Capitulary on Monastic Discipline


[Halsall Introduction]

Charlemagne's concern with monastic discipline is shown in this regulation, part of the General Capitulary of the Missi of 802.

Moreover, that the monks shall live firmly and strictly in accordance with the rule, because we know that any one whose goodwill is lukewarm is displeasing to God, as John bears witness in the Apocalypse: "I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Let them in no way usurp to themselves secular business. They shall not have leave to go outside of their monastery at all, unless compelled by a very great necessity; but nevertheless the bishops, in whose diocese they shall be, shall take care in every way that they do not get accustomed to wandering outside of the monastery.. But if it shall be necessary for anyone to go outside in obedience to a command and this shall be done with the counsel and consent of a bishop, persons of such character shall be sent out with a certificate that there may be no suspicion. Of evil in them and that no evil report may arise from them. For the property and business outside of the monastery the abbot, with the permission and counsel of the bishop, shall ordain who shall provide, not a monk, but another of the faithful. Let them entirely shun drunkenness and feasting, because it is known to all that from these men are especially polluted by lust. For a most pernicious rumor has come to our ears that many in the monasteries have already been detected in fornication and in abomination and uncleanness. It especially saddens and disturbs us that it can be said, without a great mistake, that some of the monks are understood to be sodomites, so that whereas the greatest hope of salvation to all Christians is believed to arise from the life and chastity of the monks, damage has been incurred instead.... Certainly, if any such report shall have come to our ears in the future, we shall inflict such a penalty, not only on the guilty but also on those who have consented to such deeds, that no Christian who shall have heard of it will ever dare in the future to perpetrate such acts.