

CARTHUSIAN NUNS

In the name of all we remain
in the presence of the living God



Charterhouse of the Transfiguration
2006

CARTHUSIAN BOOKLETS SERIES, N° 11

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Our monastic life poses a question to you, the interested reader.
That is why we want to share with you what we do each day.

The photos will show you the places where we live.

We will also try to explain to you something about why we have chosen this life.

But fundamentally, the choice is a response to a call from God.

And why God has led us to the Charterhouse is His secret alone.

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Editor's note: This brochure was originally made for the Charterhouse of Notre Dame in France. However, its contents generally apply to all the Houses of our nuns, and the photos were taken from their Houses.

In 1084, Bruno and six of his companions entered the desert of Chartreuse in the Alps and established themselves there. Other hermitages were founded in imitation of the one at Chartreuse. In the twelfth century, the nuns of Prébayon in Provence decided to adopt the Carthusian rule of life. Such was the origin of the Carthusian Order.

(Beginning of the *Statutes*)

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HARMONY IN DIVERSITY

Ever since its origin, our Order, like a body whose members have different functions, finds its unity in various modes of living the same ideal.

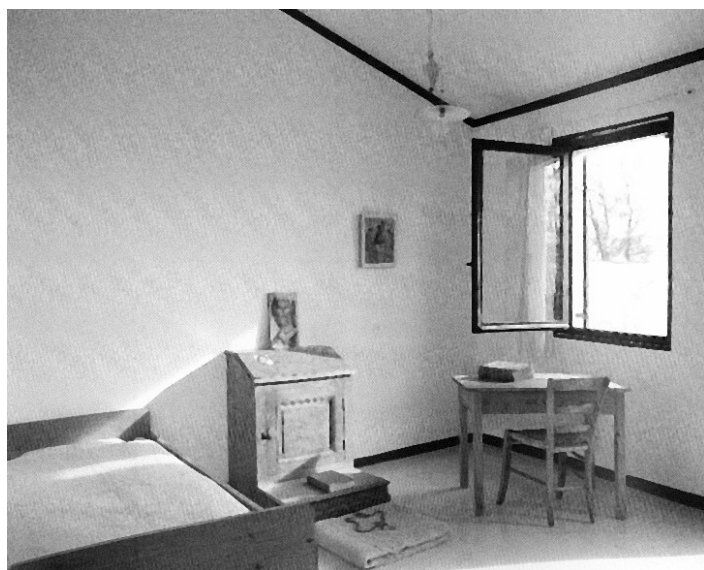
§ The **‘cloister nuns’** are called to seek God in the solitude of their cell. Ordinarily, they leave their cell only to go to the Church.

§ The **‘converse nuns’** (1) are also called to seek God in their own form of solitude and recollection, which allows them at the same time to provide by their work for the needs of the house, which have been especially entrusted to their care.

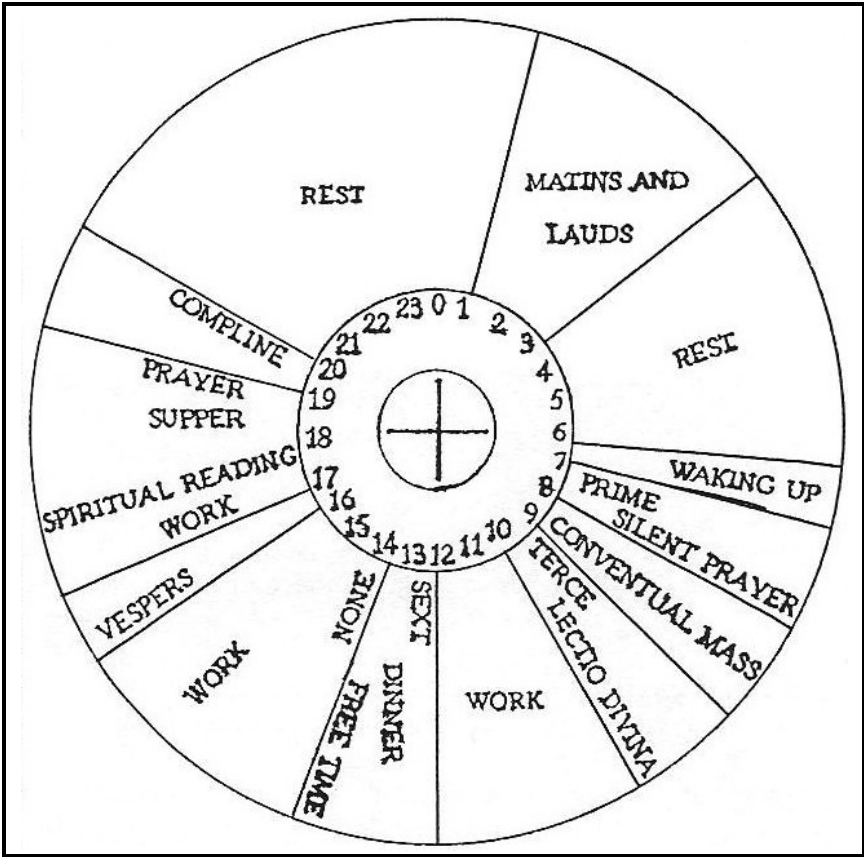
In this way the cloister nuns can devote their time more freely to the silence of the cell where, in prayer and work, they accept the austerity that such silence demands.

§ Among us, there are not only cloister and converse sisters, but also **‘donate sisters’**. These latter have joined the solitude of the Charterhouse in order to consecrate their whole life to God but without taking vows, and in a manner best adapted to the needs of each one. In main lines their life resembles that of the converse nuns and in what follows we will use only the expressions ‘cloister’ and ‘converse nuns’.

Cloister and converse nuns express in two complementary ways the richness of our life totally dedicated to God in solitude.

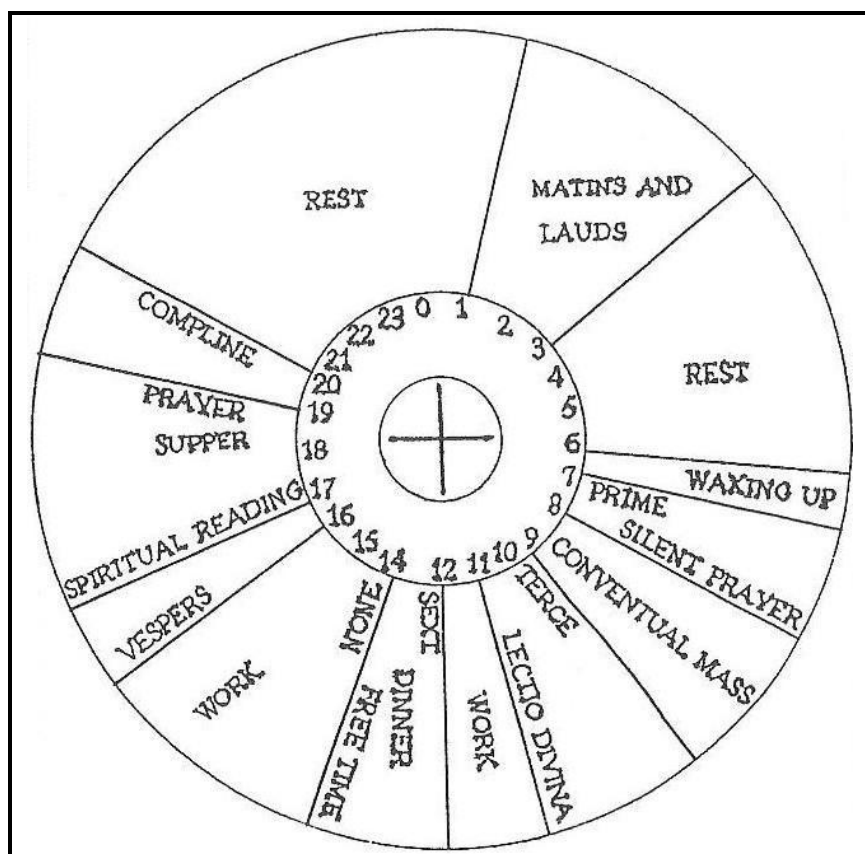


THE DAY IN THE CHARTERHOUSE (A)



This clock indicates how a converse nun, after the novitiate, consecrates to God the time that He gives her. (2)

THE DAY IN THE CHARTERHOUSE (B)



The time-schedule of a cloister nun after the novitiate.

