

***“Only those who have experienced the solitude and silence of the wilderness can know what benefit and divine joy they bring to those who love them.”*** Bruno's - Letter to Raoul le Verd.

Few are called to the monastic Carthusian life; but in the open world, [following the 11 guidelines](#) will help to rediscover and foster the contemplative dimension inherent in every Christian existence and to give it more space in our daily life...

## Epilogue: Bruno after Bruno

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Source: [Biography of Bruno by Fr André Ravier, s.j.](#)

During the 1120s, Guigo I, the fifth prior of the Chartreuse, faced a delicate problem. Bruno had left his sons a living legacy but without a constitution. Bishop Hugh of Grenoble, who had helped Bruno and his first companions found the hermitage, now almost seventy years old, wanted to give a sound structure to Bruno's work and make it useful for the Church. He urged Guigo to write down a kind of rule for Carthusian life.

In 1115, on the advice of some of the religious of Chartreuse, two monks of the Benedictine abbey of Ambronay had started a new hermitage at Portes, near Belley. Not far from there, at Saint Sulpice-en-Bugey, another group of hermits was also trying to live according to the ideal of Bruno. Around 1116 four new groups had been formed: at Ecouges, in the diocese of Grenoble; at Durbon, in the diocese of Gap; at Sylve-Bénite, in the diocese of Vienne in the Dauphiné; and at Meyriat, where Ponce de Balmey, a canon of Lyons, had founded a hermitage for which Guigo had proposed Stephen of Bourg, one of Bruno's first companions, as prior. Stephen died in 1118, and Ponce, who had been trained at Chartreuse, was chosen to replace him. The hermitages took the risk of starting others, and several of them wanted a written rule for the eremitical life according to the ideal of Bruno. Those who asked Guigo to give them a rule were Bernard, prior of Portes; Humbert, prior of Saint-Sulpice; and Milon, who was prior of Meyriat after Ponce was elevated to be bishop of Belley. All of these requests were added to Hugh of Grenoble's advice.

This pressure created a real problem of conscience for Guigo. Didn't Bruno avoid founding a religious Order? Didn't he allow the house in Calabria to live on its own without ever connecting it to the Chartreuse? Didn't he intend for each hermitage to be under the jurisdiction of the local bishop? Besides, some of them had made no request. Were they — all of them Bruno's sons — going to make a distinction between one hermitage and another? And how was Guigo to make laws when Bruno had never made any? It was true that his brothers at Chartreuse had chosen him to be their prior after only eleven years at the young age of twenty-six. But did his thirteen years at Chartreuse permit him to write a Rule that would be imposed on monks, some of whom had longer and more extensive experience of the eremitical life than he had? And finally, since his temperament was so different from Bruno's, would he be the right one to interpret his thought? In the Prologue to the Customs he wrote with sincerity: "We did not believe we were the one who could or should undertake a task like this."

However, if someone had to draw up a rule for the eremitical life according to Bruno's ideal, the time was right. Bishop Hugh was still there to verify Bruno's intentions and authenticate the interpretations. Several of the first hermits who had known Bruno and seen how he lived were still alive, too. It would be good to take advantage of their presence and their memories. Undertaking the task now would offer the best guarantee that it would conform to Bruno's plan.

After hesitating for a long time, Guigo began his work, but he did not make laws. Rather, he codified the life as it was lived at Chartreuse, under the title "The Customs of Our House". He did not impose his personal ideas, but he passed on a tradition, something like those brothers that the prior of Chartreuse occasionally sent to new hermitages to form candidates according to the spirit of Chartreuse. His work was not like a Rule but, more modestly, a Customal (Customs or Consuetudines). He drew it up in the form of a letter addressed only to the priors who had asked for it. Aware of his responsibilities, however, he put his composition on solid foundations, establishing it firmly upon Bruno's work. He connected it to the epistles of Saint Jerome, the Rule of Saint Benedict, and "other writings whose authority is beyond question".

