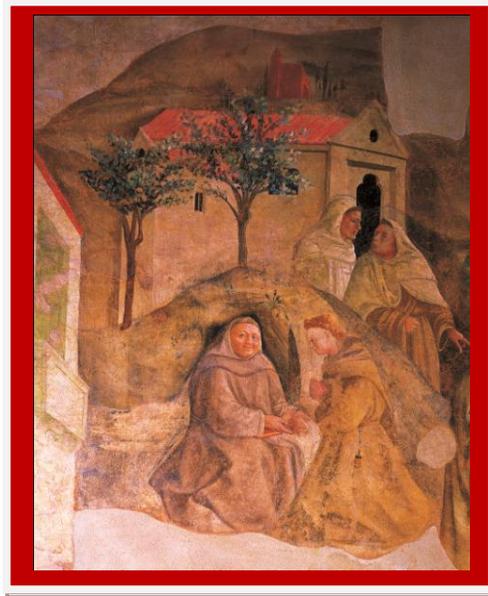


THE FIRST RULE

OR THE FORMULA VITAE OF ST. ALBERT OF JERUSALEM



Sometime between 1206 and his death in 1214, Albert of Vercelli, Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote a *formula vitae* for a small community of hermits who had gathered to live in a mountain valley on the slopes of Carmel in Crusader Palestine. A *formula vitae* was a quasi-rule (*regula*) written for a group of pious faithful who were embracing the evangelical life but who were not seeking to move beyond the lay state and become religious (regulars—those who lived under the discipline of a canonical *regula* or Rule.) These hermits were lay and initially intended to remain in the lay state. The Latin hermits of Mount Carmel would remain under this simple *formula vitae* until 1247 when they accepted status as religious and their *formula vitae*, with several modifications, became a canonical Rule. Here we have a translation of the reconstruction of the original Latin *formula vitae* as Albert would have written it.

The Rule of St. Albert

(A Reconstruction of the Albertine Version)



Albert, called by God's favor to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mount Carmel.

Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly predecessors directed how everyone, whatever one's place in the Church or the kind of religious observance one has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ—how pure in heart and stout in conscience, we must be unswerving in the service of our Master.

It is to me, however, that you have come for. a pattern for life in keeping with your proposal, a pattern for life you may hold fast to henceforward; and therefore:

Concerning having a prior and that which must be promised to him

The first thing I require is for you to have a Prior, one of yourselves, who is to be chosen for the office by unanimous assent, or that of the greater and wiser part of you. Each of you others must promise the prior obedience--of which, once promised, you must try to make your deeds the true reflection—

Concerning the site your are to occupy

Next, each one of you is to have a separate cell, situated as the lie of the land you propose to occupy may dictate, and allotted by disposition the Prior with the agreement of the other members of the community, or the wiser among them.

Concerning the cells of the brothers

None of you is to occupy a cell other than that allotted to you or to exchange cells with another, without leave of whoever is Prior at the time.

Concerning the cell of the prior

The Prior's cell should stand near the entrance to the property, so that the prior may be the first to meet those who approach, and whatever has to be done in consequence may all be carried out as the prior may decide and order.

On remaining in one's cell

Each one of you is to stay in your own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night and keeping vigil at your prayers unless attending to some other duty.

On praying the psalms

Those who are literate and know how to read the psalms, should, for each of the canonical hours, say those psalms our holy predecessors laid down and the approved custom of the Church appoints for that hour. Those who do not know their letters must say twenty-five 'Our Fathers' for the night office, except on Sundays and solemnities when the number is to be doubled so that the 'Our Father' is said fifty times; the same prayer must be said seven times in the morning in place of Lauds and seven times too for each of the other hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.

On the Renunciation of Private Property

None of you must lay claim to anything as your own, but your property is to be held in common; and of such things as the Lord may have given you each is to receive from the Prior--that is from the brother the prior appoints for this purpose-- whatever befits one's particular age and needs. However, as I have said, each one of you is to stay in your allotted cell, and live by yourself on what is given out to you.