AT THE HEART OF THE NIGHT

Our monastic day begins at midnight with a prayer to Our Lady. At the end of this prayer, there is some time to prepare oneself for the Office in the church.

At the sound of the bell we hasten to church for the night Office. A time of singular importance in the Carthusian liturgy, the night vigils (Matins and Lauds) are a clear sign of the orientation of our life, for through them is expressed **the watchful expectation of the Savior**, and the prayer that the dawn of resurrection may rise over the darkness of the world.

When they celebrate the divine Office, the nuns are **the voice and heart of the Church** which, through them, presents to the Father in Jesus, praise, supplication, adoration and humble request for pardon.

In order to allow each one to respond to her own grace, the converse sisters have the freedom to choose among the diverse forms of liturgical prayer. During the Eucharist and the Offices in church, they may participate completely in the chant and psalmody, or partially, or pray silently.

The vigils which include the morning praise (Lauds) last between two to three hours. Then the nun returns to her cell. As she does each time she enters her cell, she entrusts to Our Lady the time of solitude which is given to her; then she sleeps until 6:30.

MORNING PRAISE IN THE SECRET OF THE CELL

At 7:00 am we are called to prayer. A prayer of thanksgiving for the wonders of creation and for the resurrection of Our Lord Who takes us with Him, the Office of Prime is recited by each nun in her cell. At the sound of the bell, all pray together at the same time, thereby making the monastery one single praise to the glory of God.

According to their orientation, the converse nuns can recite the same Office of psalms as the cloister nuns, or an Office composed of Our Fathers and Hail Marys, which sums up, in itself, all prayer and links her to a long monastic tradition. All these various forms have the value of public prayer of the Church. Through the Carthusian Order, the Church entrusts the nun with a true ministry.

Next, a time of silent prayer follows. The Carthusian nun tries to offer God a simple heart and purified spirit, and to fix her thoughts and affections on Him. If she is faithful to this day after day, there will be born in her, from that very silence, something that will draw her on to still greater silence. And in this silence she will be graced not just with serving God, but with cleaving to him.



CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

This cleaving of the nun to Christ is re-enforced in the celebration of the Eucharist to which the sound of the bell invites us at 8:15.

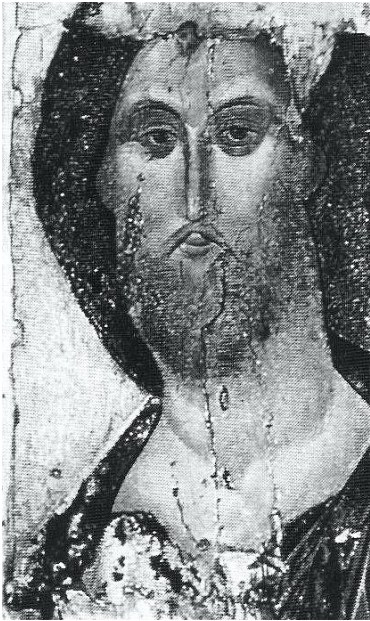
The conventual liturgy is chanted for the most part. Our own rendition of Gregorian chant is an element of the patrimony of our Order which we have kept from the beginning because it fosters interiority and spiritual sobriety. The rite of our liturgy was adapted to the directives of the Second Vatican Council.



The Eucharistic sacrifice is the center and high point of our life, the manna for our spiritual journey in the desert, which brings us through Christ to the Father. The desert is the cell to which we return after Mass.

ALONE WITH GOD

From the Office of Terce until Vespers at 4:00 pm the cloister nuns usually do not leave their cells. And the converse nuns, when their duties do not call them to be outside the cell, always return to it “as to a very sure and tranquil haven.” Both cloister nuns and converse nuns, once within, the door being closed and all care and preoccupations left behind, abide peacefully under the gaze of God and **pray to the Father in secret.**



Our Lord made Himself the foremost and most vivid example of our vocation when He retired alone to the desert and gave Himself to prayer. In the same way, just as His Passion was approaching, He left even his Apostles to pray alone.

The journey, however, is long, and the way dry and barren, that must be traveled to attain the fount of water, the land of promise.