So, he courageously began what he knew had to be a lengthy and thorny task. To it he brought his own learning, his broad culture, his creative literary talent, his fidelity to Bruno as well as his admiration for him,

and his love of solitude and the contemplative life. The completion of the Customs took six years, until about 1127. Then Guigo handed over to his brothers at Chartreuse, Portes, Saint-Sulpice, and Meyriat a Code for the eremitical life, which the Carthusian Order still follows. But that will not be treated in this book.

Guigo's work is of great help in trying to reach a better understanding of Bruno's soul and the grace he had received.

Though his lines are bland, even austere, some of them are packed with meaning and reflect Bruno's human and spiritual riches, which have already been mentioned or at least alluded to. But Guigo's lines are not the result of his abstract reflection. There is abundant documentation for them, because they are a record of forty years of the experience of a group of people, six of whom were inspired and sustained by the physical presence of Bruno. Bruno knew how to give his sons enthusiasm. More than founder of the hermitage of Chartreuse and the Carthusian Order, he was the inspiration for a life of pure contemplation. That is what Pius XI meant in the constitution *Umbratilem*: "In his infinite goodness, which never ceases to provide for the needs and interests of his Church, God chose Bruno, a man of outstanding holiness, to restore the original purity of contemplative life."

In closing, what — according to Bruno and Guigo — would a sketch of "the original purity of contemplative life" look like? A sketch only, because there can be no description. Contemplation is and always remains a paradox for an unspiritual person. The phrase "the monastic mystery" is an accurate statement of the whole contemplative vocation. An even more mysterious mystery is the eremitical mystery: that is, the vocation to live the contemplative life in the solitude and silence of a cell. Despite the profound difference in temperament between the two men, the history of Guigo as revealed in his *Thoughts* and his *Customs* is in accord with the history of Bruno and his writings, and that makes it possible to lift at least a corner of the veil that hides this "eremitical mystery".

A word used by Bruno and Guigo both describes this mystery. The word is **Quies**, and the usual translation of this word is "rest", but that does not clearly convey the divine dimension and the richness of **Quies**. The "quiet" of the Carthusian and faithfulness in exterior practices go together. The word designates the experience of the spiritual abundance of the Christian who even now is founded upon God, "dwells in God", in the words of

Saint John, through the events and circumstances of his life — for the Carthusian, through obedience and monastic practices. A verse from *Lamentations* (3:28), on which Guigo liked to comment, signifies by contrasting words that the contemplative is related to the circumstances of earth as well as the supernatural life: *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit, et levabit se supra se* (The solitary will sit and be silent, and he will rise above himself). "Quiet" actually includes everything contained in our word rest (*sedebit*), that is, calm, peace, silence, orderly thinking, mastery of the heart's passions, etc. But it contains infinitely much more, because it is the hidden movement of the Holy Spirit in the soul: it is a condition of the spirit together with a gift of grace. The soul strives, prepares, and merits it, but it is conferred by God alone. **Quiet** comes to the soul only from love that totally, even exclusively, desires the living God, the "Father, source and origin of all Divinity, of whom the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds."<sup>(4)</sup> It comes from that love that is founded upon radical faith in the word and in the salvation of Jesus Christ. Guigo calls one who has this quiet a "quiet Christ", meaning that something of the joy and peace of the risen Christ dwells in him and radiates from him ("and he will rise above himself"). With Christ he comes to that "freedom of the children of God" of which Saint Paul speaks. He comes to it already and yet never ceases to approach it, because God's presence in him invites him to solitude and silence ("he will sit and be silent"), and in return the silence and solitude assist his progress toward intimacy with God.

If this analysis is correct, the **quiet** clarifies a great principle of Bruno's and Guigo's spirituality: that is, spiritual virginity. The soul is virgin if it is so strongly attached to God that it is detached from everything that is not God. In contrast, the one without faith, the idolater, whom the Bible vividly calls "prostitute", is attached to anything apart from God. Here it is important not to lose the sense of this asceticism. It doesn't say that the first stage is to detach oneself from the world and then attach oneself to God. It says to prefer God and, in this one act of preferring, to "go in search of the good that is everlasting" and turn away from the things of earth, which are "fleeting shadows". This is the act of the Holy Spirit, who was the source of Bruno's vocation. In the little garden at Adam's house, Bruno, Raoul le Verd, and Fulco le Borgne were filled "with fervent love for God", and from that love sprang their basic resolution, which became their vow "to leave the fleeting shadows of the world to go in search of the good that is eternal". Was this an exceptional grace? In the degree that Bruno experienced it, certainly it was.

