

Medieval Sourcebook: Foundation Charter of Cluny, 910

From the tenth century there were successive waves of monastic reform - Cluniac, Cistercian, Mendicant and so forth. The founding of the abbey of Cluny in 910 marked the onset of this period. As well as providing some basis for Cluny's later power and independence, the charter is an example of why donations were made to the Church. It ends with some truly magnificent curses.

To all right thinkers it is clear that the providence of God has so provided for certain rich men that, by means of their transitory possessions, if they use them well, they may be able to merit everlasting rewards. As to which thing, indeed, the divine word, showing it to be possible and altogether advising it, says: "The riches of a man are the redemption of his soul." (Prov. xiii.) I, William, count and duke by the grace of God, diligently pondering this, and desiring to provide for my own safety while I am still able, have considered it advisable - nay, most necessary, that from the temporal goods which have been conferred upon me I should give some little portion for the gain of my soul. I do this indeed in order that I who have thus increased in wealth may not, per chance, at the last be accused of having spent all in caring for my body, but rather may rejoice, when fate at last shall snatch all things away, in having reserved something for myself. Which end, indeed, seems attainable by no more suitable means than that, following the precept of Christ "I will make his poor my friends" (Luke xvi. 9), and making the act not a temporary but a lasting one, I should support at my own expense a congregation of monks. And this is my trust, this is my hope, indeed, that although I myself am unable to despise all things, nevertheless by receiving despisers of this world, whom I believe to be righteous, I may receive the reward of the righteous. Therefore be it known to all who live in the unity of the faith and who await the mercy of Christ, and to those who shall succeed them and who shall continue to exist until the end of the world, that, for the love of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, I hand over from my own rule to the holy apostles, Peter, namely, and Paul, the possessions over which I hold sway, the town of Cluny, namely, with the court and demesne manor, and the church in honour of St. Mary the mother of God and of St. Peter the prince of the apostles, together with all the things pertaining to it, the villis, indeed, the chapels, the serfs of both sexes, the vines, the fields, the meadows, the woods, the waters and their outlets, the mills, the incomes and revenues, what is cultivated and what is not, all in their entirety. Which things are situated in or about the country of Macon, each one surrounded by its own

bounds.. I give, moreover, all these things to the aforesaid apostles - I William and my wife Ingelberga - first for the love of God; then for the soul. Of my lord king Odo, or my father and mother; for myself and my wife - for the salvation, namely, of our souls and bodies;- and not least for that of Ava who left me these things in her will; for the souls of our brothers and sisters and nephews, and of all our relatives of both sexes; for our faithful ones who adhere to our service; for the advancement, also, and integrity of the catholic religion. Finally, since all of us Christians are held together by one bond of love and faith, let this donation be for all, - for the orthodox namely, of past, present or future times. I give these things, moreover, with this understanding, that in Cluny a regular monastery shall be constructed in honour of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and that there the monks shall congregate and live according to the rule of St. Benedict, and that they shall possess, hold, have and order these same things unto all time. In such wise, however, that the venerable house of prayer which is there shall be faithfully frequented with vows and supplications, and the celestial converse shall be sought and striven after with all desire and with the deepest ardour; and also that there shall be sedulously directed to God prayers, beseechings and exhortations as well for me as for all, according to the order in which mention has been made of them above. And let the monks themselves, together with all the aforesaid possessions, be under the power and dominion of the abbot Berno, who, as long as he shall live, shall preside over them regularly according to his knowledge and ability. But after his death, those same monks shall have power and permission to elect any one of their order whom they please as abbot and rector, following the will of God and the rule promulgated by St. Benedict-in such wise that neither by the intervention of our own or of any other power may they be impeded from making a purely canonical election. Every five years, moreover, the aforesaid monks shall pay to the church of the apostles at Rome ten shillings to supply them with lights; and they shall have the protection of those same apostles and the defence of the Roman pontiff; and those monks may, with their whole heart

and soul, according to their ability and knowledge, build up the aforesaid place. We will, further, that in our times and in those of our successors, according as the opportunities and possibilities of that place shall allow, there shall daily, with the greatest zeal be performed there works of mercy towards the poor, the needy, strangers and pilgrims. It has pleased us also to insert in this document that, from this day, those same monks there congregated shall be subject neither to our yoke, nor to that of our relatives, nor to the sway of the royal might, nor to that of any earthly power. And, through God and all his saints, and by the awful day of judgment, I warn and abjure that no one of the secular princes, no count, no bishop whatever, not the pontiff of the aforesaid Roman see, shall invade the property of these servants of God, or alienate it, or diminish it, or exchange it, or give it as a benefice to any one, or constitute any prelate over them against their will. And that such an unhallowed act be more strictly prohibited to all rash and wicked men, I do adjure ye, oh holy apostles and glorious princes of the world, Peter and Paul, and thee, oh supreme pontiff, that, through the canonical and apostolical authority which ye received from God, ye do remove from participation in the holy Church an in eternal life, the robbers and invaders and alienators of these possessions which I do give to thee with joyful heart and ready will; and be ye protectors and defenders of the aforementioned place of Cluny and of the servants of God abiding there, and of all these possession - on account of the clemency and mercy of the most holy Redeemer. If anyone - which Heaven forbid, and which through the mercy of God and the protection of the holy apostles I do not think will happen - whether he be a neighbour or a stranger, no matter what his condition or power, should, though any kind of wile, attempt to do any act of violence contrary to this deed of gift which we have ordered to be drawn up for the love of almighty God and for reverence of the chief

apostles Peter and Paul; first indeed let him incur the wrath of almighty God; and let God remove him from the land of the living and wipe out his name from the book of life, and let his portion be with those who said to the Lord God: Depart from us; and with Dathan and Abiron whom the earth opening its jaws swallowed up, and hell absorbed whill still alive, let him incur everlasting damnation. And being made a companion of Judas, let him be kept thrust down their with eternal tortures, and, let it seem to human eyes that he pass through the present world with impunity, let him experience in his own body, indeed, the torments of future damnation, sharing the double disaster with Heliodorus and Antiochus, of whom one being coerced with a sharp blow scarcely escaped alive; and the other, struck down by the divine will, his members putrefying and swarming with vermin, perished most miserably. And let him be a partaker in with other sacrilegious persons who presume to plunder the treasure house of God; and let him, unless he come to his senses, have as an enemy and as one who will refuse him entrance in the blessed paradise, the key-keeper of the whole hierarchy of the Church, and joined with the latter, St. Paul; both of whom, if he had wished, he might have had as holy mediators for him. But as far as the worldly law is concerned, he shall be required, the judicial power compelling him to pay a hundred pounds of gold to those he has harmed; and his attempted attack, being frustrated, shall have no effect at all. But the validity of this deed of gift, endowed with all authority, shall always remain inviolate and unshaken, together with the stipulation subjoined. Done publicly in the city of Bourges. I William, commanded this to made and drawn up and confirmed it with my own hand.

(Signed by Ingelberga and a number of bishops and nobles)

from the edition of A. Bruel in "Recueil des Chartes de L'Abbaye de Cluny". Paris, 1876, trans in Ernest F. Henderson, Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910), 329-333

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