Our solitude, like Jesus’, is not only that of the body and heart, but also of all that could be an obstacle to our face to face encounter with God. That is why we seek to content ourselves with what is strictly necessary, preferring to follow Christ in His poverty, and by this poverty to be enriched. We keep abstinence once a week, on Fridays or on the eve of liturgical feasts to prepare ourselves for the coming of Our Lord.

Alone with God, alone for God, the longer the nun has lived in her cell, the more gladly she dwells there. She can say with Saint Bruno:

What benefits and divine exultation the silence and solitude of the desert hold in store for those who love it, only those who have experienced it can know. (Letter of Saint Bruno to his friend Raoul)

For the nun has formed the habit of a tranquil listening of the heart, which allows God to enter through all its doors and passages.

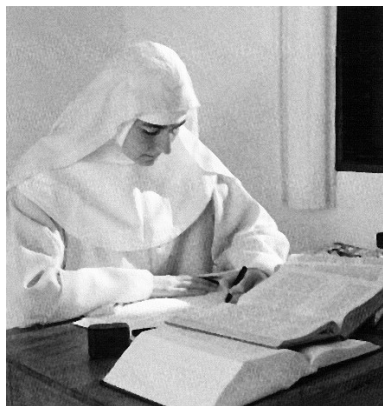
THE HEART AND THE MIND SEARCH FOR THE LORD

Lectio Divina

God speaks to us in the Bible, and that is why the nun meditates assiduously on sacred Scripture until it becomes part of her very being. By *lectio divina*, or reading prayerfully the Word of God in Scripture, she enters into communion with Christ, and Christ in turn reveals to her the Father.

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our dwelling place with him.
(John 14:23)

Like Mary who carefully preserved in her heart all her memories and constantly reflected on them, the nun immerses herself in the Word of God to listen to what the Spirit wants to tell her at that moment.



The converse nun dedicates a half hour to *Lectio divina* in cell after Terce; this enables her to live on the Word of God throughout the whole day.

Study

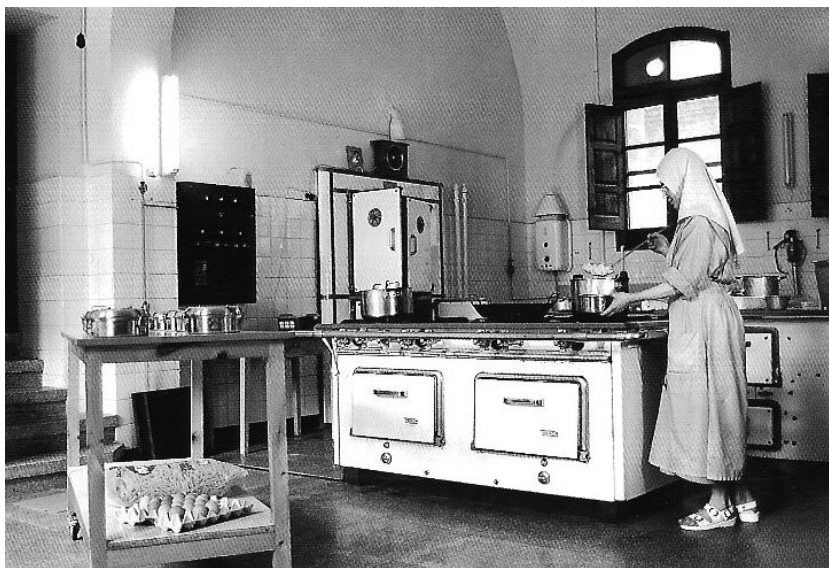
From Terce to Sext the cloister nun devotes herself to *Lectio Divina*, silent prayer, study or/and manual work, inside her cell.

For a year and a half novices study biblical and monastic writings; doctrinal and moral theology come after. These studies proceed at a rate adapted to the needs of each one. They lay the foundations for a fruitful reading of the Word of God. The solitary does not read to keep pace with all the latest trends, but to nourish her faith in tran-

quility and to sustain her life of prayer. Wisely ordered reading gives the mind greater stability, and provides a foundation for contemplation.

The body also participates: work

The converse nuns works in an obedience. We call ‘obedience’ the duty entrusted to a nun and, by extension, the place where she accomplishes it. For example, if a nun has the responsibility of cooking, both cooking and the kitchen where she cooks are her obedience.



In order to allow them to better live their vocation, the work of the converse nuns is distributed in such a way that each one works alone, as far as this is possible. Whether it is washing the dishes or peeling vegetables, picking fruit or tending the garden, this work becomes an expression of their union with the Son of God in His love for the Father and for all men.

At 11:45 the Office of Sext ends the morning and makes it a praise to God. The converse nun returns to the cell where she recites Sext, takes her meal, enjoys a period of relaxation, and then recites None, all within the solitude of the cell.

We find our meal in the foodhatch, which is an opening in the wall near the door that opens onto the cloister. The foodhatch allows each solitary some link with her community without her having to leave the cell or interrupt silence.



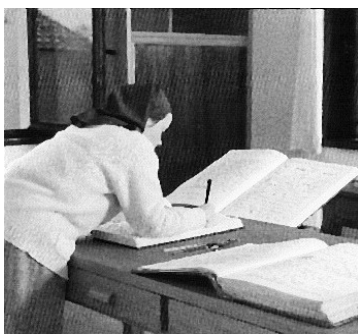
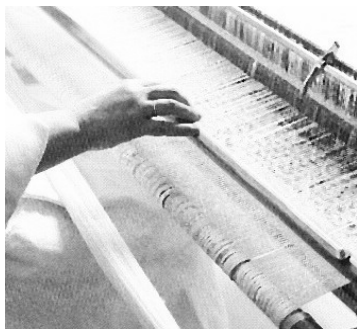
The sisterly bonds in the Charterhouse are thoroughly imbued with the silence of God. Actually, these ties of love are all the stronger to the degree the aspiration of each nun to recollection is more fully respected. For my sister as for myself, solitude is a sacrament of the encounter with God. Accordingly, the more I love my sister in God, the more I respect her life of solitude and silence.

The rest-time which follows the meal we almost always spend in cell: either outside in the garden (tending to it, or walking and watching nature), or inside (doing some light work). As Saint Bruno and the early monks state: *"If the bow is kept continually taut, it looses its resilience and becomes less fit for its works."*

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01:45 p.m.: The bell invites us anew to psalmody with reverence for God. It is the Office of None, a prayer we usually recite alone in cell yet in solidarity: since Our Lord has called us to represent all of creation when we come before Him, in our prayer we intercede for all and give thanks.

The work-time that follows can also be lived in thanksgiving if we **accompany Jesus in His humble and hidden life in Nazareth**, where He performed His duties in uninterrupted union with the Father.



The converse nuns leave cell at 2 pm to resume working in their obediences and so praise God in His works and consecrate the world to the glory of its Creator.

The cloister nuns work in cell in a variety of occupations: book-binding, sewing, weaving, typing, small-scale woodworking, making icons, etc. All their talents can find expression.

Work, which is a service uniting us to the Christ Who came not to be served but to serve, has always been regarded in the monastic tradition as a very efficacious means of **progressing towards perfect charity**...

EVENING PRAISE

4:00 pm: The bell summons us to Vespers. On passing through the door of the church, we enter into the dwelling place of God, and also into a time of prayer which marks the end of the day. The evening prayers of praise are celebrated as the decline of the day invites the soul to a 'spiritual sabbath'. (3)

Conscious of our responsibility, we put ourselves at peace, in openness to God alone.

The converse nun can participate in the praises in the church or she can let them rise from her heart in the silence of cell. Any work that follows remains imbued with that spirit of praise. Once her work is finished, the nun returns to cell where she consecrates herself to silent prayer like the cloister nun.

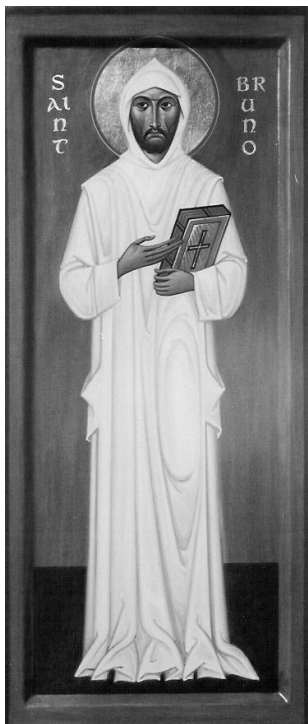
After the meal (or collation if it is a day on which we are observing a fast) we have a period of free time at our disposal. Spiritual reading precedes Compline.

Our day begins with Mary and concludes with her Office. The filial love of the Carthusian for the Virgin can be expressed by the recitation of her Office. This Office is a participation in the Virgin's thanksgiving for redemption.

STAGES OF FORMATION

There is a guest house for young women who want to consider in prayer the question of a Carthusian vocation. If, during their stay at the guest house, they feel a harmony between God's call in their heart and what they have begun to experience of our life, we allow them to share our life for about ten days, or to make a longer trial called the 'Postulancy'.

Postulancy lasts anywhere from six months to a year. It permits the aspirant to acquaint herself more with our customs. The postulant does not, however, assume the whole austerity of our life at once, but only little by little, according to her capacity. During this period she continues to reflect on her vocation before God.



If it turns out that she wishes to continue in our Order, and if the community is favorable to it, she then begins the **Novitiate** and receives the Carthusian habit.

If, at the end of two years, it seems to the community and to the Novice herself that her calling from God is being confirmed, then, after mature reflection and in full freedom, she binds herself more strongly to God and to the Carthusian Order. She expresses this offering of herself, united to that of Christ, by making a **Temporary Profession** of stability, obedience, and conversion. She promises this **for three years**.

After this stage, she is able to renew these vows **for two more years**. If it is indeed Jesus Who has engendered this vocation in her, He will see this work of His through to its fulfillment, i.e. to final commitment or **Solemn Profession**.

The donate sister becomes a member of the Order by a commitment called **Donation**. After five years of temporary donation, she

can make either a perpetual donation or renew her donation every three years.

After solemn profession or perpetual donation, the nuns may receive **Virginal Consecration**. It is a solemn rite by which the Church establishes the virgin in a special state of belonging to God. The Carthusian nuns have kept this rite as a concrete sign of the call which the Lord addresses to the Carthusian Order, to lead a life totally consecrated to Him. The offering that the nun makes to God of her virginity within this consecration opens her to a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Virginity for the Kingdom is a gift from God; in its most intimate dimension, it is the **purity of a heart** totally given to God. Jesus, in His redemptive love, creates this pure heart in all the nuns who truly commit themselves to Him.

IN THE NOVITIATE

A meeting for half an hour every week is devoted to monastic formation. This occasion is meant more to **transmit the living tradition** of Carthusian spirituality than to give theoretical instruction.

Novices are encouraged to accept with loving docility the special charism of our father Saint Bruno, a charism lived and interiorized by a long line of monks and nuns for the past nine centuries.

The *Statutes of the Nuns of the Carthusian Order* transmit this charism and enable the novices to begin to fathom the goal and means of our way of life. Their sole objective is to have us walk along the road that leads to God, by means of the Gospel, under the guidance of the Spirit, and to have us discover for ourselves that love has no limits.

The novices read the main Carthusian authors and study their sources in eastern and western monasticism. Our fathers in Carthusian life were inspired by the early monks who, from the third century onward, withdrew to the deserts mainly of Egypt and Palestine. Such primitive eastern monasticism was centered primarily on solitude and purity of heart.

A COMMUNION

Solitary life, whether in cell or in the obedience, protects and nourishes in our hearts the fire of divine love. This love unites us as members of the same body.



This is a permanent reality, but we express it more visibly on Sundays and Solemnities. On those days gatherings are more frequent: the offices of Terce, Sext, and None are sung in Church; we have a meal together in refectory after Sext.



In addition, we come together for a colloquium. This latter is a friendly meeting in which, beginning with a text of Scripture, we have

rather deep exchanges and we try to incorporate the fruit of these discussions into our lives.



Once a week we have another sisterly exchange in the form of a walk called *spatiamentum* (4) lasting about three hours, during the course of which each one is able to talk in turn with the others. These walks deepen our mutual affection and favor the interior life in solitude.



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Near each of our monasteries is a hermitage sheltering a monk who shares in our liturgical life. The ‘vicar’, as he is called, is deputed by the General Chapter of the monks to serve as a ‘chaplain’ for the nuns. He therefore celebrates the Eucharist and administers the other sacraments.

The communion we share does not embrace merely the members of the same Charterhouse, but all the sons and daughters of Saint Bruno. It even extends to the Church in both her visible and invisible dimension.

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Choosing a life of solitude does not mean deserting the human family. Union with God, if authentic, does not shut us in on ourselves, rather it opens our spirit and expands our heart to embrace the entire world and the mystery of Christ that redeemed it.

Separated from all, we are united to all; and it is in the name of all that we remain in the presence of the living God.

(From the Carthusian Statutes, and the Council Vatican II) (5)

Solitary prayer is the part that God and the Church has entrusted to us; it is our cooperation in the unceasing work of Christ: “My Father always works and I myself also work.” (John 5:17)

Because we are members of His body, our prayer is His; our silence announces the Good News, our watch, His coming.

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ADDRESSES OF THE HOUSES OF THE NUNS

Note: If you wanted to study your vocation with one of these monasteries, you would need at least a minimal knowledge of the language of the country.

Chartreuse NOTRE DAME

F-04110 Reillanne

France

' 04 92 75 62 76

6 04 92 75 61 05

Chartreuse de NONENQUE

F-12540 Marnhagues et Latour

France

' 05 65 99 37 71

6 05 65 99 33 85

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I 32037 Sospirolo BL

Italy

' (0437) 8 71 33

6 (0437) 84 77 67

Certosa della TRINITÀ

I-17010 Dego SV

Italy

' (0195) 7 81 88

6 (0195) 7 81 87

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(Castellón de la Plana)

Spain

' (977) 72 90 11

6 (977) 26 12 97

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Editor's note: This House is the latest foundation of the Order. It will be called by the name 'Charterhouse of the Annunciation'. The address will change once the nuns are settled in a permanent location.

Web site of the Carthusian Order: <http://www.chartreux.org>.

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Email: tradition-vivante@wanadoo.fr.

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Saint Rosaline of Villeneuve, Virgin
French Carthusian Nun
1263-1328

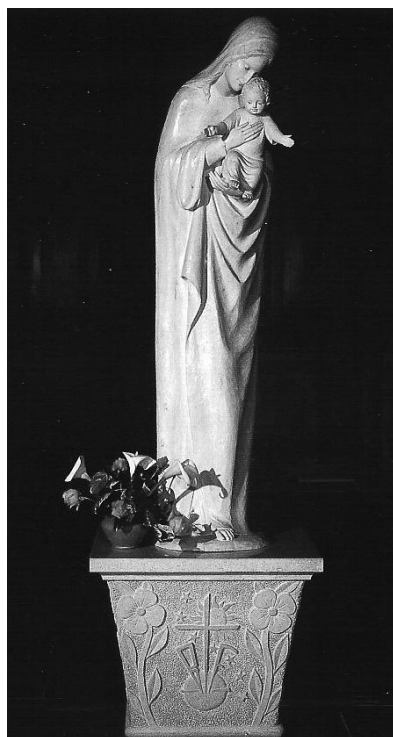
MAP WITH THE HOUSES OF THE CARTHUSIAN NUNS



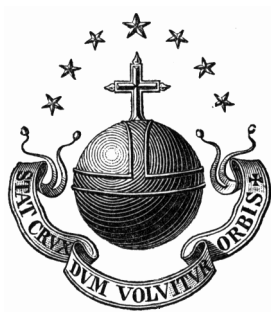
Editor's notes

1. 'Converse' comes from the Latin verb meaning 'to convert oneself'.
2. The clocks on this page and the next indicate the time-schedule of the House of Notre Dame.
3. The 'sabbath' is the day of rest for the Jews. So a 'spiritual sabbath' means a time of rest.
4. From a Latin verb meaning 'to walk'.
5. A number of expressions in this booklet are borrowed from the *Statutes*.

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CARTHUSIAN EMBLEM

13TH CENTURY

A GLOBE SURMOUNTED BY THE CROSS

~“THE CROSS STANDS FIRM, WHILE THE WORLD TURNS”~

WITH SEVEN STARS SYMBOLIZING ST. BRUNO

AND HIS FIRST FOLLOWERS