But it can also be said to be the fundamental option that all Christians must make on the day they decide to live the fullness of their baptism. Guigo wrote, "It is with good reason that the human soul is troubled as long as it is: that is, as long as it loves something besides God."(5) God does not accept a divided heart. Each one, in his own way and according to his own vocation, will meet this requirement of detachment and attachment, but the requirement itself is not negotiable. It is inescapable. No Christian, nor any "human soul", can avoid it.

Optimam partem. Bruno and Guigo present this **quiet** as the "better part" that Mary chose, a few days before Jesus' Passion [cf. John 12:1], when he stopped at the house of Lazarus in Bethany. The contrast between Mary's contemplation and Martha's activity is a traditional theme among the Fathers of the Church. Guigo takes it up in the Customs, but he gives it a new meaning and a new emotion. In the very words of the Lord he claims for Carthusian the right to live a contemplative life in solitude, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, which — though at some distance — includes the legitimate and holy activities of Martha, such as hospitality, almsgiving, and service. "Mary has chosen the better part and it shall not be taken from her." When he says "the better", the Lord was not only praising it but also placing it above the laborious activity of her sister. Saying "it shall not be taken from her", he defended it and exempted it from involvement in the troubles and anxieties of Martha, legitimate though they were.(6) Is this to flee from the labors, anguish, and sadness of the world? No. The emphasis is on profound faith. Like Bruno, Guigo thinks that for the spiritual health and apostolic effectiveness of the Church it is necessary that some souls be free for the pure contemplative life "in the weak measure that it is possible in this world, as in a mirror and darkly". Mary prays both for herself and for those who are vowed, like Martha, to other works. And so it is for those whose vocation is to combine Martha and Mary in their lives: Martha's work is made effective by Mary's prayer.

This study of Carthusian **quiet** should conclude with a comment on two traits that strongly mark the character of Bruno and of Guigo: balance and simplicity. **Quiet** and balance are almost synonyms. But the purity, the beauty, the grandeur of the contemplative ideal, as Bruno lived it and proposed it, could make one think — and fear — that this balance is of a superior and exceptional kind. Certainly the Carthusian vocation is a rare one of a new kind. A clear call from God is necessary. But that does not mean this ideal is reserved

for extraordinary souls. Carthusian balance does not require exceptional gifts of nature or of grace. What it requires is simplicity, simplicity of heart, the simplicity of the "*little ones*", the humble people of the Gospel; the simplicity that comes from integrity and faith, from detachment and hope, from guilelessness and love; the simplicity that radiates from the letter of Bruno to the brethren at Chartreuse and that Guigo requires in all the observances of his Customs.

In choosing solitude, silence, and separation from the world, Bruno paradoxically came to understand the heart of all humanity. For him and for the education of all, the basic desire that motivates everyone here below was enough: the desire to escape from all that is fleeting and be united with what is still, fixed, eternal: *Fugitiva relinquere ... captare æterna*. His two companions, Raoul le Verd and Fulco le Borgne, knew the same desire as Bruno on that day. Bruno alone pursued it, and he alone knew the fullness of joy. "Only those who have experienced the solitude and silence of the wilderness can know what benefit and divine joy they bring to those who love them." Carthusian **quiet** cannot be described perfectly. It is a mystery that can be understood only by those who have experienced it, by "those who love it".

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"Like a syllable in a poem," said Guigo in one of his Thoughts, "as the world goes round everything receives its proper share of space and time." Who would presume to determine Bruno's "proper share of space and time" in the poem of the redemption? Aren't these among the ones whose spiritual experience transcends space and time, whom the Father places with his Son, Jesus Christ, at the still and eternal center of the world's history? *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*.

[Other resources: http://www.quies.org](http://www.quies.org)