Concerning the Oratory

Let an oratory, as commodious as it able to be made, be constructed among the cells, where, if it can be done without difficulty, you are to gather each morning for the solemn hearing of masses.

Concerning the Chapter and fraternal correction

On Sundays too, or other days if necessary, you should discuss matters of the community welfare as well as the salvation of your souls; and on this occasion the indiscretions and failings of the members of the community, if any be found at fault, should be corrected in due charity.

Regarding the fast

You are to fast every day, except Sundays, from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until the Sunday of the Resurrection, unless bodily sickness or feebleness, or some other good reason demand a dispensation from the fast.

Regarding abstinence from meat

You are always to abstain from meat, unless it has to be eaten as a remedy for sickness or great feebleness.

The Spiritual Warfare

Since our life on earth is a time of trial, and all who would live devotedly in Christ must undergo persecution, and the devil your foe is on the prowl like a roaring lion looking for prey to devour, you must use every care to clothe yourselves in God's armor so that you may be ready to withstand the enemy's ambush. Your loins are to be girt with chastity, your breast fortified by holy meditations, for as Scripture has it, holy meditation will save you. Put on holiness as your breastplate, and it will enable you to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Faith must be your shield on all occasions, and with it you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the wicked one: there can be no pleasing God without faith; and the victory lies in this--your faith, On your head set the helmet of salvation and so be sure of deliverance by our only Savior, who sets his own free from their sins. The sword of the spirit, the word of God, must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all you do have the Lord's word for accompaniment.

Concerning manual work

You must give yourselves to work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy; no idleness on our part must give him a chance to pierce the defenses of your souls. In this respect you have both the teaching and the example of Saint Paul the Apostle, into whose mouth Christ put his own words. God made him preacher and teacher of faith and truth to the nations: with him as your leader you cannot go astray. "We lived among you," he said, "laboring and weary, toiling night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not because we had no power to do otherwise but so as to give you, in our own selves, an example you might im-

itate, for the charge we have given you when we were with you was this: that whoever is not willing to work should not be allowed to eat either. For we have heard that there are certain restless idlers among you. We charge people of this kind, and implore them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they earn their own bread by silent toil.”

Concerning Silence

The apostle would have us keep silence, for in silence he tells us to work. As the Prophet also makes known to us: Silence is the way to foster holiness. Elsewhere he says : Your strength will like in silence and hope. For this reason I lay down that you are to keep silence from Vespers until Terce the next day, unless some necessary or good reason, or the prior's permission, should break the silence. At other times although you need not keep silence so strictly, be careful not to indulge in a great deal of talk, for as Scripture has it--and experience teaches us no less--sin will not be wanting where there is much talk and whoever is careless in speech will come to harm; and elsewhere; the use of many words brings harm to the speaker's soul. And our Lord says in the Gospel: Every vain word uttered will have to be accounted for on judgment day. Make a balance then, each of you, to weigh your words in; keep a tight rein on your mouths, lest you should stumble and fall in speech and your fall be irreparable and prove mortal. Like the Prophet, watch your step lest your tongue give offense, and employ every care in keeping silent, which is the way to foster holiness.

Request of the Prior

You, Brother B. and whoever may succeed you as Prior, must always keep in mind and put into practice--what Our Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever has a mind to become leader among you must become servant to the rest, and whichever of you would be first must become your bondsman.

Request of the Brothers

You others hold your Prior in humble reverence, your minds not on the individual but on Christ who has placed your Prior over you, and who, to those who rule the Churches, addressed the words: Whoever pays you heed pays heed to me, and whoever treats you with dishonor dishonors me; if you remain so minded you will not be found guilty of contempt, but will merit life eternal as fit reward for your obedience.

The Conclusion

Here then are the few points I have written down to provide you with a standard of conduct to live up to: but Our Lord, at his second coming, will reward anyone who

does more than obligation demands. See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues.