

SISTER MARGARET SMULDERS AND THE CONVENT OF BETHLEHEM:

Documents from the Visitations of 1628 and 1633

Sometime around 1620, Sister Margaret was banished by her co-sisters to the guest room of their convent, called Bethlehem. After various attempts to place her in another convent failed, and it was clear Margaret wasn't going to go anywhere, she started writing letters to the bishop about the awful state of things—perhaps as a genuine reformer, perhaps to get revenge on those who'd banished her.

Most other sisters denied Margaret's accounts, even dismissed her, and claimed to be the truly pious members of the place. A few others agreed with her, and wrote letters to the bishop as well. Margaret's own letters are spectacularly and uniquely long; I'm not aware of any others from this time that are as long and detailed. Those of the other sisters are usually just a page or two.

The most convenient time for nuns to write the bishop was during, or in preparation for, official visitations conducted by the bishop or (usually) his delegates. The most important visitations in Bethlehem occurred in 1628 and 1633. Each nun was interviewed during the visitation, and these interviews were summarized by the visitor (only the summary for 1633 survives). In addition, each nun was also free to supplement her interview with a written account, which was especially necessary if, like Margaret, you had a lot more to say than could be fit into your brief interview. Thus she was well-prepared, with a 32-page letter in 1628, and a 16-pager in 1633, both of which she probably spent weeks on.

The documents here include the letters from the nuns in both years, as well as the interview-summaries by the visitor in 1633. I consulted many other documents as well in writing *The Burdens of Sister Margaret*, but these visitation-letters were the core. I've translated them here from their original seventeenth-century Dutch, or in the visitor's case, Latin. The originals may be found in the Archive of the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium), Fonds Kloosters, Grijze Zusters Leuven.

Ellipses (...) indicate tears in the page, and illegible words or fragments—in every case, the missing passage is short, less than a line. Since Margaret and other nuns punctuated most erratically, I have added punctuation where I thought it necessary. Physical breaks between pages are indicated with numbers between / /,

and paragraph breaks match those made by the nuns themselves. Underlining of passages in the document, and marginal notations, were most likely made by Peter van der Wiel, the Archbishop's Vicar-General, who led the visitations of 1628 and 1633 and who used these highlights to help him compile his own summaries of the letters. As is usual in editing, passages between brackets [] are added for the sake of clarity, while passages in parentheses () are original.

The Letter-Writers:

Mater Adriana Truis (the Mother Superior)
Sister Anna Vignarola (The Cantorress, and Adriana's chief supporter)
Sister Maria Joos (The Bursarress, in charge of temporal goods)
Sister Joanna de Vorster
Sister Maria Coninxloo (a consistent critic of Adriana)
Sister Catharina Rijckeboer (the Vicaress, Adriana's antagonist, and the closest thing Margaret had to a friend)
Sister Margaret Smulders (watching from the guest house)

Other Characters:

Jacob Boonen, Archbishop of Mechelen, the superior of the convent
Peter van der Wiel, the archbishop's Vicar-General
Henri Joos, the Pastor of Mol and the former confessor of Bethlehem who was sent away in disgrace, to the dismay of most sisters
Joost Bouckaert, Dean of Diest, the confessor and mentor of Margaret Smulders

VISITATION-LETTERS OF JUNE 19-20, 1628

MARGARET SMULDERS

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Most Reverend Lord, if we had a Mater [Mother Superior] who was a lover of true religious life, observing and enforcing the praiseworthy statutes and wise ordinances of your reverence, given through the Holy Spirit, then there would be no need for any of us to trouble and burden your reverence with all these silly problems, for it's certainly within her power to improve things if she pleased to do so. And if something does not please her, as we see now in many matters decreed but not observed, then it's in vain to establish or halt at all, if it's against her taste. I'm ashamed that we're compelled to bring up so many shabby affairs in the visitation, but since there's otherwise no hope of improvement and since Vicaress [second in command] nor anyone else may say anything to her, and though Vicaress girds herself to speak on some things anyway, [Mater's] great obstinance will always result in her doing or ignoring as she pleases, and then she gives Vicaress an answer that's scandalous for a superior. In order to maintain peace, Vicaress is compelled to silence and to allow Mater her own way, just as we have been compelled to silence, and so are we compelled to seek refuge in your reverence, and pray humbly that you will see fit to mark our situation well and improve those things which we make known to you, as you are directed by the Holy Spirit. As I see it, Mater is very unwise not to hear nor heed any counsel, and wants nothing to do with the Vicaress. It was vain to name a Vicaress here, for she may not begin the smallest thing, but instead must endure much from Mater, even behind her back, in ridicule. She isn't regarded well by the community, and that's Mater's fault. She overrules her without cause in front of all, and whoever wants the friendship of Mater won't dare speak first to Vicaress nor go around with her. Instead [Mater] seeks to alienate all, even the novices, in fact from the first day the young ones come to live here. She speaks two hours long with the novices, often does she do this. And if Vicaress commands or forbids them something, Mater will tell them the opposite. Besides this, she also appointed Sister Anna Vinnarola to teach the novices to sing, yet she is the most unsuitable of all, and was appointed for no other reason than to

pull the young ones to her. Mater told Vicaress that she would let Vinnarola do this for 14 days only, to help the young ones find their voices, but she's done it now for 18 months, so that you'd think Vinnarola was Novice-Mistress. In fact, if it were in Mater's power, she'd make Vinnarola Vicaress, for all her little friends are in office. Through her great cunning she knows how to twist and shape those things which she can't change on her own, but has the Discrete Sisters handle them and gets her way; these are miserable Discretes, for they're pathetic. It's all the same to them when people ask them something. They are all content to accept anyone into the order, even if crippled, half-blind, and dull-witted, all are welcome, though Mater doesn't stop to think whether the person is able. If Vicaress suggests they ought to consider health and ability, she gets no thanks; she is a true devotee of monastic principles, but Mater on the contrary is a spacious dish. They are certainly of different temperament. Vicaress has a very great desire to be set free from her office; I'd certainly grant her the rest, and it doesn't surprise me, speaking both of rest for her soul and body, for Mater can't bear her, and where she thinks to find appreciation, she gets only ingratitude. It can't all be spoken, much less written. As for me, I'd be content for her to be a simple soldier as before. But if she were removed, it wouldn't help matters. Though Mater doesn't much listen to her, she's still a thorn in the side, and it could be worse. Even when Mater was [only] Bursarress [in charge of temporal goods] did she lord it over other Maters. It's no wonder that she now does whatever she wants; the previous Maters were always having to dance to her tune, and couldn't have the smallest thing without being treated as if they were little children. I can't begin to count how many tears I saw those women shed because of her; she was a princess in the convent before most of us were here, and if she could she would like to have the whole community do as she pleases. No one, no matter how fearless, dares say all that she would like. Oh, she has a wonderfully worldly heart. She comes alive when she can be around laypeople; it would be the joy of her life to always have workmen,

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meals, and banquets; oh blessed statutes, what rest do we have now? If things were still as they used to be, then we would all have to fast together, but in this regard things must improve or it won't be well, for in the end it will only creep

in more and more. Outsiders are too easily allowed in the guest room; the people who come here in the evening from out of town, if they go sleep somewhere else and don't leave town the next day, why they come here at night and blabber on for two or three hours, so that two or three nuns neglect their Compline, and during silence time set food and drink before them, and then the next day, without need. They force people to drink, one pot after another. I'm not saying that no one should ever drink here again, that couldn't be done, but they do it too easily, without need. Once people are in the guestroom, then there's no thought of leaving, for they fill the table at once. And if it's a friend of Vinnarola, then the good beer isn't sufficient, but they're treated to wine, and eat wine-soup and good bread and the like, nothing is too costly or too good, and they do as much as they can, in secret. When the sisters from St. Elizabeth's in Brussels come, and other sisters from Aalst, and her friends or someone of her acquaintance, then there's so much activity that it's scandalous, and those valuable things she gives away, I say it's a crime that we suffer and put up with it. If Mater were warned on this point, she would say it's not true, as she's done before, and say that it's done to slander her; but I say in good conscience that she's not unaware. God knows what St. Elizabeth's and other convents have cost us. Vinnarola is a costly creature. God would that Vinnarola couldn't make any more silk flowers (as I do), it would be to our profit, hers, and our blessed Mater. Mater says that if she gives a bit away, it doesn't hurt the convent, for the convent doesn't pay for it; she says that other sisters also give, and that's true, but there's no comparison. I dare say that [Anna] alone gives away 100 times more than the whole community. If she didn't have more from the convent than others it wouldn't be possible for her, thus how is it possible? Where is it possible to earn so much in one hour? And if someone gives something to her, then she insists on giving something in return. She is the sacristan of the choir, and she makes a multitude of flowers and frills without need, wasted money. I say it's a sin that so much rubbish, which is no more necessary than it is for me to jump into the water, finds its way to the choir. Further, she damages as many things as is possible for someone in a convent, without consequence. Further, she is very needy, or to put it more plainly, she can't suffer as well as others; in sum, it would be interesting to see whether she could do all she does now if Mater didn't have her hands on the convent's purse, but she boasts anyway. Mater could

certainly give her permission to do all this, but Mater is so crazy for her that in my whole life I have never seen such great love between two like people. They're like love-struck suitors who can't bear to be apart; usually one party loves more than the other, but in this case they are both blind with love, so bowled over. It's no simple favoritism, if you ask me, and it goes beyond them to all they favor; who Vinnarola attacks, Mater has by the neck, and so it goes with all the cronies. It's wholly needful that Mater improve herself in this, both in her great familiarity and in her chiding and ridicule. And what she has against some is that they write to the superiors [the archbishop and vicar-general] about what goes on, and because of her worries, she doesn't like those persons who cause her to worry. The principal sisters are Maria van Coninxloo and Vicaress, and often, before the entire community, will she heap barbs and scorn upon them, and thus they are now hated by many others as well. Mater is so full of ill-will that when she sees two or more sisters talking together who are not of her people, she suspects that they are conspiring with one another over what to say in the next visitation. She can't bear it if Vicaress is talking with someone alone; she says straight out, 'what council is held here?' when the others had no such ill intent. When she heard that my reverence would soon come to Leuven, she was terribly disturbed, fearing it meant a visitation. It's hard to express how worried she gets about Sister Maria and still others; and we know her motivation well, which is why I won't neglect to mention those things which need improving; there is no one who at any time dares say, 'what she does is wrong,' and yet we all see the game she plays. She thinks that all is permitted her, and she has no concern. If someone were capable of being Bursadress, it would be well, and in fact it must happen; she should no longer have temporal power or we'll go to our ruin. That giving away outside the house knows no end; we've endured it long enough.

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Though we don't have anyone much capable of being bursadress, try someone; if she doesn't work, try another, until finally somebody catches on. Mater doesn't keep her house in order, and she must always give and loan to outsiders. When our sisters go to Brussels, then they carry whole boxes of material to St. Elizabeth's, up front and in back. It's only so that they can give and stay in Brussels longer, and visit St. Elizabeth's every day. When they go to Flanders, they

go expressly to stay in Aalst several days, for love of Vinnarola, since she has a friend there whom they visit, and they carry whole packages and boxes of frills, as if we fished it all out of the water. Vinnarola has brought in 50 florins a year, but we can well imagine that it isn't enough [for all she gives away], and that the convent provides her the rest. Mater is rich enough to give outside, but inside she has nothing at all to give, for she doesn't have the will to. If she'd never in her life gotten her hand into the temporal pie then we'd have what's coming to us. If she buys something or has something made, she gives it all away as people wish it; she doesn't care for things, but let's them spoil or get lost. No one else may do anything, for she holds every office, though not well; she is Mater, Vicaress, Bursadress, Cellaress, Novice-Mistress, in short everything. And all who she controls can do no wrong. Vinnarola is much freer in calling and commanding the novices than Vicaress, thanks to the great blind love Mater bears for her. She thinks no one more able with the novices than Vinnarola, though she is certainly the most unlearned and the most coarse of manner and as cliquish as it's possible to be in a convent. Sister Anna, from her side, thinks--she even said--that in the whole world there is no more able Mater than ours, in every respect, in ruling her community spiritually and temporally, in common love, in reconciling her foes, and she certainly holds Maria Coninxloo for a foe because she dares to speak the truth. Sister Vinnarola says that Mater knows how to love her enemies, but I say that there's no religious in this convent who is a greater respecter of persons, no one who is more full of passion and who cares for herself more. Whom she doesn't like, well they're cliquish, and once she gets something in her head, it doesn't go easily out. Not only she but everyone in her clique doesn't like Maria. If you listen to Vinnarola, you'd think that Mater is the wisest and holiest woman on earth, and, that there is nowhere to be found an equal to the Pastor of Mol [Henri Joos, the convent's confessor], nor will there ever be, in holiness, wisdom, discretion, love, mercy, and all virtues, and that in our lives we have never enjoyed such an exceptional confessor and preacher as he, nor will ever enjoy, that we were the luckiest persons ever born when he served us, and she says that those who have said otherwise of him deserve to have a red-hot iron through their tongues, and merit punishment now and hereafter. What's more, they wish and desire to know what judgment those who are dead have earned, the archbishop [Hovius] as well as others who were involved. I say that these

questioners put us all in great need of merit since we don't know the smallest part. This is how one keeps peace here, by saying that he's merciful and virtuous. That's how I regard him as well, for he in fact shows much virtue and mercy, and his countenance and deeds are good, especially the last time (not the very last) that he was here, was I surprisingly edified; but in regard to his past holiness only they know who experienced it as it actually was. And they're not all dead who know what happened, though they can well remain silent and praise him highly so as to play the game and keep the peace. [Anna] would do much better to keep quiet; if she had lived here during that time, then she'd have some right to speak. It's very damaging to speak of it, whether speaking ill or well. I'm often amazed at Mater, how her heart lives when she may speak of him or hears talk of him. Such often begins innocently enough, but it often ends with a bad smell. I don't know how profitable it can be for him to come here, not that I suspect evil, but simply that to avoid opportunity or cause in such matters seems wiser. From his side, I don't think there's any peril, but if the fountains of the rest were dead it would be good. That glow, and the unspeakable happiness shown by Mater at his arrival, and that frequent speaking alone doesn't edify some of the sisters. It can certainly happen without any evil, since he is a good friend of the convent and gives generously to us, and not all things can be judged by their outward appearance. But it would be better if she avoided such a bit, though she wouldn't begin to imagine that anyone had

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noticed her behavior at all. There is no one who would stop attending to him lest they offend Mater. Those most devoted to him appear to be her little friends. Sister Anna Vinnarola speaks alone with him regularly; it seems she can't miss him, whenever he comes. She sends him frills yearly; and in gratitude, and because she's the special one of Mater, he sends her money, and in this she also pleases Mater. Who wants to be friends with Mater speaks and gives to him, the more it is, the more she likes it, and not only to him but all his friends. Mater is an expensive Mater for the convent, with her giving away. Your Reverence might respond, 'how can she, or how does she have so much to give away? The income of the convent is not so abundant and everything's expensive now, caring for 26 people costs a lot.' And that's true. If we were cared for, then we'd have no

complaint, food and clothing, that's enough, we won't carry anything with us anyway [when we die]. But it's far from that. All that we need we must get ourselves. For clothing, the convent gives us nothing, but those who've brought annuities have hose and shoes and even sometimes nice clothing, especially those who stand in the good graces. And when someone's about to die, then they start to haggle over what's left behind. Mater knows well how to provide for those in her fold, and to put in their hands all they desire, with no regard for others, however old they might be. [The old ones] have the word, but [Mater] has the deed. Part of the convent flourishes, the other has to look like simpletons. When someone is lying on their deathbed, Mater can hardly wait until the soul has left the body to start handing out the goods, in the same way that lay people treat death so as to get the goods. The Infirmarian [Lesken Joos] doesn't wait until they're dead, but starts going through everything; yet she can't do wrong. She and Sister Vinnarola are the only ones entrusted with the keys to Mater's room, but we won't put up with this any longer. All the convent's possessions are in Mater's hands, and no one else is entrusted with them except Sister Lesken Joos, a lay sister, and Vinnarola, the youngest professed. Over a year ago, when Mater was sick, Vicaress was not allowed to bring anything to or from Mater's room, at any time. She has the key to the room, but it's useless, even if she wanted but a single piece of paper, [Mater] would close the way. And if she wants something, she must buy it, not only that, but everything, even if Mater had all imaginable goods in all abundance, of all loveliness. During Lent, with a great crowd at Collation and at other times, [Mater] would rather, so to speak, burst than give [Vicaress] the smallest thing, though she sits next to her; and that goes for other sisters too. If she had only as much as we, she'd see it otherwise, but she doesn't want for anything. Why it happened between Easter and Pentecost that three or four days a week we had nothing for our portion at noon except potage and an egg, and at night some milk. During the summer there were many days when we had nothing but some salad and potage at noon, and then again some milk at night. Even during Advent and Lent we eat fish very rarely, unless it's been given to us, though I don't speak of this past Lent when even that couldn't happen because these things couldn't be had. What amazes me most of all is that when we're sick we get from the convent only the regular common portion, unless each buys what she wishes to eat. In eating and drinking, we may not have so much as

some white bread or a pint of good beer, even when it's on hand, unless we buy it ourselves, or we go without. Mater has never experienced herself how this all tastes. She has carried the purse for so long she gets what her heart desires. Her cronies don't know poverty either. Yet in all the years I've lived here, I don't think that I've ever seen the crust of a white loaf of bread, in sickness or health, nor have they ever sewn for me in the convent as much as a handkerchief, but that I've had to pay for it. Vinnarola wouldn't be able to say that. She has all her heart desires, piles of things, in secret and in public. And Mater says she loves all of us the same, and that what she does for one she would do for another. Mater is blind. She sees through windows and doors of foolish love, so it should be forgiven her. Otherwise, I'd say with cause that she tells lies, hurtful lies. God grant her grace; we must witness many things with much wonderment and sorrow. It would be well if she truly had a common, motherly love for each, otherwise there's alienation through murmuring, factionalism, resentment, gossip, little respect, and much evil speaking. Vicaress tried warning her about it once; yet she is so proud that she listens to no one and asks advice of no one, but says only that Vicaress pays heed to marvelous gossip and has a wonderful Gabriel who brings her many messages [Maria Coninxloo]. Vicaress has had many disasters with her, for the community has often asked her to speak to Mater of certain things, but she was so against it that it was too late, and the community seeing this now waits, with [Vicaress], that which Mater fears most greatly: namely, visitation. Mater even says that Vicaress won't be content until she's Mater herself, then she may rule as she pleases.

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Vicaress has no desire to be Mater, and she would in her life never say a word to Mater except when compelled by her conscience, and when prodded to do so by the community, who want through her to see some things improved; but no improvement happens anyway, and the best peace comes through being silent. Mater and Vinnarola often walk with each other like fools in love; they take each other by the arm, fling their arms around each other's neck, walk hand in hand as if they're about to dance in the churchyard, and think that no one sees them. Mater has nothing on her heart that she doesn't reveal to her, and to Maria Joos. They're always together, early and late, during Silence, to complain to each other;

the smallest word cannot be said in private but that Sisters Maria Joos, Vinnarola, and Lesken Joos run right to Mater and repeat it. If there's something that displeases them, they especially tell that immediately, and the opinion of those three about another sister is immediately the opinion of Mater as well, and she agrees with them in an instant, even if they're horribly wrong. Through this they've become so bold that they lord it over everyone, and all that they don't dare say, they get across with their smirks. If Mater has been told something about a sister by the confessor, we know it immediately by the smirks of those to whom Mater has complained. Mater has a very ugly habit of often casting silly ridicule and barbs into the wounds of those who cause her the most trouble, which are often silly. She injures and wounds frequently the hearts; her own heart is so full of bitterness toward some that it often spills out. It's all a want of love; if she loved the rest even a hundredth part as much as she loves Vinnarola, it would be enough. She says that the others are but murmurers, but she doesn't say that she gives them great cause. All that Mater has is Vinnarola's too, so free are they. Mater would answer, 'I control all the goods in the convent, including Vinnarola's,' but she knows how to take away from other sisters and even the novices as she pleases, and says that it's for the sake of killing desire; well that's very nicely done, for immediately Mater has what her heart desires. I'd go along with this, if I saw that Mater took something away kindly and [gave to] the old sisters, the sick, and those who at no time receive anything from anyone at all, especially during Lent they have but a piece of dry bread at Collation, yet she has her heart's content thanks to all the things she takes. With that killing of desire she makes sure she is well provided for herself--it's a fine art she has. She loves herself very much in all things, but that would be a small thing if the rest were well; I grant her all the goods and ease she wishes. Though I've written all these things, my purpose is by no means to have Mater removed, but only that she'll be reprovved and improve herself, both in regard to the great favoritism and their private eating and drinking at their little cafe. It was worse before, but that's only because there's been no opportunity of late. That ridiculing she should also stop, and that endless giving away. And I hope that if there's a bursaress named that she won't have so much to give away, but it should be very strictly prohibited of her, to be sure, otherwise they won't stop it, for [Mater] will always seek to have the upper-hand over the bursaress. It would be well if she could stop that giving

away without need; it's her inclination, like a thief is inclined to steal. In house if she must give anything it's as if she's giving up part of her soul. She's been that way her whole life; she'd rather let a thing sit there [unused by sisters] so she can give it away; that giving away outside goes beyond my understanding. Neither can I understand to whom she gives it all. I see her often during the year, three or four florins at a time, buying small images, and that's the least of it. There is one sister who for how many years I don't know has done nothing but make Agnus Dei's and Gospel-books, all to be given away. Others besides her make 10 dozen Agnus Dei's, one after the other. During the Winter there is also a lay sister who makes Gospel-books, and this isn't to mention all the flowers, bouquets, little animals, decorated flower branches, tree branches, embroidered dresses for Our Lady, and further a multitude of things I could describe if need be. I know that often one must give, but that must be with prudence, according to ability and as the situation demands. But what good is all that giving without thought, why something lavish rather than simple? Mater has sometimes answered that she doesn't give without knowing where she's giving. I reckon that five or six people walk into the guestroom at their leisure to whom they bring or give something, yet we aren't obliged to give to them. Why 7 or 8 stivers, sometimes more, sometimes less, on frills for them, and then spend a whole half-day neglecting one's work? I say that it's no great wisdom; I like to see our things well-cared for, not ruined or vainly given away, and so much time not wasted talking at the grille. It's not enough and not salvational to beg. Mater has too light a hand when it comes to complaining [to outsiders] and living off begging; she should instead take care of what she has, and see to it that her religious use their time more wisely,

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instead of going out so much and wandering and gossiping and doing other people's work. The lay sisters have their beaks in the street too much, without need. In an hour's time, five or six lay sisters often leave the house, one before, the other after, one here, another there, each as she pleases, though not without permission. But there's no great benefit in this; I'm ashamed for those who must see it all. Two sisters could do it, but they are so tied in with their worldly friends and pass their time unprofitably with them. Mater has often said that she can't

get all her work done if she must send them always two-by-two, but then how does it happen that at once there are five or six sent out into the city? And even more ugly is that in other cities, such as Brussels, Mechelen, and others, they walk along the street, one here and the other there. I think it hardly right for religious to walk thus alone. I pray you to forbid this; other religious go well-mannered in pairs on the street, especially when they're elsewhere. Mater doesn't disapprove of this much at all, especially when the sisters go to Brussels, for then she sends her secretary, Sister Lesken Joos, to St. Elizabeth's; the sister who goes with her doesn't know what she sends nor what news she brings back. Usually Mater will send along someone who is devoted to Vinnarola and secretive. Vinnarola must have the best in everything, and all her things rather done by seven maids than by one. I doubt that she's ever had a needle in her hands; everything's done for her. Sister Lesken Joos sits in her cell sometimes four, five, six days long, and ignores the common work. She's the young woman who puts out her hand at no time except for herself, and some sewing for Vinnarola; and she walks out on the streets, even if there's someone sick in the infirmary. She does nothing all day long but talk to people on all sides, evening and morning, early and late, and also going to Vinnarola's cell, without need. It's wrong for us to have a lay sister as infirmarian; that is the task of a nun. We feed her laziness in this; it's a woman who doesn't particularly look for work. If there's something to be fetched, some medicine for the sick of something else, she must have a maid do it for her, unless of course it's for Mater, Sister Maria Joos, or Vinnarola, then someone else cannot be trusted. When Mater is in the infirmary, then Vinnarola must be there too or the scene is incomplete. And when they're not sick, they still aren't much outside the infirmary, at all times, early and late. Oh excessive foolish love; if someone else had ever done things which we must now witness and tolerate, the convent would have stood on end; such familiarity and freedom I've never seen in my whole life. Through all this Vinnarola has become so bold that she dares to snap back at anyone, and she has such great command over the novices that you'd think her Mater. However senior a religious, no one dares to reprove the novices or call them, lest Vinnarola see and hear and takes offense and opposes whoever dared reprove, and in the presence of the novice, even if it's Vicaress herself. Isn't that a thing of grace that Vicaress must be snapped at by the youngest professed, and that behind her back she dares to say that Vicaress is but

a marvelous fishhead? And she has no reason to speak thus, for [Vicaress] speaks ill of no one and does no one no evil. But since Mater doesn't like Vicaress, Vinnarola can't do anything wrong in this regard. Mater and Vicaress are simply of contrary humor, such that it pains me. I don't know how we'll live in this situation, to leave Mater and Vicaress in their current positions. It has no great virtue. Vicaress' removal is what Mater seeks most of all; then she'll do all that she pleases. It will become a sorry convent, and it changes every day. I also think that Mater lets the community do even more than she would like so that they'll complain about her less. We've seen it often enough. If it keeps going as it is, then I think it hardly salvational for Mater and still others that she should remain Mater. It's too bad that she's never been a subject herself, that's worked to her ruin. She was made bursar when she was a child, that's why she knows how to run the house so well, may God improve it. If she'd greatly improve herself, things would start going well. Regarding the Matership, I wouldn't know who else to appoint, for if it were someone else she would have a hard task to endure

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Mater and all her cronies, for it will be against their wills, and all that another would do they would oppose it; they would even rebel if they didn't get their way. I doubt that there is a convent in the whole world where there is less capability than here. As far as Sister Anna Marcelis goes, well, she wasn't capable some years ago, and she's even less able now. I'd dare say that she's much worse in many things than she was then. She is a slacker of all good discipline; she's good only at pampering her body, doesn't come much to choir, sleeps late, never observes silence, is tied to too many worldly folk, too easily tells them everything that goes on; the other things which I could mention I'll omit, but a pair of pressed pants doesn't lose its crease. Sister Maria Joos is a very devout, pious religious, though very quick-tempered and fickle of mood. Still, these aren't insurmountable. Worse would be that we would have a regime just like the last: just as Mater now will not reign without Maria's counsel, so Maria would not govern without following Mater's in all things. It's as if they are one. She would carry Mater through water and fire. It would be the same hangers-on; she's also crazy about Vinnarola. And with Sister Lesken Joos: well, these are all together as one. Sister Maria Joos certainly has ability, but what the community would have a

hard time enduring is that she's very righteous, and speaks hard to all, however old, without discretion or tact. If she gets an idea, then it must be carried out immediately, and she'll keep nagging until her will is done. But what I dislike most about her is that she too much enjoys the company of young men, although she doesn't have as much chance as she would like. She should give herself more to God. She has a very good conscience; she doesn't have the great pride and obstinance, neither is she so scornful, nor hold grudges as long as Mater. But she's too inclined to engage in *fickfackerie* with worldly folk, eating and drinking, letting children inside the convent, allowing too much plastering and medicines, not tolerating reformation, neither observing cloister more strictly; she tolerates curiosities and reveling, and thus in too many things will be like our current Mater, though I do let myself imagine that she might pay more heed to the commands of her superior. She has good understanding of things divine. She isn't as full of passion but controls herself more. She speaks marvelously well, with great civility and reverence. She isn't easily swayed by petty rumors, but then she will give the upperhand to the lay sisters, and allow them often outside, to their pleasure, going to play, calling, going to bed early and arising late, that is always her way of doing. Still, she doesn't do it as much as the others. Now regarding the Vicaress: I'm sure they would never choose her, even if she were the most able person ever to live here. First, the community would fear that she would allow me back into the dormitory, but that's already been asked for and not allowed and she won't do it. They'd also suppose that she would be much stricter in all things than Mater, that the community would not enjoy as much freedom, that they would be constricted and bothered. It would do me no good, as far as I'm concerned, that Vicaress were Mater, for then I would lose her. I wouldn't grant it to her, in fact I imagine, as far as I know her, that there could be no greater burden for her in the world. It would cost her her life. I know that all these things which go on here would displease her greatly, and I'm not sure she could change them. She wouldn't be able to bear their unbelievable deeds, for she is sincere, good-hearted, but she has that great vice of always seeking to avoid the unpleasant, and without unpleasantness it will not be possible to put things here on a good foot. She who will be or remain Mater here must put on her harness, get a grip on courage, and hang on for dear life. But if she starts attending to the ways of the community, namely all their bad customs, they'll never leave her be,

with all the yelling, fighting, and quarreling she'll be finished, for once something's permitted then, and then forbidden, they become more violent,

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for they see that they grow accustomed to things. The Vicaress has some other conditions which might make her unsuitable. She is not at home in nor attentive to temporal affairs. In spiritual and divine matters no one is her equal, she can be quiet or happy and joyous according to the occasion, but that's not enough: she simply doesn't care. With her it is yesterday, today, tomorrow, if I can't come today I'll come tomorrow. She wouldn't miss a step even if the front door of the convent were moved to the back. Thus, though well-seasoned, in outward matters she's like a child, though it's true that through much writing, in which she's amazingly well-experienced, she's developed good understanding of rents and other matters. If she were only so keen in external things as in spiritual, then it would be well, but it's far from there. She is too careless, too easily dumbfounded, avoids admonishing or punishing anyone; the community is too heavy upon her, it would be an eternal cross on both sides. Mater and her party would never put up with it, in any way whatsoever. Thus the best thing to do would be to hear the voice of the community, to see whom they desire. Now if someone were appointed against their liking, I fear the worst. Had someone else been appointed three years ago, then they might be content, God knows who else might have been appointed! But now they are spoiled by this Mater in many things, things which I'm sure the previous Maters never would have suffered. I've told your reverence all these things to let you see our little ability, and also the need to do something about it and to labor a bit to improve the foregoing and subsequent points, both in regard to the Mater as other ordinary matters. Your Reverence may well wonder why I've written of the four persons above, and of no one else, as candidates for the Matership. I know no one else in the convent with the ability necessary, though we could certainly do better than these [four]. As I see it, not one is truly qualified, but beyond these there is not any other choice, unless someone wants to throw their vote into the wind. The more I observe the behavior and personalities of these all, the less I can say who would be qualified. In the first place, they're too attached to outsiders, letting them sleep and eat here, setting food before them, giving too much away, and being too factional and

allowing some more than others. There's only one person in the convent worthy, and she's got other conditions which don't serve a Mater well. Now regarding a bursaress I know no solution. Sister Anna Marcelis has itched her whole life to be Mater, but I hope God will preserve us from that great plague. If she could become bursaress it would be a great joy for her. Regarding her person, she presents herself ably enough, and however it's done, we have to fill the office anyway. Though it would be best if no one put herself forward, still, if I could or would, I would promote her to one or the other office, for very many reasons, God knows what they are; it's not possible for me to write everything, but you'll hear from others as well, and may God the Lord grant you the knowledge of his pleasure and what will promote his glory and the salvation of us all, to the peace and rest of the whole community, to the observance of all good monastic discipline, and the edification of all people. The pastor of Mol was here the Monday before Pentecost once again; after he had been here visiting for four hours with Mater and his sister and Vinnarola, Mater had four lay sisters accompany him so that they could all carouse on his way to Mechelen. Among them was one who was once hit by him, which causes me to wonder greatly at Mater's lack of judgment; that she allows such is to be lamented, for the same sister is most uncomfortable in his presence but doesn't dare contradict Mater; and as often as he comes to Leuven, and returns in the evening to his lodgings, Mater always sends that same sister with him. It would be much better if it wasn't so, but I don't know what's to be done about it; I fear it's hardly profitable at all. I have much compassion for her. She once spoke of it with me, but if your reverence were to try to tell Mater that it would be better to be less familiar with him, there would be such commotion that I don't know which would be worse, and the sister would resent me greatly for saying anything, which is natural, for she doesn't know the whole story. I wish that he never would come to Leuven again as long as he lives, but it's to be feared that it will happen often, at least two or three times a year, and then he always comes to our church and reads the mass and preaches; God knows how pleasant that is for me and still others, not without reason. Yet there are others who get such unspeakable joy from this that they think themselves ready to be taken up to heaven.

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It would be most desirable for Mater to let the sisters sit in choir according to their profession and age, then there would be no murmuring. Almost always she has Sister Maria Coninxloo sitting on the side of the choir with the young ones, and yet there are five younger than she. After much complaining, she finally placed someone lower, namely the youngest novice. If she'd deserved this humiliation, it would be a small thing. It appears that Mater has tried to stifle her in one fell swoop. Mater is greatly influenced by her own passions, and she also raises those she likes best: in a word, she's full of herself. She can't stand Sister Maria, for no other reason as far as I can see, except that she is curious and observes everything, and that she occasionally writes it all to your reverence (those who were entrusted with [the letters], they were the ones who told this). Then there was that which Sister Anna Vinnarola overheard, which is known well enough by your reverence, and which stuck in Mater's head. And she says that one must beware of Sister Maria as of a serpent, that she passes everything along to the superiors. Mater's feelings are never genuine for her, though she now feigns some affection, for Mater said herself that she would try to win her favor and good feelings only out of fear that otherwise she would complain so much visitation would result. She fears that [Maria] will be heard, and not without reason; for Sister Maria often has cause to complain about Mater, but if Sister Maria could stifle her displeasure a bit and keep it among a few there would be great peace and rest, and she'd give them less reason to suspect her, for believe me she is now hated. I myself find no better rest than keeping quiet and observing unobserved and speaking when it's time, otherwise, one injures oneself and others. But Mater is so blind that she has no knowledge of some things; she would swear by her salvation that many things are not a certain way, but they're so much that way that one could almost touch them, so bad is it. The simplest person can see them without even trying, but it's all unnoticed by her and she lets it go. Yet on the other hand things which displease others she does in secret with such deception that it's a wonder. She is as double-hearted as anyone I've ever seen walk the face of the earth.

The Mater is to forbid the bringing home or recounting of all unprofitable news and tidings [by the lay sisters]. I don't think there's anything that happens in the

world, of engagements, weddings, how and what, and also what happens in other convents in other cities as well as in this, that isn't brought into the convent and chewed upon. Sister Lesken Joos is the ringleader, the one who brings home news in abundance and chews on it. Often you hear nothing here but everyone sitting around and gossiping, telling much, passing judgment and sentence, each according to her taste and her affections for the persons under consideration. These are dangerous matters which don't concern our state, and it's an ugly practice which doesn't suit a religious. I say it isn't right for sisters to attend to women in childbed, with which they have nothing to do, especially when they're early in bed, and then come home to tell all about it. This happens not only occasionally but every day they go there, and not one sister a day, but three or four different sisters without need. For it's no poor woman who needs help. I'm ashamed that they run to and fro and do what in truth is the job of a nurse, and even that which they don't actually do, they always know best. It's no great honor for them to know these matters so well. If I had my way I wouldn't allow such care and much less bringing news of it back to the convent. How harmful that is and how much trouble that brings to cloistered people can't be shouted too loudly. If Mater were as she ought to be, attentive to the salvation of her subjects, she would take notice of all that's said in the community, but it's far from that. She's just like the others; what's worse, she says that those who object are disturbed in the head and sanctimonious, and is so amazed of others who disapprove that she doesn't know what name to give them. Thus there's little reason to expect any improvement, namely that such not be allowed at all. She sends them daily, the one here, the other there, early and late, letting our own work sit here unfinished to go work

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for others, for an hour, two, three in a row, making their food. One sister went every day to draw and spread ointment on the woman's bad breast, and about a year ago went to do everything for another woman in childbed; it's true that she wasn't rich, but she did have enough to hire someone to help her, and then still she leaned on us. Even this I could accept, but not all the marvelous news which from then on they brought home with them. I'd be ashamed to write it all, and even more to speak it, and say only that in my humble opinion I judge this to be

very damaging to the convent, in soul and body. It doesn't concern us sisters; yet they are much too chattery and they cling so dearly to those worldly people that they can't talk about anything else but what they've seen and heard. Their hearts are more by these people than the convent, and their own work is never taken seriously. And Mater she sends them all. Also she is more concerned for the people In the Leopard than for her own convent and religious. Every day the sisters go there, sometimes two or three in a day, not only when she's in childbed, but year out year in, never too late or too late, whatever high feast day it might be or what we have to do ourselves. Mater would answer, 'it's a good friend for us,' and it's true, she sometimes gives us portions of beer and meat and other things. But we do as much kindness for her as is possible, and have never really had any extraordinary gift from her, small or large. She's very well-cared for, and all that Mater and others can imagine or dream up, they make for her, whether something fancy to eat or some frill, all that they can invent to give her children. Nothing is too much for Mater if it's for that house. It's not possible for me to write everything I know on the subject, but everything Mater can do in secret she does as quietly as possible, as we know from some outsiders who are amazed by it all, saying that we're not so poor after all if Mater can give such gifts to the children. But what can we do but have patience until your reverence brings correction. Mater is so attached to that family that I know your reverence would hardly believe it, God knows it's true, which is very heavy for me; to think that we're but the slaves of laypeople--Mater is at least, and not to our profit. She has, at this woman's request around the time of her last lying-in, kept a quarter-part of Rhine wine in the cellar of the convent, under [tax-exempt] ecclesiastical privilege, in the name of our convent, but to the profit of the people In the Leopard. I think that in such things some weight must be given to conscience, and that it's scandalous when laypeople find these things out. Mater likes to speak much of the great benevolence we enjoy from the Woman In the Leopard; I say that if it were all piled together they'd be more bound to us than we are to them, I say three times more. I myself don't wish to be in such chains to worldly folk, the service and otherwise they have from our convent, without mentioning gifts and presents. They're always ready to serve her at a moment's notice, and all that they can dream up or invent they cook for the woman. When she gets big, then the whole time we're troubled by her pregnancy. Then it seems she can't eat

anything unless it comes from us; it would be a small thing if she were given but the community's common portion, but it's otherwise. The portions of the community put together are not as costly as what's given to her; she gobbles up more in one or two days. It seems she has more hunger from being pregnant, and suddenly her appetite has all that it craves, and Mater and others fulfill her every desire. What do other women do? Convents aren't burdened by them. One or two or three times is nothing, but always cooking and smuggling for her, now some pork, then a tart, another time cottage cheese, flan made in the dish, an apple spiced with wine and sugar, and so many other things that I don't know how to write it all. I see it all prepared, more than the others. Mater would say that the woman provides the goods, but it's like the old saying, 'who sets the table has the greatest expense.' And we shouldn't have any such expense, it's not our occupation. What do we have to do with this all? What did she do before, when our other Mater didn't allow such things? We may keep her as a good friend at our pleasure, but I say we shouldn't go on like this. And all that could be said on the subject I couldn't begin to write about. But I pray with all the humility possible that you would please do something about this so that it may be stopped, not only because of our temporal ruin, but much more because of the damage and peril to souls, for many inconveniences occur through this, it can't all be written. One could write a whole book about the cares of our Mater and sisters for that house. That woman comes often every day, speaking for hours with Mater, even during meals and otherwise. I say it's an expensive house. Mater may say what she pleases, but she is so crazy about that woman; when the woman suffers in childbed, it's too long for Mater, she writes letters to the woman.

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And it's a woman who's full of gossip and complaining, and brings in much backstabbing concerning one's name and honor, in regard to her maids as otherwise. If that were all, then I still wouldn't put up with that great familiarity with her, neither that the sisters should run there every day, two or three in a day, no day without a visit, whatever day it may be. If a friendship must be maintained in such a manner, it would be better and more salvational not to enjoy the least bit of charity from her; I'd go forward on our own; what we get from her annually

makes me think that the friendship isn't that great anyway.

It also isn't appropriate that Mater lets the nuns wear socks and shoes, each according to her taste, one white, the other black and white, like rags that have lost their usefulness. Who knows what they'll wear next. It's as if whatever the sisters dream about at night, they get the next day from Mater; it's all wasted money. I like to see the religious all the same in all things; I'd bet that if someone made some paper shoes they'd want those as well. I hope your reverence will forbid this; Mater is much too tolerant of how they spend money, without need, on frills and curiosities. It's so ostentatious, and they have no sense of what they're spending money on. Mater is as wise and prudent in this respect as all the rest, on rosaries, flowers, the little shrines, and all such folly; in these Mater is as childish as the youngest of the house; she even has them buying for her.

I pray also that the ugly custom be halted that requires sisters to offer money annually for the choir. Whenever it's someone's [birth or feast] day, then the sacristan of the choir brings out the Pax and then one must give, on Holy Innocents Day as well. Mater then goes around the choir with the Pax and a plate to gather money for the choir. And each year Our Lady is taken down and then each must make a donation for a new dress for her. It's a sight to behold, and it's all wasted money, lost money, the reason there's so much garbage made for the choir. It's a sin and a great scandal that we call ourselves poor and have so much money to waste. I don't know what kind of puppetry and pride they'll bring to the choir next. Not a feast day goes by that there isn't something new in the choir. Instead of other religious rejoicing in this and finding pleasure, I'm sorry that I must see it all; not that I am displeased by the adornment of a saint, for that pleases me in the extreme, but all the puppetry and unnecessary things that aren't necessary, that displeases me. For our state it's simply too costly. I'd be ashamed to write all that takes place; but your reverence would do a salvational act to expressly forbid any offerings or gifts for the choir, for I say in truth that such is unnecessary. And also would you say that they must cease with all this making of things for the choir, so that there isn't want [in other areas]. Otherwise they don't do anything except make stuff, without need. I wish well that your reverence could just once see our choir on a high feast day, then you'd

see whether I speak the truth. Still, I'd be ashamed that anyone should see the choir at its best, all those small shrines and little altars are covered with silken flowers, extravagantly made so as to be life-like. First it was plain flowers of one *oort* apiece, after that it was fancier colored flowers, made of fine linen, but now recently it's changed again to silk, with gillyflowers, roses, *alemonien*, and other flowers. By the time they're finished they'll cover the whole wall. The great case with Our Lady at the head of the Choir is covered from top to bottom with flowers, and each occasion with something new.

I never cease to be amazed that Mater and all those sisters always have plenty of money enough to throw away, yet Mater [says she] is so poor that she has no money, or rather has no will, to provide ablution wine when the sisters have been to holy communion, but they get water instead. When she does give any wine, then it's so little that she puts nearly as much water into the French wine as there is wine. And she complains long and loud to people that we're so poor that she can't afford to give wine except then. God grant that she would waste no more, especially when the year ends; for if there's money left at the end of the year, then she wastes it on silk for the choir, and much more. Mater and others have money enough when they wish; how many mugs of beer has she given in vain! Mater says, 'who wishes benevolence or favors from people must do favors themselves.' That much I admit; we can't treat them like dirt or be impolite, we are bound to help our neighbors. But love begins with oneself; no one is bound to do favors to his own detriment ... but Mater ought not to

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disadvantage the salvation of her convent. What good are the things of the world, if they're obtained by damaging the soul, as I believe we run the risk of doing with so much attention to worldly people? I dare to say frankly that we get no temporal profit in such a manner either, and I say again, as I've said over many years, as long as we put our trust more in friends than in God, and seek to please people more than we attend to our calling, rule, and statutes, more concerned for things temporal than serving God sincerely, God will not protect us, I've witnessed it myself so far. Mater and other sisters say that they can't understand why we always seem poor, what God can possibly mean for us by it. But as I see

it, I don't think it's salvational for any of them, for it doesn't seem to me that we're poor--what good would it do them if we were in fact rich? So much time is wasted here already; and in regard to matters temporal, time would be even more remarkably abused if we were wealthy. If your reverence only knew as much about these things as I'm forced to observe, with great heaviness of heart. And I'm ashamed for the young novices. Your Reverence should speak to me about it all, my heart is full. It's too much for me to see and hear. It's a custom and a very ugly one promoted by those who hold even the smallest office in the convent, such as sacristan of the choir, refteress, portress, hostess, cook, infirmarian, and other very small positions, that during the year they hold cleaning days, when it's convenient for each or as they please. The sacristan of the choir, Sister Anna Vinnarola, one Monday after Nones, enlisted four religious to clean the choir. The next day there were six people to clean, the whole day; and the whole day with whooping, yelling, and ringing that you'd have to hear or see to believe. In the evening, some dishes were prepared for when they finished, an idea of Maria Joos, and then they can all respectably carouse. But I've noticed that each year the party gets bigger, each wants to show great liberality and good feeling, and through this the group of little friends, or better said the dear ones, increase in number, for with honor they've earned the right to carouse. There were six dishes, by the way; it sorrows me to name them all. There was no want of noise either. They sat there long and very late, like drunks on the beer-bench, and were so giddy that you'd hardly think them religious. It was as if they had to fill each other up like barrels of beer, and engage in high-spirited frolic like those marvelous carousers. It's not enough that they make enough noise that you can hear it in the convent, or see it all, but so do all who live right around it. Those who live near the convent under the walls of the citadel hear it all from behind, over the water. These things are brought in more and more every day, for Mater comes alive with all this, she's always at the party too. Tuesday it was in the choir; then Wednesday there were five in the refectory reveling, without as many dishes as last time, but with no less noise. Thursday it was the workroom, and there they named one a lady and caroused some more; there were five for a job that took only three. The noise and clamor were as before, in eating and drinking, wholly unsuited. Then Friday, when Mater ought to give her community a good example in not breaking the fast without need, she took four sisters to clean her

room, and in the evening she sponsored another get-together for them all, where the manners were as fine as at the others. What they've eaten that night I can't say, as I could for the others, but they were so tipsy that one of the sisters had to be helped out of the refectory, for she couldn't stand on her own. Then Saturday two more were still cleaning Mater's cell. And when the infirmarian needs the infirmary cleaned, then it will be another big party for those who help, and all Mater's dear ones will be called to it. What really displeases me is that to all these parties are invited postulants and novices, when we have them. They see and enjoy all this. It's a great scandal, if they leave the convent, having seen and heard such impropriety, so that it seems that in the convent women do nothing but clean and shout. When they're in the workroom it seems they may do all they please, and show all possible coarseness, from morn until eve, shouting, yelling, gossiping, clamoring, eating, and drinking, without coming to the refectory [for meals], though it would be easy enough for them to do. Now they even make it a habit to wait until the others are out of the refectory so they can do as their little wills please, and then they always buy something special or at least cook something different. Mater would answer to all this, 'that isn't at the convent's expense, and that which each possesses she may with permission use.'

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Followed strictly, then that which each religious has we'll get only at her death; or if a religious has something of her own, who ought to give it to her? Certainly one should have permission to use one's own things when needed, but not to abuse them. Aren't these ugly customs for people in monasteries, that no common work can be done except with carousing? When we share as one, eating together, hushed, that is praiseworthy, but God help those who wish for such nowadays. They cost each other a lot, and however poor they are, whenever there's cleaning to be done as in the refectory or the other places I've named they are most worried about showing off to their guests. I admit that the allowance from the convent is sober, but in that case Mater, or whoever controls the goods, should give more [to each] rather than running off to buy this and that for a few persons. But this Mater loves to hold frequent small tavern-parties. If Mater had a lot of eggs she'd use only the shells, see how salvational our great riches are. They wouldn't exactly break their necks with the work they do now, thus what would

they do if they really were rich? It would be, 'We're rich enough; let us serve God,' but I dare say that God would get the very least from us. They sit now an hour and a half or two hours at the table on recreation days, and on other visitor-days an hour and a half, noon and evening, so that if they had more free time then they'd sit there from one meal to the next. If the gathering were about sermons, good books, or something pious, or at least something harmless, then it would be different. But as the day turns to night, there isn't much religious familiarity here at all, together or privately, and not much profit comes from it. They would answer, 'there's not enough time,' but the time is simply not used well. The great license and that private property is a very harmful thing in the convent. I hold dear the common life. But I think there are few here who desire a common life. They're much too accustomed here to buying all they want, needed or not; they would suppose that someone who denied their request would simply be wrongheaded. If the sisters have so much money to waste, then I'm amazed that we molest and complain to other people about our great poverty. What we won't do to get a meal from someone.

Most Reverend Lord, I well imagine that you all are rather amazed that I write so much about our time being so unnecessarily wasted, and about many other things. I admit it but I am ashamed of it as well. One might say or think, 'why does she have more to do with these things than other religious?' It can happen that such things do not displease others. It can also be that others won't make the effort, or can't, or don't have opportunity. Perhaps each plays a bit of a role. But I won't sorrow to write all this since I have hope that some good may come of it. I trust that it won't sorrow your reverence to read it. That which I have said too long, please forgive me. I fear that I've said some things more than once, but this is because I write a little here and a little there, and haven't the time to go back and check what I've written already. I do regret that we must break the head of your reverence with such follies, and take up your precious time, but otherwise there is no hope of improvement, for I see that the vicaress changes daily and for the sake of peace does not speak or show her displeasure.

Earlier I gave a few examples of something which I need to write still more about. Sister Anna Vinnarola, who is sacristan of the choir, well now every Saturday she

spends the entire day in the choir. She begins in the morning with picking flowers in the garden; she then spends the whole day plucking and making bouquets. There's another who helps her with the bouquets, and then there's yet another who spends the whole time from noon until evening sweeping the choir and polishing the candelabra. That's three people for one poor, smoky choir. Sister Anna Vinnarola goes neither to Vespers nor Compline nor to refectory, and this is every Saturday. In the evening until long after eight o'clock she's running from one side to the other like an unbound calf, calling out and chattering as if it were the middle of the day, and the same thing in the morning when she first arrives in the garden, oblivious to the time. There ought not be so much

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ado about the choir. She could make two, at most three pair of bouquets of flowers, outside the common work. It was Sister Maria Joos who brought in all this marvelous frilliness, and now Sister Vinnarola is even worse. There are now six pair of bouquets, not including all the little shrines each sister makes for herself, so that every day, winter and summer, there are 12 bouquets, whether of flowers or something else. Every high day, whether Easter, Pentecost, or any other, she works three days straight in advance, one day to clean thoroughly, another to redo things, and the third to decorate, and don't forget all the hands that help her, and not to mention all the special little shrines that each decorates for herself. Is it not a great scandal for people who wish to present themselves as poor, when each feast day and high day they spend so much on putting up and pulling down in the choir? For these shrines are made up in gold and silver linen, satin, all finely embroidered, and each day they make an inventory of what needs to be made new for the choir. If I wrote down all the waste you wouldn't believe it. All the Our Ladies and other My Saints have so many different robes that you'd think they were clothing real people. From the depths of my heart I gladly see a reasonably decorated image, according to our state, but all that pomp, puppetry and rubbish doesn't please God in the least, if you ask me. It's often the cause, even always, why the choir sounds like a chatter-school. If someone told Mater she was allowing too much time for making all the bouquets and flowerpots, she would answer that she likes to see a well-adorned image of Our Lord. So do I, but on shrines that are so tiny, what a waste of money.

I'm greatly saddened that there is never any stillness in the choir, but always chattering and railing; long discourses are spoken and much visiting occurs there. And that which needs saying is said with so much noise and abundance of words that the whole choir is disturbed by it, and this includes Mater as well as others. Almost all the religious tramp and stamp across the choir as if they were shodden horses, so unsuitable is it; it's a scandal that it's all heard in the church, too. And when mass or the divine office is done, they walk out the choir talking so loudly that [those who remain] can hardly read or pray in the choir. Mater hears and sees all these things, but says nothing, even if someone talks right in the choir. However inappropriate someone might be, I don't think she's ever said a thing, but keeps a happy face.

It's also necessary to chastise and sharply to charge Mater that she give no food to workmen, as she's done up to now without being obligated to do so, for they get their daily wage. I can't conceive what moves her to be so attached to everyone from outside who has anything to do with us. The joiner, carpenter, digger, woodcutter, five masons at once, the plaster-carriers, both those being paid and not, she gives them all board. If any workman comes to work for a quarter hour, they give him the noon or evening meal, whichever is nearest. I don't suppose that the workmen anywhere get such good beer as they get here, nothing's ever too good for the workmen. If Vicaress speaks out that everyone is fed here, [Mater] doesn't leave it there but speaks angrily and will not tolerate that someone has stuck their nose into it and they're compelled to silence. If one of the nuns wanted a pint of beer or some white bread, the convent is too poor to give it, unless it's one of the little friends. But beer for the plaster-carriers, at 7 1/2 florins ecclesiastical prices, well for that there was enough for a whole *aum* [about 150 liters] of beer, for the plaster-carriers on four or five wagons, but of course this was Mater's family and the people from her region. They were so drunk they could have been rolled away. If we have any workmen here they fill them up with beer so that it seems they have barrels for hands; and what they call drinking! I think that when a man drinks 7 mugs in a day that it's too much. And then they go to stand by the workmen and chat with them, and through all the chatter they don't work for hours. And in the evening at dusk the religious

stay to prattle with the digger alone, and the next day with someone else. This has no great grace for religious, to hear all the stories and news going on, and also making them wise to many things that go on here. It amazes me that there's so little regard for such things. The portress then must keep the door open to let them talk. Those who have done this during Compline often stayed from the divine office and went off to bed, complaining of illness; yet they could stand there and gossip with a man for two hours. It's been decreed that two sisters are always to be sent to be with the workmen, but up to now that hasn't been done; anyone who wants to goes to chatter. Thus they can barely do in a day and a half what should only take a day. Some even tell them they shouldn't work so hard.

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Speaking at the grille during the divine office and meals, on communion and confession days, without need, well the statutes are not observed at all. It's necessary to take more regard for this, for it's very harmful to soul and body, that long and superfluous gossip at the grille for two or three hours, even a whole half day. What profit comes from this? Much distraction, much prattle, loss of time, little work, not coming to refectory or the office, and it results in much murmuring, for some are allowed more than others. Some sisters have their friends who come from Brussels and other distant places, and that's fine if it's but for one or two days to talk to the sisters, that isn't against the statutes, but it goes on during the divine office, meals, and Silence time. Sure, these people leave and go their way, but it's often abused. There are some who come here eight, even ten days in a row, every day, either in the guestroom or at the other grille, from before eight in the morning until night, without putting a foot outside, but chattering straight through, with two or three religious who come neither to refectory nor Vespers or the work room, but stay there constantly the whole day, on confession days and communion days, all on the pretext that one may always speak with someone who's come from far. But certainly discretion should be used; someone who comes only once or twice and then goes away is one thing. But to come eight or ten days in a row, and others four or five days in a row, and to be away from the grille only to go sleep! But isn't this full of grace and a silly care for a religious, that during all those days she finds almost no time for her hours, mass, and then eats with such haste, and sleeps a bit longer those days.

Something has to change. I've seen and heard on various occasions that people who arrived in the guest room at 7 in the morning were still there at sundown, and when 9:30 came around they still hadn't left. That lasted five days in a row, and it's not enough that the friend does this only once a year, but it must be two or three times a year, and a religious must receive various groups of friends, who don't all come at once. It was like a parade here when these same five parties were allowed to sleep and eat here at will. I'm sure that if people were allowed to lodge here as they once did, we'd hardly find a day in the whole year when we didn't have a guest. The poor crowd grows, too, so that we'd have some come all the way from Brussels just for food; we're greatly burdened by it all. We have been marvelously troubled for more than 20 years with the friends of Sister Anna Coninxloo; her sister who stayed here 18 days in a row, eating and sleeping; now it's still once a year for 8 or 10 days; then a niece, now a nephew ... It was said that they eat only butter and bread, but we all know better. If it were but butter and bread then why do they go so secretly to people? Rarely will the food be openly brought. I'd bet that if a filly off the street came to the convent, she'd be let in the guest room, and given bread and butter. It's almost as if they've been given a commandment to set bread and butter before everyone, or to threaten them with violence if they don't eat. Sister Maria Joos is the evil captain of all this, of letting people into the guest room. It wouldn't be a bad idea for your reverence to exhort her in particular in this regard [MARGIN: NOTA], since she is portress. She says that though it's forbidden for guests to sleep overnight, it's not forbidden to allow someone to sleep on a bed in the guest room during the day. Thanks to this reasoning she let one of the religious bring in some strangers, soldiers no less, who were completely drunk, to lie on the beds. Another sister let in her brother and his friends, who were so drunk that they didn't know what they were doing until about 9 that night. I well imagine that there are no female convents in all the world which would tolerate such things as happen here. Sitting at the grille for eight days and having nothing else to do in the world, giving people food and drink and in the winter light and fire. Another sister will have a brother who's a soldier who will come and visit, which is all fine and natural, but then he brings three others with him. If we occasionally set out bread and butter to passers-through,

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that is natural. But I don't think so highly of this if they can have their meals elsewhere, as they usually do. I don't see anyone come here who can't find the entrance, but they drop right on in. It's not right at all to let soldiers sleep here during the day who are full and drunk. They'd respond to this, 'the soldier has a sister here,' and that's true, but there come three or four with him. Everyone who sees them coming in and out so drunken will certainly pass it on; sure, when the neighbors see two or three soldiers lying in the barley plain and there's only one sister nearby they know that one of them is her brother. But I say that such a situation hardly edifies and would never be allowed in other convents. Why are the sisters so hardnecked here? For no other reason than that they have too much freedom.

Why do the lay sisters have more license at the grille or in the guest room than the nuns, speaking alone with their friends and even strangers? Is it because they are out every day in the street, headed wherever they please to go gossip and to carry out secret errands? They aren't any more holy for it. God grant that never again should someone go out alone nor that any of the lay sisters speak alone with anyone, that would be more salvational. They carry much away from the house and bring much back in, which brings great unrest, especially when there is someone whom they don't like and have heard much ill of him, or about any lay friends, or when there's something about the dear ones, then there's always something dragged in and news brought home, all of which goes to show that there isn't as much love for one as for the other; they won't set one foot in front of the other except with great pain. What grace is there for a lay sister to be alone among her friends or family in the guest room, or by unlike persons for two or three hours [MARGIN: NOTA], and sometimes with persons who aren't exactly to be trusted. There's as much peril for them as for nuns; they're human too. If it were up to me, I'd restrict those sisters to the smaller grille; it's too easy for them in the guest room.

It was decreed that no one should be given food and drink, nor be allowed so easily into the guest room, except in need, as sometimes rises. But this isn't observed at all. It's as if the friends haven't been unless they've been seen into the

guest room. However late they come they are let in; it's a great marvel to me that friends come and stay so many days, inside and above, even if the religious are in Compline, or sleeping, as has happened more than once. It's become a custom, so that even if the sister's in bed she must rise and go the grille, even if it's during Compline on Easter; these are ugly habits and improper conventual practice. It's good that I'm not portress; I'd send them in all directions until another day, then they'd remember for the next time they tried. But we have the reputation and also the deed of being open and letting in, at whatever time. That always staying here, if it gets like it was before, I won't be so resolved to stay in this situation, but out of hope of visitation and improvement I've shown no displeasure in order to give them no cause. But it's very saddening to be here like this, for through their excessive welcoming of people into the guest room, I often feel that I'm in a tavern. And often it gets better when they sit there and banquet, drinking beer and wine and eating different dishes, from noon until night, young beguines from outside and young religious from inside the city. The meals are secretly cooked here, one after the next. Male and female sit and carry on so that by the evening they're so drunk they can't remember how to get back to their convents [MARGIN: NOTA]. Mater would say, 'No one eats here,' but that is true only as long as no one comes. If Mater means to say that no one knows about these happenings because they're done in secret, then she's greatly deceived. Nothing can happen in the guestroom, however secretly it's done, but that I see or hear. They certainly employ much finesse and deception, but unless I'm in the divine office, it's all in vain; it's happened different times that I've returned sooner than was my custom. Thus it is well necessary to admonish Mater strictly not to let people into the guest room so easily, nor to so readily set food before them, nor to bring their own food here to come and eat. They would say, 'where is it written that you can't offer your friends a bit to drink?' To drink once for their thirst is one thing, but two people putting down two or three mugs of beer is not for the thirst, nor does it happen only once but whenever people come, without need. In all things there ought to be discretion. It is also not

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for the thirst when a young religious comes from her convent and with her friend here drinks a whole pot of wine, as happened very recently. Wine's never been

more expensive, but I've never seen a time in this convent when it was given more readily. There are several religious who do this now. I don't know if they're only trying to follow Vinnarola, for I'm not sure that most of them realize just how free she is with it. For this the sisters have money enough. If the clothes of these same religious need mending and they require some linen or scraps to do so, and then tell Mater of their needs, she'll answer that she doesn't have any and that the sister has no money to buy any. But two hours after she's given that answer, she's got the same sister off buying wine to give to her friends who've come to visit her, and from within the city. This didn't just happen once but whenever something needs mending or repair, and for whoever it is. But when they come ask her every day to buy assorted *fiterfaterije*, rosaries, images, or small crafts or garbage, whether for their cell or the choir, never in her life has Mater refused them money, but on the contrary says that she'll lend them the money. I've never seen the like of it, it knows no end. Regarding eating and drinking, if it pleases, you might speak somewhat more broadly with Mater, and tell her that there's no need for someone from inside the city to come and sit and drink, and second that it's by no means permitted or the opinion of our reverend lord that those who come from outside should go back and forth to and from the convent, day after day, and eat here daily, even if it is only butter and bread. It happened only recently that the sister of Anna Coninxloo was here 11 days, coming all the time, and this is a yearly event; if it's no longer than this, then we're lucky. There are others who do this too; the mother of Vinnarola also comes annually; Sister Anna Marcelis hosts every one of her relatives as well. Thus it's most necessary to put an end to it with one blow, or I'll promise you that it will keep on. Why do they need to eat here when they can get a meal somewhere else? They'd say, 'it's only a little butter and bread and a drink, what harm is that?' and that's true, but they don't stop there. They cover the whole table, and when people start with their drinking mugs then it's hopeless, for there's no going away at all. When they're in, then there's not much regard for the rules; if one is allowed something, then everyone wants just the same. Mater is completely to blame for tolerating all this.

Regarding our steward, I'll tell you this, I wouldn't let him eat here more than anyone else, for this reason: they all say, 'he's the convent's friend, we are the

convent's children, thus our friends are the convent's friends, and they may eat a bit as well.' But the Steward is an expensive Steward. In the first place he already has the tenth penny. On top of this he does our accounts only every other year and yet visits at least twice a year, and not merely for our convent's affairs, but whether for his own profit or recreation I can't completely say. Now, when he comes, for whatever reason, he announces it well in advance; then the preparations commence as if he were a prince. To begin, he has the heel of a ham, a piece of spiced meat, seasoned mutton, all as costly as possible, a bit of roasted *Hutsepot*, and anything else they can dream up or lay hands on. He devours it all, and is so ill-mannered about it that they don't dare serve anyone else before him. He usually stays long, five, six, eight days before leaving, and is so unspeakably delicious that nothing can be made for him that is too costly. He'd probably have to plead poverty were it not for his acquaintance with us. But even if he served us for nothing, I wouldn't want him. When the meat's on the table, he won't eat it unless it's been cut into very tiny pieces, and cooked and recooked at great expense, sometimes steamed between two plates. Every day, noon and evening, there's something new and special, besides the things I've already mentioned, not to mention all the things put into the potage, and setting the cheese on the table. And if he stays for more than two or three days, and eats each time like this, then someone's off to the market again. And he will never eat alone, but brings whom he pleases each time, now a man, now a woman, even soldiers. He was the last to sleep here. Every day, morning, noon and night. I'd bet that he was here then for six days, and every day we were feeding three people; and no matter how expensive something is, if it's not to his liking in food or drink, then he sends it back; he won't touch it. Therefore I'd rather pay his expenses in another house, there he can shame himself. Moreover, if he didn't come to the convent

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then we wouldn't have to provide his food. What do we have to do with his other affairs? I'll let you judge whether he's costly or not. And now he's married! What burden will we have now with his wife and children, and also his mother-in-law who often comes through Leuven on business? Mater says that the Steward has arranged his affairs in town so that he may attend to them each Kermis; if they're

thus arranged, let them be unarranged, or let us hire someone else; if we offer the tenth penny, there'll be takers enough. He hasn't been back here since your reverence decreed he couldn't sleep or eat here anymore. What Mater will do with him, I don't know. But it wouldn't cost the convent half as much to pay for his meals elsewhere. Then it would be every other year only once, and then Mater alone, but he sometimes came three or four times a year. Fire and light until ten o'clock and then it's still too early for him to go to bed, and if he's drunk, as he often is, then he can't be put into bed at all. There's not a worse sight than seeing a religious up so late with a drunkard. I've written at such length about this out of hope that you'll forbid Mater very sharply about his even thinking of eating and sleeping here again. I could give you still more reasons, but these should do.

I've written elsewhere about cloister, but it's still abused, both in the guest room and the church, and thus I'm going to write the rest, since the observation of cloister protects against much inconvenience. Regarding the cloister-door in the guestroom that's been made: in the first place, if there's someone in the guestroom, eating or drinking, there comes immediately the portress or, if the hostess is away, one of the lay sisters sent by Mater to remain with the guests; but they leave the door open so that people are often in the hall I use and thus often stand there right before my feet. If the door isn't all the way open, it's been at least propped open with an iron bar so that it won't close, so that the people if they wanted to could easily come inside and be out again without anyone having noticed. Also, the religious can too easily then come and visit the guests when the hostess has left. The lay sisters--well they walk in and out as often as they please; sometimes they stay the whole afternoon chatting and rattling, and that's why they let people into the guestroom so easily, so that they can go there with them. But if I had a say, I wouldn't allow such easy access to these guests. I certainly wish that I could have three or four words with you in person on this subject. If the whole community must now speak at the large grille, then I wouldn't allow the lay sisters to come into the guest room as they please. It's not complete unless they're all present; if necessary, I'd even leave them inside with the nuns.

Now regarding the cloister-door in the church, the sacristan has no great regard

for it. She often leaves the key right in the door when she's inside the church, also during the mass. If any of the chaplains or someone else really wanted to, they could easily come inside the convent and with the sisters in the choir who would notice? To remedy this problem and for the observance of cloister, she should always carry her keys with her, and never leave them in the door, neither in the sacristy; it simply shouldn't be allowed.

I've written earlier of Vinnarola, that she maintains such close relations with one of the chaplains. But that which I've seen and heard of her great familiarity since writing last demands that I write yet again, so that your reverence will take it to heart and sharply admonish her. I warn you, it brings no profit to us that she goes and gossips with that man, and informs him of her displeasure for certain sisters, and he speaks frankly to her as well and gives her still more reason to complain. If those sisters knew about it, there'd be an ugly uproar. She ought to stop, and he ought to stop listening. He knows many of the things which she does better than we who live here. If someone else comes to talk to him, besides Mater, Maria Joos, Vinnarola, or Lesken Joos, he is reluctant to speak; and then Vinnarola, well she's head and shoulders above everyone else. Their chatting knows no end, both from his side as from hers, therefore if you don't fix anything else please stop that endless chatting. The other chaplain isn't in her good graces, for when she goes to say something to him he only answers 'Yes' or 'Amen,' not one word more. He engages not in the least bit of familiarity with anyone. But if anyone begins to listen to her, they become so cliquish. Another we had before this one was also a cliquish man, and many were glad to see him go, but this one is much worse. We know from the chaplain that Anna has made from the most expensive silk flowers a large life-like arrangement intended as a gift for her Godfather. There are some in house who knew about it, but not many. He had asked her whether it was finished; when he saw a few of the petals that had been made he could say only that this would be such a costly piece, how would she explain it to the man? How long must we put up with all this unnecessary giving, those gifts from poor sisters? She wants to give him this gift because she wants him to commission a painting on the shrine of Our Lady in the choir. I wouldn't allow her to do either one. I've heard that for the one shrine alone it will be 60 florins, not including what it will cost for the other. I can also see it coming that

he'll accept her present, and then not fulfill her wish at all. Oh he'll promise her, and she'll assume that he'll come through,

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but when reckoning day comes it will be holy garden-water, and who will pay for it all then, probably Mater from the convent's money. And even if he did give money for the present would she use it for the convent, so that the sisters wouldn't have to go begging for their support? I don't understand Mater; she thinks that money can be scooped up out of the water. God would that no one of us could make silken flowers, it would be to our profit and salvation. If it keeps going like the last two years and as it's going each day now more and more, we'll be ruined. I wrote about this earlier, but now some new things have been added to the choir, a skirt for Our Lady from excellent red satin and very lavishly embroidered. I don't know how long Mater and Sister Maria Joos and Vinnarola worked on it, but it was early in the morning and late at night. Mater's been reading her offices and hearing mass in great haste. The others haven't done anything else, for they were the whole day in the infirmary, working constantly. To win a stiver for the community they'd undoubtedly feel too ill. Mater says we're poor, but I say that even the richest abbey wouldn't do such things. It wasn't long ago that Vinnarola, Mater, and Maria Joos embroidered on the apron a square Spanish cloth with gold palettes, to replace the lace embroidery that was there before, and as expensive as you can imagine, spending an awfully long time and much money on it. If it's all Vinnarola's money, where does she get it all? And assuming it is, I say it's a great sin. If Mater wasn't wearing the purse, then we'd all see just how much more Vinnarola could do than anyone else, though she would still have the tools and the time, with Mater's consent. It's as if Mater and those sisters do nothing but dream up new things to make for the choir, and then takes from the community what she pleases. I dare well say, in good conscience, that in a two-year period more than 200 florins have been put up in the choir ... you would see that I don't lie. They would say, we need this and that, but it's all wasted money; let them show me that even one florin of it all was necessary, either for themselves or for the convent. There are tiny altar-pieces less than two hands high covered in fine cloth embroidered with velvet, others with gold and silver cloths, how this happens I don't know. There's money enough to

buy velvet in Brussels for still more little altars. Then there must be gold *frenie*, then Our Lady must have yet another robe of gold linen, and she already has two satin robes, two or three of crimson, and a few others of still other material. But that's still not enough to satisfy them, because they still don't have one of red velvet, and they lament it. There are still other images of Our Lady in the choir, and I couldn't begin to describe all their clothes; they have so many, one-fourth of them would be sufficient. If you could see it all you'd wonder why they call us poor sisters. Your reverence may ask the Vicaress if it isn't true. For I let her read almost all my letter, except for a bit, which your reverence will be able to figure out. Isn't it unfortunate that one must be ruled so, that the vicaress may not say a word about these things--not as if she has a chance, for they hide it all from her until it's finished; Mater knows well that [Vicaress] wouldn't advise such expense. About two years ago, Mater misused a gold object, given as an eternal memorial to our previous Mater Josina, for the wooden shrine of Our Lady in the choir. The object was supposed to hang, as it always has, on an image in the choir, but she replaced the gold with wood. When vicaress said something about it, [Mater] answered impolitely, as is her custom, and paid her no heed. What she's intent on doing she won't quit because of vicaress; and what she doesn't dare in public she'll do in secret. What I can hardly bear now is how awfully Mater speaks about the vicaress; it's as if it's too much for her even to listen to her. I know no cause except that the two are not of the same disposition or opinion, God preserve us from this. As I said before, Mater simply can't run this house, but she's like a spoiled child who buys up frills and rubbish, while keeping house doesn't concern her much at all. Day and night she's preoccupied with making little altar pieces, dresses, robes, and other frills, and to dream up new things to be made, what otherwise ... not much income and not much time. If

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they cared about their time, and were as watchful of it as they were those useless things, they'd find much time. She imagines that her decoration of the choir is a great sacrifice and that it greatly pleases God. But I don't see much merit in it at all, since we have to go and fetch the people from the choir to do their work and run the house, and we don't get our portions anyway. What is now salvational about taking from the community to make unnecessary things, and then begging

and complaining to get more and then wasting it too? She complains that she has not the means to construct the wall next to the guestroom and to seal the windows; if she had the will, she would have certainly found the means. If we had all that wasted money back, we'd have our wall by now alright, and much more. My heart speaks out often, but I hold my tongue. When your most reverend lord send the last ordinance, namely to make the grille smaller, to shut up the windows, and to build a wall in the garden next to the guestroom, and still other good and necessary things, Mater gathered the convent and had the contents read aloud. Those who heard it rose up marvelously against certain points; the lay sisters, according to their usual manner, were ready to throw it all in, ranting and raving like they were out of their senses. Even some of the nuns were ugly about it, among whom Sister Maria Joos was the worst captain of all; she spoke without reason as if the community had been dealt the most unfair blow humanly possible. She went after the vicarress like a barking dog intent on the kill, and spoke so sharply to her in the presence of the whole community. Mater didn't lift a finger, for that's just what she wanted, and in some things she confirmed her. She said to Mater, 'if I were you, I'd throw the keys at the bishop's feet and say to him, do it yourself [MARGIN: NOTA], I can't do it this way, and I'd let him decree and command all day long, but I'd do as I saw fit and throw all his bulls in a pile, and let him pronounce and establish to his heart's content, but we will not do it; we'd rather rise up against him, rather leave the convent, than to be ruled this way.' God grant that the others weren't affected by such a display of disrespect for her superiors; for many thought that she spoke under the influence of the spirit of God, because she appears to be more pious than the others, and she speaks so smoothly that no one is her equal. She certainly has good understanding but that liberality is well known here. She's so accustomed to much liberty that she resists any changes at all. And this was very hard on her, for when her friends came, even great strangers, then we might as well have hung out a sign and called ourselves the 'Do Drop In,' with all the people who were eating, drinking and sleeping. She simply can't let go of this, that we can't do as we used to; her complaining knows no end. She gives everyone, from high to low, food and drink, whenever she may or can; she says that the bishop supports us in this and will leave us in peace. She should be answered, or at least I would ask her, whether those people to whom we give food will support us? Every day the

house was full of guests, very rarely without, sometimes four or five parties. Once we had to make up five beds, and even get some beds from outside; if we wanted to make a bit of unrest here we could say much. It's still always said around here that her lord brother [Henri Joos] served us for nothing, and that he gave 100 florins a year for his meals. But it would be to our ruin to have such a one again, even if he gave 200 florins a year, he wouldn't be able to cover all that was consumed. In the first place, he used all the linen of the guestroom, sheets, napkins, towels, beds, and everything connected with them. Rarely was he without guests of his own, people from his quarter on business, who stayed here for months and the convent had to provide their board. His friends were always here, one or the other. The nuns in his fold were invited to dine with him twice every week, and stayed there the whole day banqueting, singing, and making noise. The Mater [Barbara Noosen] wasn't allowed to say one word, even if the people stayed very late into the night, eating and drinking all they pleased. If anyone said anything bad about it, well they ran right to him in disbelief, mouth gaping, and repeated it, for he made them gossips. And then he also spoke very nastily about those not in his grace, which after all was very ugly for a confessor, for it brought great oppression of conscience. And people complain that we lost so much. It was most virtuous then that one was required to play and frolic with the confessor, day and night, and that he was so familiar and free in the convent, in the refectory, even in the cells, as if he were a nun. Oh we had good reason then to leave the convent. Though he often gives us gifts it's not enough. Even if he gave us half his goods, it wouldn't be enough to repair the damage in soul and body, he knows that well. God would that he came here less often. We should praise and thank God night and day that he doesn't live in the city. There are those who would gladly seek their grace from him, had he the time. I don't know what salvation lies in that; I don't think that such a desire can come from God. I'm amazed at him; I always thought him wiser than that. I supposed that he wouldn't think of returning so often, but I see now that if he were permitted everything he was permitted before, he certainly wouldn't turn anything down that was offered.

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It would be most desirable to do away with the office of the nun assigned to speak with the gentlemen who come to read or sing the mass. This is no office at

all, for if something need be said then it can be done by Mater, as our previous Mater used to do, with great reverence, or perhaps three or four times a year by the choir-mistress, during Easter Week, Pentecost Eve, etc. Or the [church] sacristan was simply told in advance and she gave the message to the chaplains when they came, but now it's all wrong. Sister Anna Vinnarola, the youngest nun, now has the task. She descends every day from the choir to go speak with the gentlemen at the door in front of the open window of the church. She's also spoken for a long time at the open door of the sacristy, though some say this hasn't happened for a while now. At the window across from the infirmary she still speaks with the man as often as she pleases, standing in the open window with both her elbows leaning on the window and her head inside the church. This results in much chatter, a perilous matter for young people. Sundays and Holy days she often neglects singing her hours with the community, even on the Holy day of Easter, as has happened. And she often speaks with the chaplain at the grille as well, whether in the guestroom or the other grille, talking an hour or two at a time, and even singing, while the other religious are engaged in private devotion or the mass, so they won't know what goes on or tell anyone else. From their own words, one can guess the familiarity that took place, for sometimes [Anna and the chaplain] even blab about it, and willingly and knowingly talk about what was said. Not one game is played here but that Vinnarola has the chaplain come and see from the guestroom, even on other recreation days she has him come here so that she can go talk to him. I can say nothing ill of this gentleman's honor and virtue, and of how he edifies us in all things, and that he has been as accommodating as anyone we've ever had or could have--but I say it's perilous. She is much too attached to him and has many worldly ways about her, and she can gossip marvelously well. Thus it's better to put a stop to it now. We've seen higher mountains fall, which were better grounded and more wise than she. Mater trusts her too much, which amazes me, since she once had a bad experience [was hit] that way herself. And if it's true, then she ought to be careful that it doesn't happen [to Anna]. If she was deceived, as she claims, then why doesn't she show any concern that [Anna] not be deceived? But if you asked Mater about it, she'd say, 'who is evil thinks evil.' Nevertheless, it's plain to see that Vinnarola runs to the gentleman too often without need. I've never seen such running in my life. If there's a particular mass to be sung, then she goes to him

the day before to tell him. The next day when he comes then she runs to hand him the mass, and when the mass is out she runs after him again to give him money. Aren't these lovely manners, to make three trips for what could have been done in one? The church sacristan could do this, but it's not perfect unless Vinnarola's done it herself. If she went quietly and mannerly, speaking briefly, no more than necessary, without small-talk, she wouldn't have so much to say. She's crazy about that chaplain. If anyone shows any displeasure with him or should suggest that she speaks with him too much, I don't know who'd be able to make peace after that. She'd grumble and pout for a week, and Mater would say as she usually does, 'Vinnarola is done with all that.' Mater should be wiser than to allow all this familiarity; she is young and inclined to these attachments. But instead Mater only encourages her. For whoever comes to visit, Vinnarola is right there with them, religious, worldly, all sorts of people from whatever nation or quarter they come. Even if they speak with or see her only once, all want to be friends with her and be with her. We sometimes say among us that if a dog came off the street she'd be friends with it in a second. Mater has no greater pleasure than ... the convent's guests with the company of such an agreeable religious.

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And it doesn't surprise me, for she's a gifted chatterbox. She could easily tempt someone. It's too bad she's so spoiled; she could have been a most able religious had she been well-trained and exercised from the beginning, and made more respectable. Now there's nothing to be done about it, she has so much license. It's to be feared that even if her commission to speak with the chaplains before mass were taken away, that she'd still speak with them at the grille whenever she could. She is too familiar with young men, in fact with all sorts of people. Sometimes she visits with fourth-hand acquaintances, visiting not only those who come to see her but when she goes to the grille to accompany a sister called there, she visits with her guests as well, especially when they are men. It's her ruin. Or when the Woman In the Leopard comes to gossip with Mater, which usually happens two or three times a week for an hour or even three hours in a row, then Vinnarola has to join the conversation too, and she is even permitted to stay alone with the woman if Mater is called away. She's trusted with all.

It's been decreed at another visitation that the church door into the street should be closed as soon as the service is over, and that the [church] sacristan should keep the keys to it. This is not observed. The church is never closed before evening, and she leaves the keys hanging in the sacristy. The sacristan often holds long chats with the people in the church and the sacristy, so that one can scarcely read or pray in the choir; they even talk about things that should not be talked about there. The sacristan walks very often through the church and into the neighborhood, talking and complaining about what goes on inside the convent, and since the man [she talks to] is our digger the least thing that we say she repeats to him. If the church door were shut, this would eliminate going to and fro, in and out, so often, as well as other abuses I don't want to mention here. It will be enough for your reverence to know that I write these things only for great and necessary reasons, which have driven me for long, but I could not do this outside of visitation lest I give someone cause to suspect me. The sacristan simply goes out too often alone, and it would be wise to have for a common rule that she may not go alone so. Mater could stop this if she wanted, but we know her motivations.

In regard to doing the divine service properly and with pauses, with all reverence and respect, as is proper and as called for by the statutes, this is not observed in the least, but rather it's done with such great haste, slovenliness, speeding past others, that it's more like a farce than a divine service. Mater is the worst of all. Then Sister Anna Marcelis stamps like a wharf-horse if the pace isn't fast enough. Sister Maria Joos and Sister Anna Vinnarola chatter away as if that's why they were there. It seems like the divine service can't be done quickly enough. It saddens me to hear it and I'm ashamed before God. Who slobbers most and fastest has the biggest prize and praise from Mater and her kind. Thus many words and phrases fall away. One wants to do it properly, someone else another way, so that there's rarely agreement. Also in singing it's like a contest. Mater adds to her fame by boasting that her people can be done so quickly with the hours and other services as they please. After writing this, I must say that they've begun to do the services more properly, but if it will remain so I can't say. God grant that they would be so hasty in speaking at the grille or in their chattering and carrying-on at the table.

The infirmarian, Sister Joos, that is most necessary to change. She is a respectress of persons and not particularly inclined to some, paying them little attention beyond their barest needs. She's also a big gossip, painting things as darkly as possible, and coming into the convent to announce all that the sick do or say. Those not in her good graces she hardly cares for or does little to help them relieve their sickness. Also, if anyone has an accident or requires medicine which might be embarrassing, then she does little else but ridicule that person. There's a nasty habit in this convent of poking fun at each other and taunting when there are any secret or embarrassing accidents. Mater tolerates this and even laughs along. I'm ashamed that I've had to listen to some of this talk, and if I were so afflicted I'd rather die than admit it. Sister Lesken has a great loathing of carrying or cleaning anything; that which needs doing falls on the shoulders of those for whom she has little affection, and she even complains about them. Everything stinks to her and makes her feel faint, and this causes still more telling of embarrassing details. She has no real vocation for it; it's happened that no one has lain ill in the infirmary for a whole half year, so that she spends at least half her time in idle gossip and the

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whole day in the street learning all the news and wonders and stories, and what's happening at every convent, inside and outside the city, and how they rebel in other convent, what's happening in childbeds, and that often we hear nothing but what's happening in the world, of weddings and the like, more than we ever had known before. Mater listens to all this like it were one of the Gospels, and so do many others; sometimes they sit at the table for two hours to listen to all this. God knows how harmful such things are for cloistered religious, and what thoughts they conjure up. Many would never have imagined such matters their whole life long. I pray you for the love of God that the brides of Christ ought not be familiar with such things, but it won't change unless Mater is sharply admonished and ordered that she not allow such things nor discuss them herself. What do we have to do with such affairs? We've left the world to serve God; these things don't concern our vocation. There's so much to learn about God and matters divine, so that our hearts can be moved to love and gratitude; with other

things we ought not be concerned.

Further there is here annually a very ugly and harmful custom. Every year on Shrove Tuesday Mater insists on baking a great pile of waffles, from convent funds, to be taken to very many places. Two sisters need an entire day to bake enough, one after the other. [MARGIN: EXPENSES DURING LENT, TO WHICH THE VICARESS ALSO REFERS IN HER LETTER] Three, sometimes four sisters then do nothing but carry the waffles to every corner. Mater would certainly answer, 'I didn't start this custom, it's been around since before my time,' and that's true, but never was it done in such abundance as it now is, and every year it increases. The previous bursar also did it, but only that which duty required, such as for the dean, the confessor, and now for the Guardian, since the Friars do so much and serve us at no cost. And perhaps for two or three good friends, whom we know will repay us, that's something different. But as the saying goes, 'harness everyone, and where will such foolishness lead you?' We'd have goods enough if we didn't carry waffles to too many people, even those from whom we can expect nothing or who even expected nothing themselves. In my life I've never see more carelessness. Wood is so scandalously expensive, and they know it, and a fire should be stoked with greater care than ever, but then to carry on so wastefully--it's scandalous all that good wood they waste every year. But this year it was so extreme that I couldn't keep it in my heart any longer. It's also a custom that the religious are given every year on Shrove Tuesday a portion of wheat flour, to do with as they please. This is now so abused, because almost everyone in the community uses her portion to bake waffles, and each sends it to whomever she pleases, with the permission of Mater, so that the lay sisters do nothing else. This year it lasted fourteen days long, that baking and taking, one to her mother, to cousins, nieces, nephews, others their sister or brother. That's not so bad, but then some send off to a crony, another to a cleric, young theologian, an Augustinian, another young male or female religious, and here to the needy or to pigs. In sum, if this goes on there won't be anyone left who hasn't tasted a waffle baked by the Grey Sisters. The waffles aren't sent only within the city, but last year a whole chest with several dozen was sent to Mol in the Kempen. People will start thinking that we eat as many waffles as we please. I was present when the waffles were being baked for the gift to Mol, but civility there wasn't great

enough to allow me to taste even the smallest crumb. In fact, I was sick at the time and right before my eyes I had to see the convent's goods given away. In house, if you're not of Mater's brood, then she is the most impolite and spiteful person alive; it's enough for her as long as she fares well, and those who stand in her good graces. She is her own best friend; she has no motherly heart, and it's a great scandal that we

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must bother your reverence with such nonsense, for there's not one thing Mater couldn't improve, but she won't do anything unless warned by your reverence, and then it's still not certain she'll do it. The Vicaress may not exhort, warn or even advise her, assuming she can even work up the courage to try. She's most obstinate, and she won't do or stop the smallest thing unless it suits her. In fact, there's nothing she dislikes more than that someone reveals something [in visitation] but if she doesn't like that then she should listen to counsel so that no one is compelled to complain elsewhere. I'd assumed here that we can say anything at all, but in fact you're much better off here by burying your displeasure. I hope regarding this custom of waffle-making that your reverence would forbid the sisters from baking waffles that are to be sent outside the house, and that which is sent by the convent should be done as I suggested above. I know for sure that Mater will say that she never gives without a purpose, but we know to the contrary: if there's one from whom she gets something, there are ten others from whom she gets nothing. If she's so devoted to baking waffles perhaps she should open a stall on the market and bake them on the spot for sale by the piece. It's an expensive matter and she doesn't know how to manage it. There's no prudence or care for consequences. That which we have isn't well preserved or watched as it ought. Mater can't jingle her coins enough, unlike others I've seen. Patience.

It would be good if Sister Anna Vinnarola were no longer permitted to go into the infirmary outside the hours permitted, more than other religious. When Mater is sick or was recently in the infirmary, so goes Vinnarola with her, always; early in the morning before going to choir, then again at Primes when choir is over, again during the mass, after Mass, midday after Nones, 7 times in one day,

in the evening after Compline, the whole day she isn't far from there at all. Also if Sister Maria Joos is in the infirmary or Lesken Joos or someone else from her companions, then she goes at times at which other religious may not visit. Mater wouldn't let anyone else do this. When Mater is sick, we all know Vinnarola will get there soon enough to visit. It seems to me they must always be together as if they were lovesick, or that if one has something the other must be there too. If Vinnarola is ill, then Mater is there with her, like the most anxious mother in the world with her dearest child, as if Mater and the infirmarian had nothing else in the world to do. It's much trouble, but she ought to do so for everyone in house; she has feelings for them, but small feelings for everyone else. Mater always says that she'll do for each what she does for one, but God forgive her that we see a different story with our eyes. If Sister Maria Coninxloo or many other sisters I could name were sick, you wouldn't see Mater running to and from the infirmary, and the infirmarian doesn't do much for these others anyway. Even if no one has told me who is sick, I can tell just by how many trips Mater makes to the infirmary; if it's someone she likes, then it's the doctor, the druggist, the barber, 7 maids for one sister, all sent immediately to the infirmary, however small her affliction; others must almost sneak in their medicines and cures. Mater is blinded by foolish love. Anyone who wants to test Mater's feelings for Anna need merely say something good about Anna, and Mater will agree with you immediately; she'll transform herself into a loving soul, happiness evident in all her expressions; but say something ill of Anna, and at once she transforms again, baring her teeth, the face marvelously angry, the words spiteful, and can barely answer, saying that everyone notices everything about her and takes everything badly. In sum, she's so angry that it's impossible to write it down. I know all I've written must seem unbelievable to you, both on this and other subjects, but I may well speak with the Apostle Paul: God knows that I lie not. Nor have I written everything that might be written, for I couldn't do that--that would become a whole book. If improvement results according to the will of God then my labors will be repaid enough. And if not, to his glory, then my intent was good. If Mater didn't have so much to do with Vinnarola, it would be for the better. It's certainly possible to like one person better than another, but too much is forbidden. She indulges her too much; in a manner of speaking, she has her own little heaven here. I don't think that she could dream anything up that she doesn't already have, for the

ground she walks on is still too cold. And on the other side, she's much too familiar with Mater and they sit next to each other too much, no matter what the time or place.

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The workmen aren't supposed to come on recreation days, without need, that is if it can be postponed, but this is not observed. Neither does it suit religious to go and talk to the workmen when they're not assigned to watch over them. It's a very ugly practice, this hanging around the workmen, and laughing and prattling so crassly.

It's not good that Mater talks alone with [work]men, behind and before, above and beneath, early and late, sometimes talking with one man inside for an hour and talking of frivolous subjects which have nothing to do with the work being done, but subjects which don't concern us. Standing and talking so long, from sunup to evening, even in the garden, is disgraceful. I don't suspect her of any evil, but it doesn't edify, especially when it's Mater; she ought to give a good example to the others; some are greatly amazed by this, and she ought not give anyone cause.

Once again it's necessary expressly to forbid Mater from allowing children to come inside or be carried inside, however many there are, old or young, daughter or servant; it was once again done, very recently, despite the last decree against it. I also think that cloister is too easily broken when a woman or maid is let in, alone, merely to bring a sack of cabbage, for it's not necessary, neither is it necessary to weigh them; once they're in, the religious stay there to chatter and show them still other places around the house; it would be well to admonish Mater specifically that no more sacks be let in.

There's no special grace in Mater's using a silver thimble, nor any of the religious. She ought to set the example for her religious, in humility and simplicity without any curiosity, as befitting the children of St. Francis. We've never had a Mater before who has ever used a silver thimble, but they were an example to us of simplicity in all things. Thus I pray that this no longer be permitted her, lest

anyone else imitates the practice; it doesn't suit us.

The Mater plays so wildly on recreation days, from the beginning to the end, as if she were the youngest, and she compels one and all to play as well, without ceasing and without permission to quit the game until the very end. And if anyone does happen to leave, she runs to get them or commands them to return, and gives a special command that everyone must play, and says that they'll earn more merit from playing than they would by going to do their devotions to God during that time. It's true that doing all things in obedience is most meritorious and sure, but to go into the Mass with such marvelous stillness, and then as soon as the Mass is out to hear and see all that calling and whooping the whole day through; if the people outside hear all this then I think my heart will turn around from shame. I've been at the grille speaking with a distinguished man when they've been yelling thus. She never urges them to play in a proper conventual manner, but she who yells most Mater considers to be most virtuous. And she says that no one can dare call herself devout who doesn't play, and where the pleasure in playing dies there dies devotion and love. That's a regrettable thing. Then where does that leave the Capuchins and other convents who never play? Playing itself doesn't bother me, but that hateful yelling and ranting! There isn't one item in statute or rule which they are so careful to observe and which is so strictly enforced as this one. She says that she would not like to see play disappear or become laxly observed. She recommended it in the last chapter meeting, and afterward those who didn't play hard enough for her tastes were

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compelled to do penance, more than for any other rule they might have broken. It would be well if she punished true evil and transgression as well as this. And it's not enough for her that they watch, but they must play along. If any of the lay sisters have been prevented from playing, because they were out or something else, they come ask for permission to read their hours, and she grants it, but no sooner do they start than Mater calls them to come and play, without delay. If any of the sisters are sick or weak, and consider retiring early that night, she fetches them from their cells or has them fetched and they're compelled to play and to stay up even later than the statutes allow. In the refectory they sit two

hours or often longer at the table, ranting and banging the table like drunkards sitting on a beer-bench. That makes so much noise, with all the dishes, pots, and utensils on the table that one isn't sure where one is. Those who don't like to see or hear all this are then spoilsports, hard-heads. And at Vespers the Compline are read right afterward, so that they can stay up late carrying on. That used to happen only once or twice a year, on Shrove Tuesday, and at that time everyone was supposed to at least watch the play, but no one is supposed to be compelled to play every recreation day. Mater says that by playing they earn more merit than from wearing a hair shirt. Mater doesn't irritate her back much with her clothes, neither her body, and is not much accustomed to taking discipline.

Mater should not so quickly allow the religious to seek medical attention and plasters, without need, each as she pleases, as is done now. They waste the resources of the convent through their insistence on making potions, pills, *kaeten*, and plasters which they just can't be without; they make themselves unable to do anything, and they do this all without advice of the physician but as they dream it up, and in fact it's often contrary to his advice. There are some who would quit all that plaster and medicine, and in fact the doctor often expressly warns them of the ill effects, but Mater then allows them to go on anyway, some because they've got their herbs all ready, and others whom she urges on without need, all money thrown in the water, knowingly and willingly. We see more doctors than anyone; they're always sick. If there's a need, then of course, we owe it to them. But it's 'I'm melancholy, I've got no appetite, I've got this or that in my head, or I don't feel like getting out of bed, or following the community like everyone else,' and other excuses I don't wish to write here. These people are doctored all right, but the doctor himself says they've got no sickness, only melancholy; they only lack desire and will to go up and down with the others. Therefore, I would prize greatly the practice of examining more closely those we accept to the religious life, and heed the council of those who know better, even if the majority of votes is in favor, when it's important enough.

Mater should not store in the convent any goods or materials from other people, due to the problems this brings. In the first place, it brings no thanks from the debtor who seeks to hide his things here while he pretends to be bankrupt; it also

brings no thanks from those who leave their things and then come back some time later and say, 'there were more than this,' or, 'this wasn't spoiled when I left it here,' and so on. We can't keep the rust off iron goods, we aren't responsible to clean them! And by doing the dirty work of others we place our convent in peril, for example when we keep various animals, or when we make ourselves night and day the slaves of outside people, without need or profit to soul or body, or without every any reward or thanks but only ingratitude, as I've seen too often.

Mater speaks so curtly and with such spite to her religious that I'm often amazed, even to the very eldest sister and the vicaress, that they dare not ask or say anything. It seems that the vicaress and sisters are children who need to be muzzled. She would never have dreamed of speaking to the previous Maters in this way. It's as if she had hauled us all--except her dear ones--right out of the muck. Where is her example of meekness? She thinks so highly of herself and holds her neck so high that it seems there's no one who can possibly be her equal, and if the smallest word is said too curtly for her, then she attacks with more zeal than she does the great sins, pertaining to God or important affairs.

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Regarding temporal rule, it's necessary that Mater be removed from it, for many reasons. In the first place, we carry too much burden for her worldly friends who get their meals here. The son of her sister got his meals from us almost every day for two years, and he's a very demanding fellow, eating more than two of our religious. Before that, we had another who studied here [at university]. Besides him, she also has a niece at the Grand Beguinage, another child of her sister who often comes to eat and to fetch this or that. The boy I mentioned above was also treated and plastered here. There was more care for him than for many who live in-house. And if there's a feast day or wedding, he's always provided with good beer and all the rest. And if he doesn't come here, Mater always arranges that he goes to eat In the Leopard, and then we have to provide the gifts and other things for his visit. The community in fact agreed to let him eat here one day a week, but it's every day now. All that she can lay her hands on, she sets before him. Mater would say that her sister has given the convent some grain; in fact she gave a *halter* for the last two years, but I'll leave it to you to figure out how that helps. Further, her sister comes here often herself, four or five times [a year];

every noon we have to worry about making something for the children. She even loaned her sister some money once, but no one can truly say whether it's been paid back. It's a marvelous thing indeed that she alone controls the pursestrings and all there is, and that no one else in the house may know in the least, for she does all she pleases. If she took care of her own, I wouldn't care. One might say that she shows what she does with all the goods, she does her accounts, and I don't deny it; but we can't let ourselves depend on one person. She is too prone to giving and too attached to everyone outside the house. She never showed any grace as long as she was bursar. She ought to be forbidden. She has no right to help her friends according to her whims. If we could feed someone every day, well she'd like that just fine. We are poor ourselves and must go beg; we can't help her sister's children this way, the one after the other. They say that the boy is going to leave very soon, but this shouldn't stop you from admonishing her about it, otherwise it's to be feared that she'll just take in another, like the one we have right now. That giving to him had no comparison, for he wanted everything, even if we had to fast.

Mater has lent grain from the attic to strangers, once a whole *mudde* [three US bushels], which we got back only three years later with much ingratitude and shock that it had to be repaid, and then when they pay us back we feed them; she's also loaned a 1/2 *mudde* of grain to someone else. It's now four years since that happened, and we can't get it back; it was to a stranger who's never done a thing for us. And afterward you can well imagine that we had to buy grain, at the highest possible price. She did this before she was Mater, and she did then just as she pleased without consulting Mater, no voice for her in anything. Now it's changed, for now no one can do the slightest thing on her own, whatever her office, without first telling or asking her.

It's necessary to command Mater not to lend all our things to outsiders, as she does now, such as beds, sheets, woolen blankets, pillows, tablecloths, napkins, tins, dishes, pots, bowls, even by the dozen, chairs, benches, tables, even the beds and pillows of the infirmary! In short, all that we have is soiled or damaged by those people who borrow it, even lost, and we don't even know sometimes who's borrowed. If some people are having a big dinner, or childbed, or kermis, then

they all come to borrow these things, kitchen utensils and other things, and then leave the utensils of their guests alone and use the convent's for six weeks at a time, and then bring it back looking like no utensils I've ever seen. We're forced to be the maids of strangers, washing and cleaning whatever they soil. If we could expect any kindnesses from these people, it would be different; we are poor, and we want to be called poor, but by lending so we don't act poor. The richest abbeys

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would never even do this. Mater would answer, 'we need to make friends and keep them.' I wish Mater could prove that she's ... in regard to lending ever gained one stiver or any friendship. Some people even say that we aren't poor at all if we can do this. It burns my conscience deeply, going to complain about beds and arguing and then going to fetch them. It's better to take care of our own house, and not let others ruin and spoil our things. If Mater has too many beds or other household goods, let her sell them, then we won't waste our time or trouble people. If it keeps going like this, we'll keep on living from hand to mouth. And it won't change unless your reverence wisely intervenes and tries someone else as bursar, for it can't remain thus. Try a change, for it can't remain so. If she should die, there is no one who knows the least of the affairs of the convent.

The communion window in the choir and [the window] below [in the church] are greatly in need of modification, namely that they be made smaller and locked, and that they never be opened again except to commune. The one below is very dangerous; given the notion, a secret conversation could easily take place there, which in fact often happens while the rest of the sisters are in the choir, and even give away or receive something without anyone knowing it. You can even fit a child through the window, which is also often done, as can be done at the window in the choir too, and at the one in the choir other distractions can occur so that those who speak at the window are often left unobserved, even when the religious are in their devotions and who don't realize that the true reason for a sister's leaving is so that she won't be seen. Also at other times, while the religious are in the refectory or have other concerns, there occurs much

familiarity among men and women and between them, in which there is much peril. Moreover, the religious can day or night actually go through the window above right into the church, and still other inconveniences which might occur which I don't wish to write here. I wish you would warn them about this; it's a more dangerous matter than some would suppose. I pray you, allow it no longer. I unburden my conscience with it; don't be distracted that other affairs are more important than this and thus this will be overlooked. It's not just the salvation of one or two, but an excessive license. If someone tries to tell you that she often uses the window below for the sick to see the elevation of Our Lord, that's really not the reason or necessary. They gather there like it's a gossip school, so that it's a scandal in the presence of God. If they are well, they should be in the choir anyway, and the sick aren't bound to come if they're unable. What is done in other enclosed convents, where the [sick] never see the elevation of our Lord?

Regarding the window below, across from the infirmary, it is necessary that it be closed once and for all, for the grills remains as is, the gossiping will never cease, nor the gaping into the church. Not one person comes into the church without the sisters peering through that window and looking in and reporting to their friends who is there, and what they're wearing, and what they're doing, even during the Benediction they chatter with each other: 'she is there, she's doing this, has that,' and laugh and make noise. It's like an egg market. Often eight or nine or ten people gather round, making such noise that I'm ashamed, for the chaplain can hear it all from the altar. It's not enough for them to look through the grille, but through the whole open window, even if there's only one person in the church for mass. If there's someone who doesn't feel like hearing mass from above [in the choir], they stay at the grille below so that they can leave when it suits them, or if they don't arrive until the mass is half over, no one is the wiser. And they come kneel before the window during the whole mass, doing nothing but gaping into the church to see what's happening and then run to chew it over with the others. Before they go above to hear mass, they look one last time to see what's happening in the church. If there's something special then they run back below to see. If there's a wedding, as happens sometimes, there is such running to the window and gaping that they trample one another. If someone like the Woman In the Leopard comes to church then it's talking for an hour; the

chaplain also talks with them, without need. I pray you to cast all these stones away. I could say more, but this should do. I know that they'll resist any decree furiously, but this must be of no account; once it's established, they'll get used to it. The windows are supposed to be only for communion, but they're used for gaping and gossip, and to give things away, as has happened often. Oh unholy windows! If they had been closed many years ago, what problems could have been avoided! Mater also talks at these as she pleases.

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There is at no time to be any nun-making or beguine-making [of children] on St. Gregory's or St. Gertrude's day or otherwise, nor during any weddings. It might seem a small thing but it causes very ... distraction. In the first place, there are two or three religious who spend half the day on it and neglect the divine service. Further, there is no quiet during the divine service, there's so much running to find and fetch everything, for most [people] don't bring things with them. It also happens that the dressing-up takes place before an open cloister door, so that one can't go this way or that without being seen, and they also leave the door open when they go fetch something. The people could come inside and go where they pleased during that time, since they're long there without anyone watching them. There are also strange children who come, whom we don't know and from whom we receive nothing, and from whom we can expect nothing but idle hopes; just as in everything else we do this in the hope of getting something back. Next they'll round up the children from off the street to come inside. When it's all done they have from some nothing for their godly-reward than dirty towels, and running after this, that, and the other. This dressing-up is becoming so frequent that there isn't a game played here without putting frills on someone. This is permitted more to Vinnarola, since she makes friends with the people who send their children to be dressed as nuns and beguines, but it's a cause of much murmuring that she's attached to everyone in the world; everything's permitted to her, Mater has too much love for her.

Mater shall be vigilant in seeing that those received to the religious life are able, and without any physical wants, healthy, no accidents. I think it unwise that they've received someone here whom they well know has an impediment in one

of her eyes, for when young she fell into the fire. As a result, to keep her sight, it's necessary for her to wear golden earrings [spectacles]. If she doesn't wear them, she doesn't see well. Moreover, the eye also moves around, so that she can [hardly] bear the presence of light or fire. Further, she's had yet another blow from nature, as she must beware of eating various spices because of her bleeding, and it's not convenient for us to provide her special dishes. Often when she comes into the choir, or work room, or refectory, or whatever she's doing, blood suddenly starts streaming from her nose and soils all around her. She also acts very weak and tired when someone's in house. She's doing better, but she's not used to working, and she doesn't like it much when someone speaks against it. She complains after she's finished a task that she won't be able to sleep that night. She's a strong-headed young maiden who chatters with all around her and who would do much more were she allowed to do as she pleased, and answers people very abruptly and rudely if she's contradicted. The young ones are spoiled here. If Vicaress could exercise and teach them as she desires, we'd make some pretty fair religious out of them, in time. But she breaks her head in vain. This daughter will have lived here two years come October, and for each year she had 50 florins in expenses, but we haven't had a single stiver from her father to cover them. It's also to be suspected that if she should come to profess that we'll not have a single stiver either, and that all she needs for her clothing and otherwise, if we don't get it in advance, we won't get it once she's in for sure. Even if she were my natural sister, I couldn't counsel anyone who has an impediment, especially in her sight, if that's known in advance. And Mater knew this well enough before she came in. She said that she would test her; but Vinnarola is so crazy about these two novices that I have no doubt at all that if someone were the most unable person in the world for the religious life, they'll be accepted if they have Mater, Vinnarola, and the hangers-on behind them. Mater took this daughter in because she thought she'd get from her a certain number of portions for the community, but even though her parents live almost by the front door, he doesn't do us or her much kindness. And if she stays she'll have to be doctored, they won't think about that; what will they do when she's here for good? I wouldn't by any means let her profess before she gets in advance everything she'll need, for the father is nothing but a tightwad. We are not good about this. We are too easily content with nice promises and then it's too late and then we get nothing.

Not that they don't try hard to get what they want, for they skin people to the bone, but when three or four things are required they'll be content with two. It was also ... Vinnarola, it seemed she was such a wealthy maiden, until she was in for good.

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It would be well if all who'd been ... received into cloister wouldn't go outside any more afterward once they've been cloistered and ... lived here. Their playing they can do before and not after, as they now do ... but before they come and live in cloister, so that they don't grow wild and that which they've learned ... they might hold onto, and not reenter the world which they once left and bid adieu ... But instead be in better state to become one with their bridegroom. It's very harmful and a very ugly practice, God knows how harmful it's been for some and will be their whole life long. We hear wondrous stories of playing after someone has lived in the convent, which I'll remember all my life and regret. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. Mater and the other religious can't go run around outside enough. If someone says to Mater that she's promised not to go back into the world, Mater compels her to go anyway, 'because it's the custom.' Oh Mater knows little the damage to her children! I've heard several complain about it, and wished that this weren't the custom. When outside they think everything is allowed to them, and throw themselves and attach themselves with all sorts of excess to that which they've left behind. Afterward, it's harder to observe cloister than it was the first time, and costs them many difficult struggles when they walk so from one town to the next, and have much liberty in all they please. For wherever they go they're then welcome, eating, drinking, nothing in moderation; moreover, they then have more opportunity to tell what goes on in the convent; this shames me deeply that there's no firmness or care about this. Four or five days isn't enough, but rather a month or five or six weeks, one less, another more; we also have to do without the sister who must go along with her. This ought not be so; and then if she goes alone there's no stopping them from telling whatever they please. I hope that your reverence will do something about it so that it happens no more; it will bring peace. For when someone leaves, there's much murmuring, for Mater usually sends as a play-companion one of the sisters to whom she's most attached, and those whom the younger nuns especially like. It also happens that

the sisters, during the time they're out, tell everything that's happened during the many years they've been inside, things of great importance. In sum it's greatly to be lamented, and no good can result from it.

Further, it would be well to once again prohibit speaking of affairs from the past, including of Sister Lesken Nijns who is now in another convent. Sometimes they start talking of things which of themselves are neither good nor bad, but then they continue and nothing is kept back; I say that this is the cause of many sins, even if they don't always realize it. Mater herself is often the cause of such talk, and it would be more honest and salvational for her to keep silent, especially since she knows that some things used to be said about her as well. She gives enough cause that others say about her secretly, 'though she's now Mater, she's not the holier for it.'

Item, it would also be well that the religious who played the fool on Epiphany Day would not be dressed in fool's clothes. It's possible to play and be merry without engaging in such silliness. One day of it might not be so bad, but she wears these clothes for two days. At Advent the lots are drawn to choose the fool, though she is not yet clothed with the silly attire. When the day of the feast is determined, which is usually done eight days beforehand, from that time on the fool is called little hen and the queen is called My Lady. That's observed at all places and times, though they don't make that much noise in the dormitory. But otherwise, wherever you look it doesn't seem much of a convent at all, with all the uproar, early and late; it goes on much too long. If there were three days of recreation that would suit me fine; and if it were done quietly with good conventual manners, then all that long feasting might not even be so bad. One might say, let them shout and carry on, leave if you don't like it or keep quiet. If there were in the whole convent in fact a place where one could do just that, fine, but there isn't one, not even in the furthest corner of the garden. I say again that it goes on too long: eight days before and then eight days again, it last sometimes 13 or 14 days. It is

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a scandal. The laypeople are ... and talk that they yell and whoop so. The clothing

of the fool is a ... dress, with yellow and other embroidery upon it, a white apron, with a bouquet of leaves, a red ..., a veil and a paternoster and all kinds of things around the neck, a nightshirt with big pins ..., a cap on her head, all kinds of sticks with bells hung on them, a doll in her arms, a [h]am on her side, a large fool's fiddle, this is how she's dressed and paraded around. When it's time to eat ... the sign is given to go eat and each must come ready to lead the woman to the refectory, singing and jumping along the way, the fool playing on her fiddle. Everyone in house runs to the woman and plays in front of her, hitting keys on their kettles, shovels, lids, and further all that they can lay their hands on, thus they go noisily to the refectory. People hearing it all run to their attics, climb trees in the garden to see. After noon, if there's good weather, they go into the garden and are seen from all sides, from the vineyard, from the walls, the bridges, early in the morning and late at night, the fool missing all her services, Vespers, Compline, everything. Whose lot it is to serve as chamber-maid must spend two days dressing the fool and My Lady. When they're dressed, then they're paraded in front of the worldly people who admire their gaiety. They call their friends and family to come and see it all. But I pray you in all humility to allow this great foolishness no longer, neither that any religious should be dressed as the fool. Whoever is dressed as the fool supposes that she is free to do whatever she pleases, laughing at and ridiculing one and all, lay or religious, and spitting out anything that's been in her head. The fun turns into anger and unrest according to the condition of those involved, so that it sometimes happens that someone gladly plays the fool so as to say anything she's ever dreamed up before. Some know how to make jokes out of little thorns, with which they greatly wound many hearts. Though it's supposed to be said in jest and laughter, they're too well-prepared.

It's most necessary to do something about the burning of candles in the choir. I think it's too much. Unless it's halted, they'll soon burn a candle before each image; I could speak all day about this. It used to be that only one was burned, on some days two; but now it's around and in front of every shrine. One gives this many, another that. Those who don't give or who have nothing to give are called stingy. The convent gives enough for candles annually, but they buy still more. In the refectory we can hardly see our food, no more than two skinny

candles there. In choir to read the Office five or six people must share one candle, and they can barely see to read them right. Further there are candles wasted here and there around various shrines and otherwise. The choir is very small and one can hardly bear the stink from all the candles [around the altars]. Because it's so small, one must kneel right beneath many of these candles and their smoke is then often overwhelming. Sometimes during the service the novices or other sisters must make four or five trips to take care of the candles. It causes much distraction and one can hardly hear the mass. As for me, when it's dark in the Winter I ruin all my clothes from accidentally kneeling in the grease of the candles, not to mention the soiling behind and above. It seems a small matter, but it's most inconvenient. It's also a sign of private property when everyone forms the habit of giving so much for the candles, one sister so many pounds per year, another so much, one for that image, another for this. It costs much each year. It would be salvational if none of the sisters gave even the least amount for this. But if they insist on burning them, your reverence might decree that in the choir no more than two candles shall burn at any one time before any image or case, nor during Mass, nor in the evening during Lauds, but just one before the holy cross, the other before Our Lady, and that none of the religious should give individually but only the convent together. The choir must often be whitewashed because of all that burning. One sister spends the whole Saturday cleaning all the candelabra, another makes it her task to preserve all the private candles. The young ones spend a lot of their time occupied with those candles

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so that often there are nine candles ... before the shrines and images, according to the devotion of each. I've seen at kermis ... candles burning. I'll let you judge how healthy that can be in such a mean place. There ... several displeased by it, but no one dares show it because it's Mater's will ... The humidity that comes out of the head is nothing but steamed cooking. One becomes so distracted that one doesn't know where to hide from the filthy smoke. When you come into the choir, you'd think you were in a candle shop. Where there aren't enough fixed candelabra they set high, temporary ones. If someone wishes to scrub and wants good weather, then they burn the candles for a changing wind. For such small, lousy matters they burn candles all day long so that it's light all day. If one of the sister's

patrons or patronesses visits, then it's light all day. If someone has a special devotion to a certain saint, then it's eight days of burning. They are readily called generous and devotees of the saints. But such making of paper images and then burning of candles before all these things ought not to be, whoever the saint; but it gets worse every day.

Mater allows the lay sisters to have the upper hand over the nuns. They concern themselves with even the smallest things, and whatever is decreed or established or done away with they rise against it more than all the nuns put together; their chirping, murmuring, and ranting have no end, and they dare reprove the nuns even in the presence of Mater, who actually encourages them and backs them up in the presence of the whole community. Before the whole community they rise up against the vicaress like barking dogs, as if they'd tear her to pieces. That raging, discord, clamor, and reproaching for the smallest thing; what occurs is impossible to bear; even matters that don't concern them, for example cloister or something else. But in my life I've seen this before, as long as the lay sisters have the upper hand it won't profit us much, for what's established they won't tolerate. They dare to say that which the regular nuns don't dare say--they dare much. I suppose there's not a convent in the world where the nuns are so snapped at as here. They can't do wrong; and through this they become so stubborn that nothing is complete until they've had their say. Also the very youngest lay sister, if she were reprimanded it would bring in much peace and rest. Those lay sisters wouldn't bear the hundredth part of what we must bear from them. It's sometimes marvelous to behold. If we ask them to do an errand, they snarl at us so that we wish we'd never asked them to begin with; and when they return home with less than we'd asked, we keep quiet, or they say to us 'go get it yourself,' and they don't want to go again. They're such costly market-wives it's amazing; we'd do as well if we sent children. If they buy for you and don't like you, they're not choosy at all, no matter how bad the item. But that's the least of it, their wondrousness and unwillingness. They also make fun of things pertaining to choir and hours, the one praises but the other laughs and another shows her distaste. Many of them say irreverently that the nuns are but ladies, that they do nothing except hold a book in their hands. Even if you commanded Mater to admonish them, she wouldn't do it. And if she did do it, out of obedience, she

would only do it once and the next day they'd be back at it again. In my opinion, your reverence would do well to reprove these lay sisters themselves, in the presence of Mater and the Vicaress, warning them not to chastise, harp at, or otherwise, and not to trouble themselves with matters pertaining to the nuns alone, neither to set themselves against those things decreed or done away with or modified, neither to reproach anyone, neither to say this person or that has caused it, as they always have done and still do, and ridiculing others; not even going so far as to say that this person has done it or not, neither to pass along what someone else has said during the visitation. The lay sisters should have to come and work in the common work room; if they need to work on something of their own then they shouldn't go sit in some other place all together and make a gossip-house; that which they sew or make in their cells they can do just as well in the common work room, without going here and there. There's too much freedom, to do such and all that they please, especially for Sister Lesken Joos; she's allowed much more than the others.

Sister Margaret Smulders

ADRIANA TRUIS

I, the undersigned, protest out of sisterly love and for the sake of peace and rest in the community,

In the first place that the Vicaress is much too attached to Sister Anna and Sister Maria Coninxloo, who are passion-driven and disagreeable persons.

That from them she listens to too much gossip and proceeds from there, as we know from frequent experience and observation, through which the aforesaid Vicaress is held in suspicion by the community, and is the source of much contention, murmuring, and ill feeling within the community.

That she would do well to cease speaking her displeasure to such disagreeable persons, regarding her confessor, superior, or co-sister; for in so speaking she leads others to believe that they may speak similarly.

That she ought to work to bear each a common sisterly love, speaking to each who is in need, rather than passing her time exclusively with two or three persons.

That some in the community ought to resist the temptation, after visitations, to boast that this or that point was decreed at their instigation, and to admonish those who might have violated it.

Sister Adriana Truis

ANNA VIGNAROLA

/1/

Jesus, Maria, Franciscus

Reverend Lord, after you visited us yesterday, I recalled that I had held back several items, supposing at the time that they were not necessary to reveal, but considering that those things which we know but do not tell will weigh on our conscience, and though my intent was to say nothing at all to anyone, I've decided, upon investigation of my conscience, to tell what I know after all, and to place it in the hands of your reverence and my most reverend lord the archbishop. In the first place, seeing and trusting that visitation is intended for the edification and peace of the convent, it needs saying that there is a great abuse in this regard here. For when the visitation decrees are read, the first time or otherwise, as ordained, then there are a few who the entire time sit and laugh and joke and carry on, especially Sister Maria Coninxloo, who counts on her fingers the points she supposes were made at her behest [MARGIN: MARIA CONINXLOO], and shows by her expression and manner that those persons who are deficient in any point are to know that it was she who revealed it and who sought correction. And that isn't enough for her, for she chatters and goes on for so long until she is sure they have heard it, and then she boasts that she was heard on every point she requested. And when she puts her tongue to work, she knows how to weigh her words so that it seems she is not acting out of passion, and then she threatens some that in the next visitation she'll have still more to say if they dare say something about her, and many other such foolishness, all of which causes much distraction, and breaking of love, and many lies and other sins occur as a result. In many ways does she bring great unrest into the house. I have tried every means to win her over, to show I have compassion for her soul, but without profit. Thus I don't know what else to do except pray, and have patience. She is growing so stubborn that she will soon be ungovernable, I fear, for she may not be admonished in the least. If the confessor admonishes her, then she announces to everyone that he is restricting her conscience. If she is admonished by our reverend Mater, well this does more harm than good, for she then complains that Mater does this out of hate or that she doesn't like her. But in truth she is not worthy of Mater's care, and all the love she shows her, and how

humbly she tries to win her over. That which Maria does to me I'd rather not repeat, but we are obliged to defend our Mater in such things, since she seeks only to promote the glory of God. It is as if Maria had vowed to stir unrest. Seeing that Mater is beloved by the community, Maria then stirs up others whenever they are admonished in chapter or elsewhere, even when it has nothing to do with her, and says Mater doesn't love them, and that she punishes them out of passion, and then embellishes certain things she has seen in order to engrave these things on their hearts. Through this there occurs much evil, but let us hope that God will not judge her too severely, for she doesn't know the whole story. The Vicaress is

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much too lenient toward her. Not that she follows her in her evil, I trust, for she is pious, but she doesn't tell her she's wrong, or doesn't guide such persons to safe, humble ground [MARGIN: THE VICARESS], as the holy father of our order, Francis, taught. I've experienced much this way myself; she says much but does little, I'll leave it there. I also ask your reverence, at his discretion, to see that the young ones may stand during their first year under the guidance of a song-mistress who can them teach to sing and read, and everything else preparatory to their novice-clothing, at which point they can then stand under the Vicaress. For the Vicaress cannot teach them to sing because she has such an inept voice. She is also so empty of heart that she won't teach them. They almost brought me to my death, my conscience couldn't bear any more all the evil they heaped upon me, through hate, because I was the youngest nun and was to teach the young ones to sing. Vicaress asked me to do it, and kindly, but I feared the gossip that would flow to and from Sister Maria, and didn't want to do it, but Vicaress promised that she would soothe her, and through your reverence forbid them to say such things, but it was all human promises. Before a month had gone by Vicaress changed her mind, thanks to all the gossip, and burdened me with assorted lies which no one knows except God and my confessor, whose counsel I sought, and which no one will know if it pleases God. The cause of this is that she desires office so greatly, which is completely contrary to my condition, for I know no better rest than to have nothing to do so as better to serve God, for that is why we left the world in the first place. Though I've written all this, I leave

it to the discretion of your reverence, and say on my conscience that it's true, and do not wish to write one more thing than necessary, but only to relieve my conscience. If you object to any of them, my heart wishes nothing but peace, for we must bear one another's crankiness, that's why we live together. Recommending the Holy Spirit in all things, and praying that he will grant you wisdom to handle our affairs for the sake of salvation and peace, I conclude.

Sister Anna Vignarola

Worms for Lunch if God Wills it

MARIA JOOS

- 1 I desire Reformation as follows, that if there are any sisters who are sick or weak, or must take medicine and cannot follow the community, they should go into the infirmary, and receive together that which is given for the care of the sick, and thus avoid all gossip and murmuring which otherwise results.

- 2 I pray humbly that we altogether may enjoy Holy Communion every Sunday, for the improvement of our souls. The confessors say they'll gladly give it to us, and that this is the custom in other convents under their direction, but they don't do it here because your reverence has allowed only every 14 days.

Sister Maria Joos

CATHARINA RIJKEBOER

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Sister Catharina Rijkeboer makes deposition
in the visitation of 19 June Anno 1628

Item in the first place it is wholly necessary to bring about Reformation (in order to remove the opportunity for many worrisome abuses which could occur) of two windows, the first beyond the portal of the church in the choir, where the sisters kneel when they go take the Lord's Supper, the other is below in the church, across from the infirmary, where the sick or someone else can take holy communion, or see the body of Christ when it is elevated during the holy Mass. These windows are both so large that one can easily squeeze through with little effort. It is necessary that they be reduced and locked, though the grille below might be left open, and that the key should be kept by Mater, who should open the same when necessary.

It's also necessary to admonish that the sacristan should close the church door at the right time, and keeps her keys with her, according to the statutes, rather than simply leave them hanging in the sacristy for anyone to take, for she is very negligent in this. Also that she should more carefully keep the sacristy-door within cloister, and never leave the keys in it.

It would be well if the lock on the infirmary would be changed, for the same key opens the door to Mater's room; the infirmarian goes in and out as she pleases, and this causes sometimes much murmuring within the community.

After it was forbidden again last time to let children inside the cloister, so have various sisters found, with Mater's permission, a new invention in order to make children into little nuns or beguines on St. Gregory's day, St. Gertrude's day, etc. Now a nun does this in the cloister-door of the guest room. She stands then near the children. If she must go fetch something inside, she leaves the door open, so that the children or someone with them easily enough could walk right inside. And the nun who's busy with them must miss choir, whether for the Divine

Office or Mass, and without need. For a lay sister could be assigned to do this, and take care of the children in the outside guest house.

It would be very profitable and salvational to prohibit lay sisters from henceforth going to care for women in childbed, or to bring home any such affairs which do not edify our state and vocation. This often causes among some religious various disturbances, when they get knowledge of things which until then were unknown to them. Also that from now on we wouldn't be so eager to make bouquets and other such things for marriages and other worldly affairs, so that we show we're dead to the world.

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It doesn't edify much that the religious are allowed to wear second-hand shoes and stockings, the one white, the other black, as they please, but from now on each should all wear black as they ought, and I hope this will be decreed.

It would be fitting if during Divine Office the nuns stood in choir according to station, based on age and profession, also in the refectory and in chapter, so that if one is excessively humbled, another is not excessively exalted.

It is greatly to be desired that His Most Reverend Lord would forbid so much wasted money to be spent henceforth on the decoration of the choir. The amounts spent there are too scandalous to tell, since we claim to be poor and are poor. Nothing is too costly, and what the sisters want, Mater gives them all. In fact it seems she also dreams of nothing but inventing new things, every feast day is there something new to be seen or at least something is redone, something to be repainted, or dresses to mend or re-embroider, and to use it again isn't good enough, but it must be re-embroidered once more. The silken flowers are artfully made to look life-like, those can be seen in multitudes, since the choir, or rather all the little altars and images, are adorned and covered with them. For such there is money enough, but in things necessary for the community there must be scrimping. It's true, Mater would say, it doesn't cost the convent much, it's paid by the sisters. But I think they're the same. The sisters are the children of the convent, thus I regard that which they have as the property of the convent. For if

they didn't have it then they'd have to get what they needed from the convent. If any of the sisters want to mend their clothes, why it's as if they must mend them with leaves, and then they have no money to buy materials anyway, whatever it is. And there's much time wasted on all that making and remaking, time that could be spent winning a stiver for the convent instead. For long I would have rather seen that we'd made a wall instead of wasting all that money; the convent would then be freed from it all and the nuns better cared for.

It is also well to be wished that you would do something about the many candles burning in the choir, for many reasons. First, the great cost for the convent, and this is not to mention all the money sisters spend from their own pockets, according to their particular devotions, and that with permission. These are very liberal, to say the least. It also causes the young ones

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much care, for they are charged with watching the candles, and it causes much distraction, for they must walk from one side of the choir to the other to trim and douse the candles. For the choir is covered on three sides with candles. This causes without doubt much unhealthiness, for the roof above the choir is very low. Thus all the smell and extinguishing of these candles linger in the chest, which causes a very great dampness, which I've experienced myself. It would be enough to burn two or at most three candles in the choir, and then purchased by the convent only. To buy other candles they're rich enough, but the candles burned during Matins when the sisters have to see to read the Office, for that we're too poor. These are rather thinner than they ought to be, and more people have to stand under one candle to spare the lighting of others. During the week much time is also spent by the sacristan of the choir, with her helpers, who all clean the candelabra which adorn the little altars and images.

Regarding temporal matters, there is much to be written, but it is necessary that a bursaress be named here to bear responsibility for temporal affairs. For Mater can't do it all well by herself, and it's also better to let someone else try, and see how the convent fares. And then Mater can teach someone else how to manage the convent's temporal affairs. For if she now died they would all be as ignorant as children. But it would also be well if the bursaress was not so devoted to lay

people, as Mater is with her giving, and would show more affection for the community.

It's an ugly manner here to bake every year so many waffles and to send them everywhere someone has a friend. In Sister Margaret Smulders' bull this is written about at great length, thus I mention it only.

Regarding Mater, I think that there is no one better suited to the office than she.

If there are any complaints about her, through admonishment she is able to improve herself, for she has good understanding, and there is no one, if she wishes, who can better sway the sisters to do her will in anything, than this Mater. For she has many who are greatly attached to her, who to please her would do or omit much. If there are some, as can occur, who would gladly see her removed and would find better consolation in another Mater, then it should be said that others would also be devastated. Grave faults I do not know of her, everyone has his shortcomings, and another Mater would also not be perfect. Though some sisters complain, there are other things to consider as well.

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I would like to see Mater admonished that on recreation days she wouldn't so compel her religious to play. She exhorts them to play in the chapter meeting beforehand, and elsewhere, to play as if it were a matter pertaining to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And she says that she regards as most pious that sister who does her duty in playing. It can sometimes certainly happen thus, but that no one else can be devout except the hardest players, then it's a marvel at all that one can find so many devout Carthusians and Capuchins, who rarely or never play. My intent is not to prohibit play on recreation days, but only that everyone wouldn't be so compelled. For it's not enough for her that we talk, laugh, and frolic all day long and wear a happy countenance, but we must play too, each and every one. It's true, we always played twice a year together or watched each other play, once on the Sunday of Quinquagesima, and once on St. Martin's day, but now she requires it every play day.

If by chance there are any complaints about Mater, that she doesn't hold me in

high regard and that I don't speak much with her or the like, so do I pray humbly that she not be admonished or rebuked for my sake by your reverence, for though affection of freedom is not very great between us, it may be that the fault lies more with me than she. I believe it would be better to have another Vicar, who would agree with her more, thus I pray very humbly to be let go. For if I dare to say or admonish Mater of something, she thinks immediately that it comes from Sister Maria Coninxloo, and then it's that I have a wonderful Gabriel who comes to announce all things to me, and that I must be a wondrous person indeed to be able to hear all that gossip, and that others shouldn't say anything to her so that she can't hear anything, and that it's no wonder everyone knows our superiors don't think highly of me praise be God, and that it's a good thing to have a good name, God knows it, and that it's good it will last for this life only, and many other such thing which wound and trouble my heart; after this I am terribly estranged, and compelled to silence and simply to watch everything. I don't know why she regards me thus, I have never condemned her to the superiors, such as my reverend lord [bishop], for in truth I know nothing of her that would injure her good name or honor; if she was "hit," that could have happened without fault, I don't really care. Nevertheless, I must still serve with her, and I will gladly try to submit myself to her in all reasonable affairs, as it should be.

Last, it would be well to recommend that we should follow all good ordinances according to the new statutes.

MARIA CONINXLOO

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Regarding Our Reverend Mater,

She is very hard toward our Reverend Vicaress, who was appointed to exhort Mater as necessary, but she doesn't dare do this any longer. I prayed her to do this for the love of God, but Mater answered her very painfully, for she was already suspicious that whenever Vicaress exhorted her it was at my bidding, which for the most part is not true, as Vicaress herself would testify, also that I've had to endure a great deal of silliness from Mater and her hangers-on. For above all she loves Sister Maria Joos, Sister Anna Vingnarola, and Sister Elisabeth Joos. Between herself and Vicaress she, without consulting any Council-Sisters, made Anna Vignarola the song-mistress of the novices, which greatly disturbed many in the community, partly because she was too young and still full of natural passion and unedifying manners, and partly because she's told the novices so many incredible things. She also made Sister Maria Joos Portress, and though the Council-Sisters were present when that decision was made they say they must be content with what Mater wishes, for though they might find another course wiser, if Mater's happy then they're happy, for they fear her fury. Once she gets something in her head she listens to no one, even if they're old sisters who were jubileed four or five years before. It pains me in the heart when I must hear it all, especially for Sister Anna Vanden Broeck, to whom she's especially nasty, as if [Anna] were but a child. I think [Mater] shows more respect for the novices than for her community,

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for she undermines Vicaress too often. Vicaress has the name of mistress [of the novices] but Mater has the deed. Mater is always with the novices and gossiping and laughing with them for hours in her room, as if they were old friends, which in my opinion wounds her self-respect, for if your reverence thought this a good idea you wouldn't have decreed that the novices and new nuns should be subjected to a novice-mistress for five years. The young ones are freer and more stubborn toward Mater than are the nuns, except of course for the hangers-on. In chapter, in the presence of the full community, she gives the appearance of trying

the young ones by imposing assorted penances which your reverences never specified in the new statutes, and which no one else, however old, has ever seen or heard, which amazes me, for I always supposed that if we should follow our statutes then we would be doing enough, but to the contrary. Instead of blaming ourselves when we've sinned against any part of the statutes, and then accept the punishment required, now we ignore it, no one even regards it. There are some who make up whatever penance comes into their head, and pray for some bit of penance in refectory, and then admit general guilt only, without naming anything in particular, or they look forward more to recreation than to times of devotion. Thus I wish that your reverence would give a decree on this point, first because the

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penances are much too general so that no one will know what the transgression was, even if it ought to be known, and so that no one knows how the transgressor might improve, and also for the young ones, for they think it's typical and think little of it, and imagine that this is how it's done. Thus I pray your reverence to maintain the custom contained in our statutes. Then there would be ten times as many penances as now, out of one's own devotion. And I wish that the rule and statutes would be better observed generally, especially silence, of which I've heard very little confession.

Regarding the Divine Office,

I would ask your reverence to enforce the custom of standing in choir according to seniority, also in refectory and chapter, for there is much neglect in this. Four young ones stand together who ought to stand on the other side of the choir, through which still more faults occur. Mater says that we don't have to observe this decree so carefully, but I think otherwise, for if that's true then we wouldn't need any rule or any statutes. And it's also necessary that your reverence forbid that during the Office and the sung Mass sisters should not close their books until it's finished, for it causes much noise and distraction during the service of God; and also that no other books should be read during the Office, for it ought not to be, as many leaders have told us, and through this comes much dissolution; and also that sisters would not start moving about before the Office

was over. And if Mater cannot sing on the high feast days, even when she's present, then she ought to let Vicaress lead the singing, which hasn't occurred, for Mater then appoints whom she pleases.

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The communion window in the choir, and below in the infirmary, they ought to be included in cloister, for they are so large that anyone could easily climb through them into the church, and there occurs also much chatter with the chaplains who come do the service; they'd rather open the window than go talk at the grille, and there are other faults that come as a result. I would wish it to be the custom that the sacristan of the choir ought to tell the sacristan of the church what the chaplains need to know, and then before they arrived for the service; it would bring us much peace. For now it's necessary that each time a nun must miss the Office. And usually it's the youngest who are busy with this, and the chaplains are also often young, so that much attachment could also occur through this. In all the time I've been here I've never seen anyone pass so much time on this since Sister Anna Vignarola was made sacristan. It would also be fitting if there wasn't so much sleeping in the choir after meals, of which Mater is the most guilty, for she does this not only on Sundays and Holy Days so that she won't sleep during the sermon [later], but it happens almost daily, so that I think they've all made their bed in the choir, for they often lie there as long as they're there. It's also a cause of dispute, for it's necessary that there be more reverence in the choir and right around it rather than sleep during the Divine Office. It would also be fitting if sisters did not go into the garden on communion days, for on such days they would rather go pick lettuce than on workdays, and sing and play and such, which I doubt is the manner in any convent, unless you permitted this in the evening, after dinner. There have been friars here who came to preach and who saw many of our sisters in the garden, then went home and said they thought it was recreation day, and said they would do it again if they saw us on such days in the garden.

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Regarding cloister,

it would be well if your reverence put a halt to the nun-making that occurs on St.

Gregory's day and St. Gertrude's day, unless a lay sister did this, for there is much transgression in this way, for Sister Maria Joos absented herself from the Divine Office and then clothed the children inside the cloister-door, and wandered here and there, and left large children standing there alone in the open door, which is a very ugly manner for a cloistered convent. Also, Mater was deficient a month or so ago in appointing two sisters to go stand near the workmen, for she went alone and stood by them a half-day long in the dormitory, and other places. Your Reverence also prohibited workmen from coming inside on recreation days, which hasn't been observed, for there are few recreation days when the gardener doesn't come, and sometimes many other workmen as well. It would also be well if everyone wore the same shoes and stockings, for one wears black and another white, which the laypeople talk about, especially those white shoes, for such belong to the world and not religious. Thus it would be better for us to wear black only, as we've always done, and are all alike, for as the saying goes, 'like monks, like caps.'

I also wish that Mater was not so attached to laypeople, for she deprives her community and gives to laypeople; on Shrove Tuesday the waffles are baked in abundance and then are sent to laypeople. When a pig is butchered, it's

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not enough to carry sausages to laypeople, but sisters then make them better than for the community. There are two nuns who do nothing but make Agnus Dei's and Our Lady's and other such things to be given away, not to mention the flowers and little animals which Sister Anna Vingnarola also makes. There is a nun who makes handkerchiefs in abundance, to be given away, not to mention all the frills they're adorned with. It all is taken from the community, and no one knows for what. Images are bought in multitudes, and in this she's satisfying herself. There's nothing but she must have it. There have been butchers-wagons arrive here, and [the drivers] have not exactly been fed as if we were simple and poor sisters, but as if we were some great abbey. They set the best salted beef in front of him, and I heard many sisters say that in seven years they haven't eaten such meat. Your reverence may well imagine how the hearts of the community longed for such. For the community is fed very poorly, on many days we get a

simple egg for our portion, and roots, and steamed pot-herbs, and a dish of *saelvet* [some type of fat?], and what's more she was not ashamed during Lent to set before her community that which the cow used to eat, for we then had no cow, namely a head of lettuce stuffed with roasted fat, and nothing else. I'll let your reverence ponder how a community is supposed to survive on that, and then she has brown bread made which seems as if it's still on the plow. The laypeople who know how to manage a household have said to her various

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times that wheat is almost as cheap as grain [corn], and advise her to take half wheat and half grain, that it would be more profitable, but she didn't want to do it, for she's too stubborn, there's nothing to be said about it. She doesn't even grant the community what's been gifted it, for when our steward Mr. La Motrousen gave a recreation here, when he was married, he then said to Mater that he would fill the community's stomach with wine. When he asked how much wine he should give, he was amazed, for I think there were only two pots drunk, for she didn't give the community any more than that, so that the steward had to ask whether that was all we could drink. It also happens that when something is given to us Mater must have at least a double portion. If something's given by her friends, or the convent's friends, she shares that only with her hangers-on. She is very fierce about defending and promoting those sisters, however small the matter, so that there is often arguing about it. And all that they advise her to do, she does, not one word to the contrary, and if the community protests out of disagreement or concern, things that pertain to her or her hangers-on, she'll root it up in a second and start in about it. So that I may well say it's no wonder the members are sick since the head is so sick. For I see more perfection in the community than in my superior, whose footsteps I ought to follow. And violations of rule or statute, why she takes no regard for them. She lets it be known that she's worthy of all honor, and she has little regard for her community, for when the community stands in the refectory to receive

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her benediction, and she passes by and the community honors her [by bowing], well she'll never bow her head in return until she comes to Vicaress, and that's a

sight to behold, for then it's as if she has a stiff neck. I'm ashamed that she admonishes the young ones to something and then doesn't do it herself. That which she can't tolerate in others her community can see in her, she treats them all like they're children. If there's ever something eaten or drunk outside of meal times, or outside the refectory, she's right there, and those who don't call her to come are her friends no longer; if she's in the infirmary then her hangers-on are there early in the morning and late at night, and instead of letting Vicarress lead the doctors in and out, as she ought, Sister Elisabeth Joos does it instead, and in fact all which concerns the convent is never hidden or locked from her hangers-on. It stands written in the statutes that a chest should be made with two locks, for the convent's papers, but it is a sorry chest. It's a little box with a lock and she hung another pathetic lock on it as well, and next to the lock is a hole in the wood through which anyone can easily pull out the letters; and however weak the thief might be he could easily walk away with the chest anyway, may God preserve us.

She is also much too free with the lay sisters. She talks with them much too much when they return home, then there's such laughing and cackling as if it were a wedding that I'm ashamed that outsiders hear it, for her room is on the side of the street; people look behind them, then up, then in front, and wonder where it comes from; she listens to it like it's one of

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the gospels. And I wish that she wouldn't let our sisters go attend women in childbed, for laypeople notice these things. Even Black Sisters, who must go attend the sick in their homes, are not to serve women in childbed unless they've been in the home before. And it would be well also if we didn't have experience with the married state, for that doesn't concern our state, or of murders or such things, for we are removed from the world, thus we ought not concern ourselves with its affairs. It wasn't like this here until we had this Mater. It would be better if she spent her time comforting a sad sister.

Sister Maria van Coninxloo

VISITATION-LETTERS OF OCTOBER 14-15, 1633

These letters receive less attention in the book than do the letters of 1628, because they repeat many of the same themes brought up in the visitation of 1628. But there are new details and emphases that make them worth reading.

MARGARET SMULDERS

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I wish that the rule would be observed about not carrying things through the church. Your reverence has forbidden this, but it's not observed. They think that if no one can see it that it's enough. Plenty of wood, kindling, and sacks of apples and other such things have been carried through, without need.

It's certainly to be wished that beds would not be loaned to outsiders any more. Every year during Kermis in Leuven they lend four or five beds, with all the accessories. To the people in the Leopard the beds from the infirmary are even loaned out, if they've got much company. For many reasons this is perilous. If there are too many beds here, let Mater sell them; we shouldn't be keeping beds just to lend them out.

No religious are supposed to go to the grille or speak-windows without their wimple, which has now become a very ugly custom here. When the religious are in the common work then they just throw a cloak over all their foul clothes and look so improper that it's scandalous. They look like stable boys. It would also be necessary to forbid them to go to the grille if they're in the common work. That's allowed too easily, whether they're washing or cleaning or otherwise, and then they stay there two or three hours without need, gossiping. It would also be proper for them not to come to the Divine Office without their wimple, which is also often done, as above. I pray in all humility, for the love of God, that your reverence would please do something about the wash of the Jesuits, and all other washing and folding that we do, for this is ungodly washing, and the ruin of all conventual manners, [and brings] much unrest and strife, great slavery, and little profit. I couldn't write everything that could be said about it. I'll say only that it's

necessary to stop all that washing and folding, and that we wash for no one, neither friends, nor clergy, whoever it may be.

The *rolle* [a lazy-Susan like contraption, in which religious and visitors placed messages and items, then spun it around to the other side] in the guest house needs to be remodeled, and it would be well if all the *rolles* could be build so that no children could be placed inside them. It would be easy but for the cost. The portress should be prohibited from allowing such. Sister Maria is very spacious about cloister, especially regarding children, and letting in at the Wagon-gate.

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No religious are to speak at the wagon-gate, nor above from the attic, nor from their cells through the windows that open into the street. But it's now an evil custom. Mater herself stands at the wagon-gate almost an hour long and gossips with people; above in the attic some stand and gape and chew over everything that's going on, and who goes out or in. That they speak in the attic and their cells and tell many other stories is the result of the laundering, for they're often in the attic with their noses in the windows.

It's to be wished that the religious would never speak at the grille alone, and if there are two related nuns they should not speak without another religious in attendance, as is necessary now with the two Coninxloo's; not without great cause do I seek this, it would be too long to write everything that can happen there.

No one is allowed to come into the cloister, whoever it may be, neither children, big or small. This still isn't well observed. I would pray humbly that no women be allowed inside, young or old, whether to bring in wood, or grain, or coals, or anything else, for this is most abused and other arrangements can be made.

The religious are not permitted to go set plasters or enemas wherever they please, as this sometimes happens; they've also done this on women in childbed. Sister Joanna Schoensettters wishes to become expert in healing burns. It's indeed a charitable work, but it's a great disturbance for a cloistered convent, for many reasons, and Sister Joanna has become most stubborn through this, and it brings

much gossip and many inconveniences with it.

It's also been decreed that the sisters should not go out alone, but this isn't observed. For the sisters go into the neighborhood, and into The Leopard for hours on end to gossip. And if they travel far to run an errand, one goes here and another there while they're on the errand. If they go to Brussels one goes to this town and another somewhere else to visit her friends, and so forth. That isn't proper for religious to be wandering the streets, especially outside Leuven.

Moreover it's necessary that the lay sisters don't go talk alone at the grille; they never have a companion sister with them when they go talk to someone. It seems they have more privileges than the nuns. They talk to whom they please, and as long and often as they please. That makes them proud toward the nuns. The nuns have to bow and scrape before them, and they certainly have the upper-hand, especially Sister Joanna Schoensetters, who busies herself with everyone and is very bold about bossing and overshadowing others. She has no regard for anyone, young or old. And Sister Lesken Joos also--she tells everything to Mater.

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Regarding going to the grille, that is permitted too often and too much, so that the religious are often there a half-day long without need, early and late, during the Divine Office, on confession days, communion, during silence-time, during meals, also in the evening when we ought to be sleeping. If someone comes from out of town they're allowed in even after nine o'clock, and then they stay chattering until midnight even on the eve of a communion day; that happened only once but if someone came so late again Mater would again allow it.

Mater often goes to the grille on high feast days without need. And on communion days she often goes to talk with various women, especially one who comes very often for two or three hours at a time, from six in the evening until almost nine o'clock, also during meals and during the Divine Office. It's a rare day that Mater isn't at the grille during meals and the Divine Office, to the astonishment of the community. It also means much inconvenience for the cook and refteress, a great irregularity is it.

It would be well if the religious were prohibited from attending women in childbed. It's been said before but not observed. It's very damaging that we must hear such matters, all the histories which don't suit our state. What do we have to do with childbeds, weddings, and many other things regarding the married state. Such matters ought not be allowed, may God improve it, but it is to be heard often and much. But one can't let on that she is displeased, if she isn't strong enough to be ashamed by others, even from Mater herself.

I wish that at no time would any sister when outside the convent use a silver mug or silver spoons. Some time ago a prominent person gave them a silver spoon with which to eat, and was so amazed that they took it he said, 'are you truly religious of St. Francis, using those silver spoons? You're no poor sisters.'

It's also to be wished that Mater would not use a Spanish chair in the work room nor a silver thimble. Our previous Maters didn't use any such things. The children of St. Francis shouldn't do such things, for many reasons, and thus it would be better if Mater were like the other religious.

It's most necessary that Sister Anna Vinnarola changes her prayer-place in the choir. She is now next to Mater, and they're too close to each other and gossip, often and in abundance. Such behavior ought not be tolerated. And Mater even often laughs at what she says, even during the sung Mass and other times; I could write much about this.

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Moreover, Sister Anna Vinnarola shouldn't be allowed to give away, to high and low, as much as she pleases. But she should observe the Office and recreation days like the others, and not give away the convent's goods. It goes like this: she works during her free time for the convent and all what she makes she gives from the convent. It would be better if she were like the others, for she gives away so much that it's impossible she earned it during her free time alone. She is so often at the grille that she doesn't seem to be a religious at all. She makes acquaintance with everyone and converses with all who come to the convent. It's

not perfect unless Vinnarola has been there. If she visits with someone only once she is so well-acquainted that pretty soon she knows everyone at the grille. And wherever Mater goes, well Vinnarola may go there happily as she pleases. She does and doesn't do as she pleases, she is vicaress in deed and the other is but vicaress in name, God knows I don't lie. If I were to write everything to be said on this subject I'd have to write a whole book.

Mater rules through Vignarola. Whatever pleases her must please us as well. No secret is too great, for whatever it is Mater tells everything to Vinnarola, and that is very harmful, considering that [Anna] still hasn't killed her passions. Who doesn't like Vinnarola won't be in the graces of Mater very long, God knows I've had my share of this. For Vinnarola has glared at me from St. Anne's day until now, saying barely three words, and that is because of the music and other things that Mater has repeated to her; that attachment among Mater, Vinnarola and still others is so damaging that in my judgment they ruin each other's souls. And as long as it doesn't improve things cannot go well here. And I say on my conscience that if there were any ability here then it would be better to change [Maters], but there's no one capable here.

Mater permits far too much to Vinnarola; everything she thinks up or imagines, she gets; or whatever she dreams at night, as the saying goes. Whatever Mater has, she has. What pleases the one, pleases the other. She is trusted with everything, and if the least word is said against her, she has them by the throat. It's unbelievable, you have to see it to believe it. What's worse is that Mater and Sister Anna both are blessed in well-speaking, and that they can twist the truth, and Sister Maria Joos as well, especially in things they wish to defend. They are so good at convincing one another and making things seem wholly opposite from what they are. I watch their cunning in amazement, but the truth will once be revealed. It's amazing that Mater allows it all, since she'll have to account for it one day. God give her grace and us patience.

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Mater bears no care nor love for her community. Whom she doesn't like she treats as if she doesn't know them. One has no refuge in her. She shows no more sympathy nor compassion than a stone. Besides, she's so busy that it's astounding;

but she's more concerned about caring for her friends than her religious. What could be written about that is much too long, but it's greatly necessary to improve it. I wish that she would send as many things to her religious, when they're sick, as she does to her friends, for she carries and sends everything to them.

Mater listens to too much gossip. She trusts a few who come and tell her everything, including many lies that the accused have never even imagined. They know well how to go gossip about those who aren't in Mater's good graces, and in this they please Mater. It's an evil that causes much damage. Mater has said to me herself that not one word is said her but that it's immediately told her. She admits that it's wrong, 'but I'm human,' she said, and that's certain, and she's also not very perfect. She lives too closely to her passions and carries great alienation in her heart. And she spews out whatever comes into her mind, with great turbation, and she distresses others with her belittling and pricks, so they don't know where it's all coming from. Mater is greatly inclined to that belittling, and tolerates it often. She is so curious that she wants to know everything, and she encourages them in their gossip, and then she complains it's damaging to her. That is something a superior should not want to know, what this one or that one said about me. To speak truthfully, that great respecting of persons and great attachment and many other things cause much murmuring, sadness, backbiting, and otherwise. It makes for little love and reverence toward superiors. I'm often amazed that the community still shows her so much love and reverence. Though Mater complains often about her community, I think that they have more cause to complain.

[The bursaress] Sister Maria Joos is very hard on her community when they're sick. She won't give them the smallest thing, except a poor egg. Even when they're lying sick in the infirmary they have to buy all their food and drink themselves. I admit that the convent can't provide everything we need, but little things already in house--that we have to go buy those is wrong. If she had gone to school her whole life to learn the art of miserliness, she couldn't have learned it better. She makes words over matters that aren't worth a penny. It seems that she can't

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bear to give her community what it needs. And if something is given to us from outside, she can't distribute it among us without reducing it first. And when we go buy beer from her she gives us such small quantities it's not right. Moreover she gives food too easily to workmen, to whom she owes no obligation; yet to them she shows more liberality than to the religious.

It would be well to admonish Sister Maria Joos that she not speak so self-righteously to the religious. It seems she can do no wrong. She regards her community not at all, but belittles and gossips about them. I fear that her office isn't salvational for her in the least; in fact she hasn't learned humility through it but to the contrary.

Mater too easily allows her religious to be absent from refectory, either for reasons of work or to go talk and play with people, and even to loiter around during the Divine Office. She also too easily allows sisters to leave the refectory before the meal is finished, for small matters that can easily be postponed.

The lay sisters often gossip in the streets on sundays and holy days, during all of Compline, or in the winter near the fire, and also outside the convent during the evening, for hours on end, and then bring much news and tidings back to the convent which don't much edify, regarding other people's business.

Sister Elisabeth Joos is one of the captains of this; when she goes outside she can tell marvelous tales, so that one can hardly believe the half of them. But Mater loves them and believes them so much she hears them like she were hearing one of the gospels. Sister Lesken causes much unrest by telling Mater so many things, but she's not the only one.

It's to be wished that the nuns didn't walk so from the choir, each as she pleases, while the martyrology is being sung. The one walks to pick flowers for her little altar, the other to gather apples, and other such. Moreover silence is observed poorly in the choir, since the one chatters here, and the other there.

Sister Maria Joos has an ugly habit of giving errands in choir, sending one to the market, or counting her money, even during Mass. She's very hot-tempered. She chases the lay sisters around from morning during Matins the whole day through. If something comes into her head, she takes no regard for time or place. Sometimes she talks for long about some little thing that could have been handled in three or four words, and that could have been whispered.

Maria Joos should also be admonished to come to the workroom. Others complain that she talks so much about the common work and then doesn't come herself. She'll respond that she has other things to do. Others [in her position] came more often to the workroom, but she doesn't want to. She wanders around, busying herself and sticking her nose into things, without end, and what's more she speaks too long. She ought to give her religious a good example of diligence. But she wouldn't walk one step out of her way for something that didn't fit her own desires and passions.

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Regarding people who eat here, it would be impossible to describe this in a few words. I also fear it would be in vain, for Mater says it simply isn't true, and if Mater is so inclined then I have no hope of improvement. I admit that for various reasons some people should sometimes be served food, but the way it goes here is like no other convent, where people come once and then go away. There are various parties of friends and even strangers who stay here long, four, five, or eight days, and others even longer. They're here from morning 'til sundown, leaving the guest room for only half an hour, and then again at night to go sleep. And in the morning as soon as they're awake then they come again, and the whole time the religious are with them, whoever's friends or acquaintances are there, early and late. They can hardly bear to leave for the Divine Office, and they gulp down their meals. I regard this as an unsalvational life. What profit can come from this, to soul and body? And all that unnecessary talk and frivolity, they come and chew it all over in house, and all that time they spend in front of the grille. Thus they all work for themselves, except Vinnarola, for the reasons I gave earlier. This summer there were twice 15 persons at once eating, men, women,

children, daughters, and young men, and one other time 10 persons, and other times four, five, or six at once. And Mater let the daughter of her sister eat here more than a month. She had another nun teach her lace-making, at the open communion window in the choir. That lasted several days. And the choir was like a gossip-school. After that she went to learn and took her meals here. And once for 14 days they fed a boy, and now recently 8 days, since Sister Anna Marcelis is his godmother, and constantly one must sew new and old clothes for him. For the nephew of Mater five or six religious did nothing else for two weeks but sew clothes. Mater and the bursaress want to complain that we are poor and that much isn't accomplished or earned here, and that's true. But if Mater thinks that then let her abandon such things. Then there is that abundant sewing for the Jesuits, four times a year. And that constant running to the grille is unbelievable. I could write a whole book about it, but it would be in vain, because Mater would deny it all. And to learn music, well there's time enough for them, two or three hours at a time, that lasted for long, though it's true it isn't done any more. But if it will stay that way I can't say, for that great inequality they're not likely to forget. And for an organ we have money enough; various alms were socked away for that, as the bursaress herself once said in my presence, but it was all lies. To hear them now it's as if no one ever dreamed such a thing. And for long they ran around trying to buy a *clavesingel* [harpsichord], to learn to play on that first, and they were ready to buy it, but it was sold from under their noses, otherwise we'd have it now. For such we are wealthy enough. The bursaress was ready to pay 10 florins for that organ, it was said, and Vinnarola even more, and still other such things. They'd rather win and save alms for these than do well by their community.

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Regarding the children's day, it was decreed and prohibited in the other visitation so that it would no longer be done. But Mater now appoints each year a [mock] Mater, Bursaress, Vicaress, and Rafteress. That's fine and good, it's all in fun. But what I don't like is that Mater then carries herself like a buffoon, from her mouth there emerges during all that time not one wise word—now a made-up speech, then acting like a naughty child who wants something, and if you don't give it to her right away, then her hands go out of her sleeves and she starts jabbering and

throwing things, jumping, hitting, and striking the dishes, banging and yelling like you've never seen, and she doesn't stop until she has all she wants. If something is set on the table, or she gets it in her head that she must have or do something, what she then does and says as farce and other silly comedy would be impossible to describe, even unbelievable. You'd have to see and hear it. And she also does imitations of some, all their words and manners, everything she knows comes spewing out, and moves hearts. She brings joy and laughter to all who are against [the imitated], with all her peasant-like, droll farces. or to say it better, these are words which she says to ridicule and belittle, to burden some or to show their condition to the whole world, and to wound them in the heart, even things which until now they had never imagined. It's very ugly and doesn't suit a superior to do such things. God knows how she wounds hearts this way. She has such joy in this manner of play that she longs for it, and in advance can be seen laughing to herself, and can hardly await the moment to then show off all her imitations and whims. Mater complains sometimes that her community doesn't seem to honor her enough, but then she ought to carry herself otherwise, including on play days and recreation days. She's first and last in playing and romping. It is well that she plays with everyone else, but to play the fool herself, as if she were youngest in the convent? What kind of discretion is this in a superior? Before and after she goes forward with her neck in the air, such that one doesn't know whether to speak to her or not. What grace is there in this: very hard, belittling, quick to anger, and so upset that she quakes and sees death at the slightest word that contradicts her, and immediately puts her authority to work, and defends herself too severely, more than she punishes any good transgressions, though she will allow herself to be spoken to disrespectfully by Sister Maria Joos and Sister Anna Vinnarola and others of her friends, these she lets go unnoticed. But if it were someone else, that would be paid with strong penance, even if it were a word whispered in secret, she has them pay for that lustily in public. I pray for the love of God to admonish Mater about these children's days, for it is most necessary, and for this reason and for the laundry of the Jesuits I have great desire for visitation; it's necessary more than I can say or write, I trust your reverence with this. If you can't visit, then don't do another visitation when you hear everyone but leave everything without improvement, even in matters of importance on which salvation hinges.

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Your reverence should please exhort Mater that she not stand at the grille so long and so often. She might answer, as she would like to convince us in house, that there is nothing so heavy and sorrowful to her as standing often at the grille. If that's so, then she should show that by her deeds, and go there only when necessary, and give her religious a good example in this. It was not longer ago than Thursday last week that Mater to my best knowledge was at the grille from one o'clock until the evening. First came a Miss Agneet, who lives at the small beguinage, and who comes often, even with two. In fact I know with certainty that three hours in a row on a high feast day she sat there jabbering, since she's very abundant in words and requires no rest. Second on the aforementioned Thursday was the sister of Pater Gauthoven, who came to banquet with her children, as she's done more than once, and which is not necessary at all since she lives in the city. The third on this day, and who waited until the last was departed, was the Woman In the Leopard, another pig who comes here often to chatter, and who stayed so long that Mater was missing from refectory. That evening, very late, Mater still had to read her Vespers, but this happens often. These are no conventual ways. Mater seeks to be under the jurisdiction of the Franciscans. If she were, she'd have to unlearn her habits very fast, or she won't be reigning for long, I dare say that, for these are manners that displease them greatly, all that conversation with laypeople and all that free speaking. That's one of the reasons they wanted to be rid of us [before]. That Mater speaks freely, well that's obvious from how coldly the Woman In the Leopard treats those sisters who aren't in favor here, and how attached she is those who are. But that doesn't bother us, we don't have to be there with her. That they look for every opportunity, secretly or otherwise, we know that well, but don't admonish Mater specifically on this point or she'll tell her that too.

Sister Maria Coninxloo has a sister in town who is a beguine. In a week's time she makes two or three visits here, as last week. And it's for an hour, even two hours at a time. According to conventual statutes that is much too long. And they speak together alone with their godmother, Sister Anna Coninxloo. In my good opinion, they ought to have another sister present. Such things are Mater's fault. Further,

Sister Anna Vinnarola has made acquaintance with various beguines, who come often to gossip the whole afternoon. She goes there with Sister Margaret Geraerts, because she's friends with them too. Though there's common work, that talking can't be missed; it just doesn't edify. Mater would answer, 'Vinnarola must often go to the grille because of the flowers she makes. That's true, but it doesn't take long to treat of flowers, and she's there instead making new friends, with everyone who comes, it's unbelievable. She often spends so much time at the grille so

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that she then must hurry to finish her work, which means she misses choir and refectory and then she doesn't have time to go to the common work either, cleaning or otherwise, except in times of great need. The common wash, well it's a rare day when she comes to help clean. But for the grille there's time enough. Others more senior than she must do the common work. In short Sister Anna is the breadwinner, at least she has the name, and with much help [from Mater]. Another thing is that she on different occasions has worked at night, which isn't the way. If they would watch their time better during the day and not start their work late, then they'd conform better to conventual decrees, God would grant them more grace and they'd earn more than they do now, I'd dare say, if they only put God first in all things. But in such a way they'll never be rich. I pray you to speak to Mater about this, for it's necessary, and if it pleases your reverence say that if she doesn't improve herself this way, that she'll be removed, that will ruffle her up. These are things she ought to improve. I can't understand how she's so blind, or that she has no knowledge of such things, or that she knowingly and wantonly lies, it's one of these or both. Moreover she'll have to give accounting for the things she's able to improve but chose not to. What good is it for her often to command or forbid, and then watches as the contrary is done, saying nothing as if she didn't see it. Thus her command or prohibition is respected no longer than it takes for her to utter it. She ought to do something about it ... In amazement we sometimes say all these things among ourselves, which made Mater furious. But she ought to remove the causes.

My intent was to say or write the smallest word about all these things, especially

since I can imagine that no one else will mention them, and thus I'll appear all the less believable. But my conscience witnesses to me that I should write it all and then my conscience will be relieved. For there are many things that don't displease them at all, because they do them so gladly, such as going often to the grille, and having friends eat here, and still other things too long to describe, though they pertain to good conventual conduct. God grant that I may one day see change in all these things.

I pray you in all humility sharply to charge Mater to cease ridiculing, as is her custom, when the visitation is complete, that she'll stop saying, 'I know well whence this or that comes.' God knows all the things I've suffered this way, sighs and barbs, 'Oh what people we have here,' and a hundred others at other times. And that no one else should be allowed to ridicule in her name, such as Sister Maria Joos and Sister Vinnarola, for through the ridiculing of Vinnarola we know that she knows all the secrets of Mater. And that Sister Maria and Lesken Joos would stop speaking so impolitely and sarcastically when everything isn't according to their tastes, and that they shouldn't reproach, saying that so and so will have to go to another convent, that they'll have to live as a recluse where things are so sharp, and other such things. They said that to vicarress, and were on her like barking dogs in front of the whole community. That happened at the other visitation, when they looked

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as if they'd turn the convent upside down. We wouldn't dare talk that way to them, even if we were right. That is evident from the Jesuit wash. We've endured it now these two years, in silence, but whoever asked us? It wasn't brought before the Discretes. Mater and Maria Joos simply decided it. They would say, 'it's good profit.' But if that's so then why didn't Maria see that profit several years ago, for it came up then when she was portress. Then she didn't want to hear anything of it, and said that the convent wouldn't accept it. 'What will come from this laundering but unrest,' she said. Someone reminded her of this once, but she denied it, but we know to the contrary that it's true. But her lord brother [she had another besides Henri?] was then no rector [apparently connected to the Jesuits].

It would be well if Mater did no important business without first consulting her Discretes, according to the statutes. She would answer, 'I don't do the least thing without consultation, for I do not stand gladly on my own.' I think that's true, that she doesn't do the least thing without advice, but from whom does she ask advice? Sister Vinnarola and Sister Maria Joos. If those two could be quiet, we often wouldn't know it, but through their ridicule and conversation they betray themselves. If I wanted to write what Vinnarola told me several years ago, when I stood more in her graces, then you'd be able to discern for yourself whether Mater follows her counsel or not, and whether she knows no secrets or not. In sum, it's harmful to her and doesn't help us much either. Patience, the will of God must be fulfilled in all things. If I must suffer in such a way in God's name, then henceforth with God's help I'll earn my merit.

Whenever the Woman In the Leopard goes into childbed, then a quarter-portion [*vierendeel*] of wine is set aside for her here in the name of our church, because it then has no excise and impost taxes. If there's no sin in this, then your reverence need say nothing to Mater, but if it's otherwise tell her it ought not to be this way. They come and fetch it in secret, with pots and jugs, as they're accustomed to doing, early in the morning and late at night, when the convent's already locked and we're sleeping, much unrest.

I wrote in the other visitation long and wide about all the candles that are burned in the choir, which is much too small and narrow for such, especially in the summer with all the flower pots and 14 or 15 *fistels*. I'll let you imagine how lovely that smells, and I suppose that your reverence didn't say anything about it at the time. Now I fear it will be in vain anyway to write about it at any length. But you can imagine it. On feastsdays there are 9 large candles burning and nine or ten pair of flowerpots, without mentioning all the flowers on the little altars or lying on and stuck into stools. If Mater were to give the bursaress and the other religious one-fourth of these candles for the church, she would be too poor. I like to see much light burning in

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the church, but not in the choir. Then during the Mass there's much running back and forth to trim the candles and other such things. One gives this many candles, another that many, then it's for their patron saint or their name saint, then they burn light the whole day through. When I first came to live here there were only two lights burning, at any time, and that was in front of Our Lady and Our Lord, and there were only two candelabra standing, not at all like now. It's not enough to have all the permanent-standing candelabra, but on feast days then more are set up, and on the tomb. At kermis, at Candlemas, light every day, for then they make [the biblical] Bethlehem, and then again at Easter, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the candle-burning is never enough, one can't find one's way. I dread those days, for [smoke at] the tomb irritates me greatly. I wish it would be decreed that they'd offer and burn candles in the church, but that in the choir no more than two or at most three would burn at a time, whatever the day, and that they would take down all those candelabra which they frill up and spend so much time on. I don't know that God has much pleasure in this at all, but they burn candles so easily here that even if there was but a contrary wind then they'd want to burn a candle. I prize them in the church, for Our Lord, there can't be enough there. But that narrow choir, you feel like you're losing your heart.

I'd also like to see that no nuns would be allowed to play the fool on Three Kings Day. It was prohibited to put on the fool's clothes any longer, but they've invented other silly things that aren't much better. For Mater simply could never leave it alone; even if my reverend lord the bishop said it to her face, she would still want to play the fool herself. If Mater really can't get herself to quit the practice, it would be better to have one of the lay sisters play the fool. But it's not right to let the nuns leave choir and play all day long the fool, and be clothed so crazily, and then call their friends from all corners to come see the fool. Then no decree or ordinance is observed at all. This simply isn't right for cloistered convents. It seems that they're ready to entertain everyone who passes by, and all that goes with it, well I'll leave it at that, for there's enough already that half would be sufficient. We simply lack a Mater who has any sense of regard for conventual discipline. That we play and enjoy ourselves at the proper time, that pleases me much. But that lay people must be present, that displeases me

extremely, and there's much more that could be said. May the lord give your reverence His holy blessing and inspiration to do what may please Him, and pray in God's name for me.

I hope that your reverence won't take offense that I've written so much, but I protest that I haven't written the smallest thing that isn't true, God knows it. Neither is it possible to write it all. Mater can improve all things that she pleases to improve.

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Considering that we have no refuge in our Mater, who ought to help us according to her ability, may God improve it it's far from there, thus I've sought my refuge in you, who art our Father. Regarding Sister Maria Joos, her miserliness is so great that I couldn't begin to tell or write it. As far as I'm concerned it she doesn't want to improve herself, I would hope as much as I am able that she would be removed. If she were asked about it, she would say, 'I can't do it any longer.' Then say to her freely, 'we'll see if someone else can't do it then,' that will shake her up. For she's very overbearing about it. She thinks she is it. We're easily content and we know the limits of the convent as well as she, but to make words over a small rag. The likes of her can't be found in any convent of the world, I suppose. She has no more compassion or sympathy. If someone says anything or nothing it seems her face is made of wood. If she doles out a portion and someone says, 'the community doesn't like that,' she says, 'that doesn't matter to me, if I've given their portion I've done enough, if they don't want to eat that let them fast,' so impolite and dog-like is she. If someone can't eat what we do have, that doesn't concern her at all. Before if you were sick then you could cook a turnip, or two or three, or onion, and other small things already in house, beans from the garden or something, but now that she's bursaress by no means. We must go buy these instead; she would say, 'if they come ask me, [I'll give it],' but I don't know when someone would have to be sick enough to work up enough courage to put up with so much ridicule and so much griping and chirping, for she is a chirper. She'll start in over a draft of beer, and the smallest portion that she can manage, that's what she gives, since she sells the beer to us and wants to make a profit. And if someone had to pay her for a hundred pots of beer and was

one penny short, then she wouldn't give it. For her life she wouldn't give one drop of beer away. What's more, the Woman In the Leopard has said often that if someone is sick, then she may come freely on her wagon and fetch a mug of beer, and once a month anyone who wishes it can go fetch beer from Sister Maria and [the Woman In the Leopard] will reimburse her. She said that several years ago, but it's not in [Maria's] power to grant it, for when someone goes to fetch it then it's 'she's not sick enough,' or 'she can buy that herself,' or 'it hasn't been a month.' In sum it's too short or too long. In all my life I haven't had one drop but that I've had to pay for it, and however sick I've been she hasn't offered one drop to me. I've heard from one of our religious, who seems to know how much [the Woman In the Leopard] gives every year to us, that Maria keeps the rest, but if it's true I don't know. If the woman gives as much as Maria taps out ... She is the shortest of the house but she is master of us all, God forgive her for it, and grant her love for her community. In the summer she wanders in the morning during Prime in the garden picking apples, while we're singing the martyrology, out of fear that someone else might pick them. It was so misty and wet that for all the apples in the garden I wouldn't have gone into the garden at all, so smelly was that mist. But that's from her great miserliness. In the winter, when she comes into the kitchen, however cold it is and three ... logs on the fire, even when no pot is hanging over it and we're warming ourselves,

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well when she's warm then she pulls the logs out of the fire right before the shoes of the others so it seems there'll be a fire in an instant, no one would believe it. She bosses the lay sisters so harshly it seems they're mules that may not rest if she gets something in her head. Except her cousin of course, who is governess of them all, and helps Sister Maria be so sharp and defends her in everything if there's any complaining about her miserliness. It happened to me this summer that I was very sick, and could not eat; but at least I had a desire for some fresh butter; I asked her for a bit. She answered me, 'I'll give you a half pound on Saturday. Well this was on Monday, and on Saturday we each get a half pound from the convent. Would the convent have been made poor because of that? I could add a hundred such things, in truth, and what's more shameful we must so strictly buy our own things, clothing and otherwise, and regarding food.

if it weren't possible for me to buy more than the common portion I wouldn't be able to live; and there are others like me, one buys, the other is given something. There's no use asking Mater. She [Maria] lacks nothing in sickness and health, she doesn't dare provide clothing or food. If she doesn't like the table beer, she has the keys and so goes and drink in the cellar. The portions are small and mean, especially anything cooked with butter, because the butter has to be fetched from her hands (the cook has the fat only). The soup is very good, but on Friday and other fast days they practically fight over whether butter should go in it or not. Last Friday we had for our portion beans, which tasted like they'd just been hauled limp from the water. If we have a portion of yellow roots [carrots?] that's eight bushes for everyone, which costs four stivers, that's a whole meal for 23 people. The cook said that if she'd give another bushel she still wouldn't use up the common portion, but [Maria] quarreled and said it was enough, yet it was only half a stiver. In the same week we once ate turnips, a portion for the whole community cost three stivers. I think if she keeps on like this, in truth I don't know what will happen, but as the saying goes, 'give them swill.' To be sharp and strict with those who desire drink for no reason is fine, but there's no sympathy or comfort or ease, nor can she ever say, 'have patience, I'd like to do better for the community,' no not at all. Whatever she can yank from our mouths she yanks. We have no one to speak up for us, thus I pray you for the love of God give her no cause to be sharp, but exhort her in God's name. A year or so ago she earned 300 florins, as I heard others say. But I know as well that she doesn't do well by her community. If someone wants to give beer or a portion for recreation, then she gives it to us on days when the convent is supposed to give us more anyway, as on recreation days, at kermis, or the like, and thus in the end she doesn't really give us extra at all. It won't make her rich, I even let myself think that God would give her more benediction if she would serve her community with a liberal heart according to our means. Little things

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often help much, and when the year's out she would hardly notice [the loss]. If she showed instead a good willingness and would grant us what people have given, without reducing it. It's been more than two years since Vicaress was sick, and Sister Maria supposed that Vicaress didn't have long to live, not that she was

so sick but because she's been dying for long. From that moment she laid claim on a white petticoat, and made many words about it; that's her greediness again. She has the money of her lord brother in her care, and he says to her in abundance, 'do for yourself [the convent] all that you please, buy all you want, I don't want any accounting.' No, there's nothing to do about it, she can't do it. When someone dies, and leaves any clothes behind, she quarrels if she can't have it, and if she must buy it then she doesn't want it. Another winter Vicaress was sick again, and it appeared her soul was about to depart. Sister Maria Joos wanted to take possession of her fire-kettle, saying that hers was too small, and that she would trade for a while and just borrow it for a time. Vicaress didn't dare say anything against her. So I said to Sister Maria, 'let her in God's name use her kettle as long as she lives, you'll have time enough to lay your hands on it when she's dead, why isn't your kettle big enough, you've had it for years.' It was given to her because she wouldn't buy one, but she couldn't get herself to spend anything on it. She was so angry at me but I didn't care, that poor thing needed her kettle herself. She answered me in many words with such authority and ridicule that it was amazing, and immediately she ran to tell everything to Mater and declare all her displeasure, over the smallest word that was said. If anyone knew what one had to fetch and provide here for oneself, I don't know that any [new religious] would enter our convent. Sister Maria also loves to be with her friends, and she supposes that more is permitted to her than to others. This time it's a student, four or five days, then another cousin, then her other niece, her sister at another time, her brother's children. During kermis she invited the Pastor of Mol with the family of her other brother, and now for long she has invited a beguine, the daughter of her brother. In sum, I seldom have any rest here; that noise sorrows me so, that eating and drinking, that singing and clinking, banqueting and merrymaking, whether I'm sick or whole or want to hear it or not. Then it's a house full of whining children, especially those dreadful children from the Leopard, and still other children. I doubt that there's one chair or bench still whole. I think sometimes that my head will break, especially when I'm not well. I can't understand what fun there is in all this. If I could only live to see Mater otherwise, and that she didn't so gladly speak with all those laypeople. She thinks that she's restricted, but I don't know what else she could have, unless she wanted to feed everyone who came, and open a tavern. I complain often to

God, and pray that he'll give her a change of heart. Also I pray that you'll forbid her all

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that eating and drinking. If your reverence only knew how she received people and set before them everything she can dream up, and not only for nourishment, but imagines all day long what she can serve at the next banquet, especially when they're here days at a time. What can I say more? I fear that I break my head in vain. For if Mater doesn't want something, then it's all lost words, whatever might be said to her during the visitation, especially from me. If she were the sort of superior she ought to be, it is entirely in her power to change things, so that we wouldn't have to spend all this time and labor with your reverence. But it seems that she takes no regard for anything as soon as the visitors are gone. She goes her old ways then. It's as if she thinks she'll never have to give accounting to God. And no one in house may say the smallest thing that contradicts her. Once with a good heart I tried to tell her something, regarding several beguines who were here for a week from morn until eve. She took that so badly as if I had done her great harm, and the worst evil. She was disturbed, she shook and shuddered from anger. She threw up her arms and stuck her neck up high and made such gestures; the color and consternation and all those deep wounds she gave to me, and that amazement and alienation I've since had to endure from her and Vinnarola, and Maria and Lesken Joos, and others, I couldn't begin to describe. But Vinnarola goes beyond all others. When she crosses my path she looks as if she'd like to kick me far away. Mater said to me at the time that it wasn't true that the beguines had eaten here; but I see the food being cooked and carried in, I see the dishes coming out. She said it was a sandwich, that's what she told others, but I saw it. She wants to make a lie of everything. I see that it's once wine-broth, flan tarts, meat pies, almond cakes, and then a broth with small breads, cinnamon sugar and wine and butter, then rice, and further all that they can think up to bring people. And then they bring other friends because the fare is so good, as this past summer when they were here in such abundance; one group was barely gone when another would ride up, and even young regular religious [postulants] here in Leuven are called to come and banquet with them. Some of them who had such great familiarity here have now left [the religious

life?], but that coming and sewing for them knew no end. I pray you to banish this conversation, for it brings no profit or regularity. I'm often amazed at Mater, very suspicious, that she often lies so blatantly [MARGIN: MATER], and defends lies which everyone can see and hear. How will she not lie to your reverence, about those things she defends? How many lies has she told about the Jesuits' wash? She says the lay sisters earn the money, and that only two nuns must help. To the contrary, the wash is never done without four or five nuns helping, and the lay sisters help for only three days, the nuns do the rest. Mater is worthy to be removed, with all her lies, how does that suit a superior, tell me? It's a scandal that we must say it. To write all her sins, and those of Vinnarola, and sister Maria Joos, would be impossible. But it's not enough, visitation, for they do what they please. And though we sometimes have refuge in my lord the dean, they learn about it and then Mater ridicules us. And he can't do anything because he wasn't at the last visitation. If it pleases your reverence, you might charge him to occasionally come see if the statutes are being observed, otherwise the visitation will be of no use. Mater will simply go her old way in all things.

ADRIANA TRUIS

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I pray humbly that your reverence will decree the following points, because of certain inconveniences which have occurred in the past.

- 1 That when any maidens come here to take up the religious life, if the vicaress is incapable of teaching them to sing and to read that a mistress be appointed to the task, under whose subjection the postulants and novices will stand until their profession, then for three years after profession under the authority of the Vicaress.
- 2 That none of the religious will hold any individual conversations with any postulants or novices, much less say anything to them regarding any faults or mistakes made in the convent in the past, on which point the young ones ought to be often and closely examined.
- 3 That no religious will presume to rebuke the young ones because of their faults, especially at the moment when they come before each nun and ask to be received into the order; but if they notice any faults in the young ones they should tell this to Mater, or their mistress.
- 4 That if the young ones or any other religious are given penance in chapter, no one else should tell them in word or expression, or stir up the penitent to murmuring against her superior, by saying that the superior does this out of passion, and such things.
- 5 I pray that Sister Margaret Smulders be admonished not to busy herself so with all the affairs that happen in the convent, and not presume to rebuke everyone, with untempered and passionate words, to the great distress of the community.

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- 6 That it may be decreed that if any persons or friends come to visit Sister

Anna and Sister Maria Coninxloo at the grille, that a companion sister should go with them, as is done with other sisters who go to the grille alone (this is requested because they're related, in which case there must always be another sister with them at the grille).

- 7 I wish that the Vicaress would be more careful if she has any displeasure with her sisters or superior, that she wouldn't say this to the other sisters, or that if sisters complain about something to her that she wouldn't confirm them in this or tell them they're right, for much damage has been caused in this way, and much disrespect for the superior and co-sisters and otherwise.

Sister Adriana Truis, Mother Unworthy

ANNA VIGNAROLA

Reverend Lord, In order to fulfill the desire of Your Reverence, and to save time, thus do I put into writing that which according to my conscience ought to be improved (or that can be improved).

In the first place, the Superior is shown little respect, and the greatest fault lies with the Vicaress, for in the absence of Mater she is much inclined to speak her dissatisfaction with this regime. Rather than rebuking others, or speaking well, it happens through this that those who hear her then have less regard for the decrees of Mater's regime (and even less for the Vicaress), for they rebuke her in her absence, so that they then talk about both of them, and spend much lovely time. But Mater has quite a contrary condition, for she always defends, and speaks highly of, those who are absent. Of this fault in the vicaress much more could be written, but little improvement can be expected, for she may not be chastised because of her illness.

There is also much abuse among the subjects in conspiring to alienate others from Mater. I believe, according to the witness of my conscience, that many sins occur often this way, for they embellish lies and speak them as truth about Mater, among other things that she can't keep secrets, offering as evidence some trivial thing they've told her, and they are so busy with gossiping that they do not see their own inability to be secret or keep silent. And they say that Mater can't keep a secret. I could also say more about this, but there's little profit to be expected from it, for they act as if they know nothing about it, and then are worse than before. For if the confessor admonishes them on this point, well they must be told they're right or there is no rest. One would never know that they could keep secrets themselves, and the confessor didn't even say what they claim, as they've sometimes charged out of passion. If your reverence would like more information, you may speak to the two lectors of the Franciscans, or the Vicar of Brussels, seeing that they may have better experience with our convent than we who live here.

From the same comes an even greater abuse, and unless it's improved our convent can never achieve good discipline or progress among the young ones. For

when the young ones enter they're told right away that they may not speak with Mater, and other amazing things, may God improve it. It doesn't edify to have the young ones watched when they go see Mater, or be questioned with such thoroughness about what they've said to her, for their only concern is that Mater not know what's being said. And then they stroke them by promising not to reveal to Mater what they have said.

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And worst of all, and to pull the hearts even further from Mater, they try to tell them stories that supposedly happened earlier, about our secular confessor [Henri Joos], and further everything they can dream up or embellish; that gossiping knows no end. And if it happens that Mater admonishes the young ones, or tries them with penance in chapter, they run to them and say that never in the past has someone had to bear such penances as those handed out by this Mater, and even tell this to professed nuns, and tell them that Mater doesn't like them, that she reigns out of passion, and pay no attention to what she says, she has to say something because it's chapter ... and thus it's a great obstacle since obedience is not achieved through love or reverence, and no profit comes from the admonishments given. And the young ones who aren't yet professed, and are still doubting whether to stay or not, if they leave it's a great scandal for our convent when they can't keep silent about what they've witnessed here. That this might improve is not to be hoped, but at least there should be some kind of fear or hesitation planted in them, as I hope, for as I've said before, all they care about is that Mater doesn't know, or Vignarola, then everything is well--as if God cannot see their hearts and feelings. I think Mater knows much more than I do, though her discretion does not permit her to show by her expression what she knows, in order to keep peace. Thus I think it would be well to command that at least every month Mater shall inquire among the young ones whether something has been told them which is damaging, or that hinders religious progress. I believe this will be profitable. For if they won't keep silent out of the love of God, then they'll be silent out of fear. And say specifically that the young ones may enjoy the good admonition and conversation of Mater as they please, without fear, and of their mistress also, without the novice-mistress forbidding it, or jealously seeking to know what's been said, for she's jealous that the young ones show

more freedom with Mater than with her. No profit comes through disrespect on either side. For the novice-mistress gives cause that they are alienated from her, and they seek more to avoid her than to be free with her. And if it is recommended to Mater to maintain the silence she has until now, it would shatter love greatly ... It's enough to instill a fear in them not to say harmful things, for all that they've done, all the precious time they spend on this, cannot be said or written.

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I'd also wish that it would be forbidden that on high feast days, when all the religious go to take holy communion, they not wander into the garden without permission, for this is a time to spend in thankfulness, and not to wander and chatter. There's little distinction here now between feast days and ordinary days, for there are some who are never out of the garden. All this I recommend, and leave to the good discretion of your reverence, without adding any opinions of my own, except to add that I'm prepared to receive whatever the Holy Spirit will inspire.

Sister Anna Vignarola

P.S. Though it's true that we must have patience with the wonderful manners and conversation of Sister Margaret Smulders, I nevertheless pray that she be admonished that when workmen enter, or when for other reasons the wagon-gate is opened, she not come and stand there with her hands on her hips. Other religious are prohibited from going near the workmen, which is reasonably observed, and thus the workmen are then compelled to ask what for a nun she is, and those who are around don't know what to say in order to preserve the honor of the convent.

JOANNA DE VORSTER

Most Reverend Lord, I'm very amazed that two nuns must stand at the grille, since we need them so badly in choir; the best voices are taken from us [Maria Joos and Anna Vignarola]; it was decreed that one of the nuns should be a lay sister, and it was long that way, according to the advice of your reverence. It also is ignored that two sisters must remain with workmen, for now when one has to fetch something the other stays there; here is also much fault.

On fast days it is prohibited to do any slavish work, in order to observe our ordinances better; here is also much fault.

Further [Mater] lets the Jesuits have their church-linens washed here, which is a great slavery for two weeks; nuns assigned to it are then often absent from choir and refectory, and most of the community doesn't like it, through the great compassion we have for those who have the burden, for a measly 60 florins a year, four times a year, and each time it takes nearly two weeks before it's finished.

Also that Mater often stays out of the community, from choir, from refectory, and work room, and knows everything, and then disciplines us as if there were a cabal in the air. If that's true, it would be better to [punish] one or two who the community suspects. What can I say about this except that factionalism is a devilish affair. There's too much attachment between Mater and Vignarola, who has all she wants from Mater, which others don't get without begging.

CATHARINA RIJKEBOER

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- 1 It would be well to correct a small matter and remake the grille in the guestroom, where it's possible to shake hands with worldly persons or pass something through secretly, if someone were so inclined.
- 2 It doesn't suit a poor convent that, when guests are served white bread and milk, to give each of them, however many there are, a silver spoon, which doesn't edify some outsiders.
- 3 It's also to be wished that it would be forbidden to lend beds and their accessories to outsiders.
- 4 Moreover, I wish greatly that Mater and the portress would be strictly admonished that by no means will they allow small children inside cloister, whether through the cloister-door, the grille, or the wagon-gate. When it occurs at the wagon-gate, or in the guest house, why it appears that it's perfectly acceptable or permitted, but I and a few others don't see it that way.
- 5 When workmen come inside then, according to the statutes, Mater is to send two sisters with them; this is not observed, since sometimes she sends only one.
- 6 It's a great abuse that the religious pass so much time chattering at the grille with lay people. The statutes teach us to keep our business short. It happened on October 2 that three young nuns sat there for several hours with the same people, and again on October 5 another three hours; they weren't real friends, but various acquaintances who were all together.
- 7 Sometimes there is also little regard about not speaking alone [with outsiders].

8 No one is to speak at the grille or anywhere else with anyone from outside on confession days and communion days, except in great need, or unless it's someone who cannot be put off, according to statute. This is hardly observed, and almost no nun is refused who asks to go to the grille at such times.

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9 On the same point is Mater most deficient. I admit that she's the superior, and can't always turn people away, but often she goes without need, for she often stands two or three hours at the grille with a certain young lady, a widow, who comes seeking consolation. It appears a work of charity for Mater, but it happens especially often on communion days. Mater could ask her to come back another time, to give the community a good example.

10 It wouldn't be unwise to decree that Sister Anna Vignarola must change places in the choir, where she hears Mass and does her devotions, for it's much too close to Mater, and gives them good opportunity to find diversion when they think no one is watching.

11 It would be most profitable to warn Mater in private that on Holy Innocents Day she wouldn't carry herself so wildly, for on that day she displays every coarse manner imaginable, behaving like a wharf-child. She ought at such times to carry herself simply and humbly and teach obedience, and give her subjects a proper example of how to behave.

12 It would be well to forbid all small feasts which sometimes two or three of the sisters continue to hold after Three Kings. It's enough that we have a real feast together during that time. The Three Kings Feast already goes from Monday to Friday, and the other little feasts or tavern-parties afterward cause much murmuring among those not present.

13 I pray in all humility that our community may be loosed from the great slavery of washing for the Jesuits, or for anyone else. In truth the labor is

so heavy that no compensation is enough. Moreover the nuns ruin their clothes, which Mater and

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Bursarers don't much care about, for the convent doesn't give clothing to its poor nuns anyway. Also the religious during this time are so untidy that they couldn't appear any uglier if they were lying in the street [lagen opde bare]. Our diet is too sober to slave like that. Each time we do it, there is more unrest, and all conventual manners must be pushed aside for the time. The choir becomes very thin, and the workroom as well, so that we can hardly do the common prayers properly. Rest assured that if your reverence would free us from this, we will make much progress in the religious life.

Sister Catharina de Rijkeboer

MARIA CONINXLOO

/1/

Regarding cloister. According to our statutes, Mater should have one sister with her when she lets in the doctor or surgeon, or any other person, which is never observed.

In our statutes it is written that no one may go to the grille without a companion sister, without exception, but there is great deficiency in this, for the bursar always speaks there alone, without exception, not only with her friends but also strangers, and Mater does this as well.

It's also become very lax about going to the grille on confession and communion days, as some are permitted this very easily, while others are forced to observe this very strictly.

Our Mater is also a respector of persons when it comes to correction, especially during the Divine Office, for one of our nuns causes much distraction with her *opstetten* [temerity?], in the presence of Mater and in her absence, but Mater pays it no heed as if she weren't even Mater at all.

Mater is also most deficient when anyone asks to speak with a Pater, for she often goes to meet him and takes all the time, so that he then has little time to speak with the sister who called him, and it looks very bad, and it robs the subjects of their freedom when the superior goes first.

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I would also wish that there would be no teaching of music here, to sing in the choir, for it will bring in much unrest, as would permission to buy an organ, even if times were well, for love would be ruined through this.

It also stands written in our statutes that if any workmen come to work inside the convent then two sisters must be with them at all times, which is never observed. There's always only one with them, and sometimes no one, so that the

workmen are then alone and can walk where they please.

I also wish that Mater would quit her pomp-table, for it is a great obstacle to her ability to watch over her community, and it also robs us of freedom, for if we go to ask her blessing for something, it's easy if she's sitting alone, but it's not so easy when she's sitting with all her hangers-on, and I also think that those attachments would slowly fade away if it were banished, and I would hope that Mater could then watch after her community more closely, and also better fulfill chapter 1 in our statutes, regarding the office of Mater, which I happen to think Mater hardly observes at all. And Mater ought also to improve herself in always being with lay people. It would be better for her to comfort her community, so that they'd have refuge in her.

And I wish very much that we would be released from the Jesuit wash, for many sins occur through this.

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I wish very much that Sister Maria Joos would improve herself that when Mater gets impatient with her, she wouldn't be so careless in her words, that she wouldn't immediately say, 'what a marvelous superior this is, perhaps she ought to be removed,' and other such disrespectful words, and this in the presence of nuns both young and old, and also at other times that if anyone follows her example and says something about Mater she then gets angry; such hardly brings any peace. But others imagine that if the bursaress may speak in such a manner about Mater, in whose good graces she stands, then I, who am not in her good graces and who must suffer so, may certainly speak thus as well. But from other sisters it's taken much worse than from her.

I wish well that Sister Anna Vignarola also watched herself a bit more, that in the presence of others she wouldn't presume to speak so freely about Mater; I believe well that she speaks out of freedom, since they have so much affection for one another, but it's not right. It's a bad example for others, and a cause of murmuring. For one says, 'Mater wouldn't tolerate that kind of talk from me,' and 'this shows what a respecter of persons she is,' and so forth, and other such

similar sins which grow out of this, though not without truth, for it's correct that Mater wouldn't suffer or tolerate this from another.

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It's true that the community murmurs sometimes, but they have much cause and reason to do so. I ought to speak with all our confessors who have ever been confessor here. It's a good community, may Our Dear Lord grant it grace and good patience. But there is one who stands out a bit, and that is Sister Joanna Schoensetters. Everyone has something to suffer from her, and to bear, for she wishes to boss and rule all of us, more than Mater herself, and lives according to how her passions drive her. It would be better if she had nothing more to do than spin her spinning wheel rather than be our cook, too, then she wouldn't have so much occasion to exercise herself on everyone, for whoever has anything to do with fire cannot avoid the kitchen, for whoever wishes to start a fire must go there and who goes there must take up her cross, believe you me. We've made enough complaints to Mater, but we're not heard.

Regarding what I've desired about Mater quitting her pomp table. I pray it once more, for it doesn't suit a Mater well, for she must sometimes sit there early and late, so that there are sometimes whole days when one can't speak a word to her, and since Vicaress is very sick we are often alone without anyone over us, in the common work, in Matins, and during the day at the grille, and when the community before midday is in the workroom, in silence and listening to reading, then Mater is reading with her daughter Sister Anna Vignarola, and thus the time we have to speak with her is severely limited.

SUMMARIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH SISTERS IN 1633, BY PETER VAN DER WIEL

Van der Wiel's interview-summaries for 1628 did not survive, but only a rough, incomplete overview, organized by topic. Hence this 1633 document is most valuable, for it gives a closer sense of the views of illiterate nuns and of nuns who did not take time to write letters, as well as more detail about nuns who did write letters. Such summaries also survived from 1616 and 1624, but the questions were less wide-ranging and no separate letters from nuns survived. Spacing is the visitor's.

On the 14th of October 1633 was undertaken the visitation of the convent of the Grey Sisters of Leuven.

- 1 Sister Catharina Rijkeboer, Vicarress, age around 37, professed 16 years. After taking an oath to speak the truth, she deposes that there is no notable discord here. Rule and statutes are read four times per year. The ordinances of the most recent visitation were proclaimed verbally, but not in writing. Decrees from the penultimate visitation were incorporated into the statutes [of 1626]. The meals have declined gradually. On Sundays they have for the midday meal *carnes iuralentas bubulus* (*ox-beef with gravy, or stew*), a little in the evening, the same on Tuesday. On Thursday, they have for lunch salted beef, a little in the evening, Monday they have for lunch cabbages or other such. On Wednesday parsnips [*pastina*], on Friday beans, and on Saturday fruit or such. Complains that in the past two years a burden has begun here of washing four times per year for the Fathers of the Society [of Jesus], namely their church-linens, with which they are occupied for three weeks. In choir there is sometimes want of silence. She has handed in a letter, labeled E.
- 2 Sister Aleidis Doelmans, 76 years old, Jubileed 8 years [thus professed 58 years]. She cannot speak much, but prays that they may continue to have the services of the Franciscans.

3 Sister Anna Marcelis, 51 years old, professed 35, after taking an oath, Complains that Sister Margaret sometimes makes much racket whenever anyone comes to talk beneath her room. Complains that much displeasure comes through washing four times a year for the Jesuits, which lasts at least one to three weeks, which causes divers sisters to be absent from choir, and there is little profit to be had; in fact it even prevents them from making money in some other way. She wishes that Mater would be a bit softer during chapter, when she punishes faults. The Bursaress is much too sharp, and though the religious would sometimes like Mater to request a few things for them, not even Mater will dare ask her, but she won't let go of that affection they have long had for each other, and doesn't know that Mater concerns herself much with the Bursaress.

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The accounts are done yearly, as they ought, and the *affgeuoten renten worden aengeleyt* (*annuities are properly maintained*).

She knows no complaints regarding disobedience, private property, or cloister, though she doesn't busy herself much in others' business.

Sister Maria Joos, Vinnarola, Elisabeth Joos act as if they live in their own little convent, through their special friendship with Mater.

She wishes that the Novice-mistress wouldn't admonish the young ones about their faults right after they've been to confession, for they then go to Our Lord [in the Eucharist] in a restless state.

Prays that the read Mass might always take place before the High Mass.

Says there is no time set aside for inner prayer there, since after the Mass those who wish may use it until eight-thirty. After Compline there's half an hour before Mater signals inner prayer.

Those who aren't legitimately prevented ought to be in the common work, where at the start there isn't much silence; but after a while prayers are read.

Chapter is held weekly.

4 Sister Jacomyne de la Haye, in her 40's, professed 26 years, after taking an oath, as others. Says that the rule, statutes, and vows are observed reasonably well, except that Sister Joanna Schoensetters sometimes is very opinionated and stubborn, and unpeaceful.

There is no remarkable factionalism here, including in Mater, who does her best for all according to the means of the convent.

The sick are well cared for.

The sisters don't eat with outsiders, who in times of need are occasionally given food at the grille.

The Pastor of Mol comes here rarely, and never eats with anyone from the convent.

Admits that at the grille, both at the entrance and in the guest room, there are sometimes conversations of two or three hours, including with people from town; but though guests are sometimes given something to drink, the sisters never drink with them.

No one sleeps here except the Franciscans when one of the sisters is sick, and other religious of this order.

No sister speaks at the grille except in the presence of another sister.

Children, including infants, are not allowed inside.

The meals are reasonable, according to the means of the convent.

Prays that those who eat during the second meal may have some edifying conversation about what was read [during the meal].

Says that a beguine at the beguinage here, a sister of Maria Coninxloo, often comes here to visit her sister and her godmother [Anna Coninxloo] and stays here long. Prays that the same may be corrected.

Complains that Sister Maria Coninxloo makes much noise at table whenever anyone speaks, also at the gate.

Prays that the convent may be placed under the jurisdiction of the Franciscans.

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Complains that Mater and Vicaress do not get along, which causes much murmuring, as for example when someone feels misunderstood by Mater and seeks her refuge in Vicaress; that one doesn't correct the complainer

but confirms her, which Mater also does when someone comes to her to complain that she has been punished by Vicaress.

Silence is observed well in choir and in the dormitory.

Says that Sister Margaret Smulders comes very often to the gate, sometimes to run an errand, sometimes to see who's coming and going.

Prays that she may commune every week.

- 5 Sister Margaret Smulders, 49 years old, professed 26 years, after promising as usual. Says she wishes that the Pastor of Mol would stay away, for he comes two or three times a year, though because of the bad times he now comes less, and when here he sings Mass and preaches. But fears that if Mater were required to [keep him out] there would be much turbation, and one would have to wait and see whether he could be held to this anyway.

On October 15, 1633, she handed over a letter labeled F.

- 6 Sister Anna Coninxloo, age 54, professed 26 years, after the usual promise. Says that the statutes are not well observed on the point that those coming into cloister are to be accompanied by two sisters, for now there is only one, either Mater or a companion sister, though she thinks there is at least always one.

Complains that Sister Maria Coninxloo often brings dissonance into singing by singing in too high a tone, and among others weighs down the voice of Anna Marcelis.

Complains that because of the silken flowers made by Anna Vignarola there has grown much affection between herself and Mater, which is nourished as well by all the gifts and things she has from her friends; says that no one dares admonish Mater, especially not the vicaress.

Says that the bursaress is too sharp, and is of such a disposition that the sisters don't dare ask her for anything.

Declares that the wash of the Jesuits is a cause of much dissension, since the number of religious is already small and thus there are few people in choir, for eight people are necessary to do that wash.

Inner prayer is observed in the evening, but in the morning each is left to

her own devotions.

No one comes to sleep her except the confessors when a sister is sick, or religious from our own order.

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Though some guests are indeed served at the grille, none of the sisters eats or drinks with them.

Disapproves that the portress gossips at the grille for long with strangers, without anyone else present.

Wishes that the convent could be placed under the Franciscans.

7 Sister Joanna van Outhagen, 50 years old, professed 26 years, after the usual promise.

Says that Sister Joanna Schoenssetters is kind as an angel to people from outside, but surly toward the sisters, and though she's been rebuked for it by Mater there's been no improvement.

Wishes that the Vicaress would admonish Sister Margaret that when she's in the kitchen she wouldn't start in about the faults of other sisters, for it then happens that if the kitchen-sister can't keep quiet, there arises much dissension.

Complains that the bursaress is much too surly and unfriendly.

Admits that the greatest attachments here are among the Mater, Bursaress, Vignarola, and Lesken Joos.

Prays that the convent may be placed under the Franciscans, since they may expect much fruit from them.

8 Sister Joanna de Vorster, age 65, professed 26 years, after promising, etc.

Wishes that only one nun, with a lay sister, would be assigned to the gate, for otherwise there is want in choir.

Further has handed over a letter written by her, labeled A, which she wishes to be regarded as if she had written it here.

Prays that the convent may be placed under the Franciscans.

10 Sister Maria Joos, Bursaress, age 45, professed 24 years, after promising

as usual.

She knows no outstanding faults here, except that Mater and Vicaress are not one, which is a cause of division. As a reason she says that Mater speaks hard, and that Vicaress agrees with those who complain about Mater.

Complains that Mater is most devoted to her poor friends, to whom she gives what Vignarola has received as gifts from her friends; other religious also offer to that end those things which they can do without.

Attached to the Vicaress are some who are inclined to murmuring, such as Maria Coninxloo, Anna Servranx, and Joanna Schoenssetters.

/5/

Finds it advisable that each religious should have the same amount of linen, for though it's shared evenly some get more from their friends.

Wishes that the infirmarian were a sister who didn't go out, as it now is, for while she's out the sick aren't well cared for.

To the sick the bursaress gives according to the means of the convent, as she does to the well.

Says that it's difficult on workday mornings to read all the Divine Office together; thinks it would be well to have half an hour inner prayer after Prime, and that the other hours of the Office be read between the two Masses.

And wishes that they may commune every week, for which she hopes the confessor will be prepared. To this end she prays that the convent be placed under the Franciscans.

Says that Mater sometimes goes and speaks alone with Vignarola in the evening after Compline, to the unedification of the community, since this is a time when silence is to be strictly observed.

Says that it's the custom here to hold vigils with 9 lessen (readings) and a Mass whenever any nun's father or mother or brother or sister has died, which is a great burden for the convent.

Believes that washing the linen of the Jesuits is not unprofitable, since through this the convent has 60 florins a year, and it costs only 20 florins to do, and those busy with it could not together earn 60 florins on their

own.

For guests the convent has no expenses except for butter and bread, and no one sleeps here except the friars when a sister is sick, and religious of this order. Wishes that beguines could sleep here as well.

- 10 Sister Maria Coninxloo, 34 years old, professed 14 years. Has handed over a letter written by her and labeled B, which she wishes to be regarded as if she had written it here.

Wishes that the Bursarress were more friendly and not so surly toward the sick, and that she displayed a common love for each, for to Sister Vignarola she gives a double portion, and Mater has a much better portion, in fact when there's something leftover at the guests' table which could be given to the sick, well it's given to Mater instead, which isn't very friendly to the community.

Prays that the convent may be placed under the Franciscans.

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- 11 Sister Maria de Smet, Refteress, 32 years old, professed 11 years, after promising etc. Prays that the Jesuit wash may be discontinued here, considering the small size of our community and that choir can hardly be performed.

Wishes that the lay sisters would not bring home so much news, for it's a cause of much distraction. And that they wouldn't waste so much time learning such things, especially Lesken Joos, Fransen [Sannen], and Magdalena [Remmens]. Finds it advisable that only one be allowed to go out.

There is no constant discord here. Though Sister Margaret gives great cause, since she sits from morn until eve in the kitchen with Schoensetters and during this time she recounts the faults of others and they confirm each other in this way, for which they ought to be separated [MARGIN: NOTA].

It seems that the factionalism among Mater, Maria and Lesken Joos and Vignarola is a cause of much evil.

And doesn't know what to say about guests, except she wishes that they

could be fed not at the expense of the convent.

Prays to be under the Franciscans.

- 12 Sister Anna Servrancx, age 37, professed 11 years. Wishes that Mater were a bit more friendly, for she's a bit of a respecter of persons and more friendly to some than others, namely to the Bursarress, Vignarola, and Elisabeth Joos. Declares as well that the Bursarress is also a respecter to the same.

Prays that they may be relieved of the Jesuit wash, which brings no peace here, because of the difficulty.

The sick are cared for very soberly, because of our sober means.

Prays to be placed under the Franciscans.

- 13 Sister Anna Vignarola, age 29, professed 9 years. Hands over a certain letter, signed by her, which she wishes to be regarded as if she had written it here, and is labeled C. Says in addition, that if the wash of the Jesuits is unprofitable or a cause of unrest, then she wishes it would be halted by Mater.

Last she prays that the convent may be placed under the jurisdiction of the [Franciscan] order.

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- 14 Sister Margaret Geraerts, age 28, professed 5 years, after promising as usual. Says that Mater and Vicaress are not unified, and believes the greatest blame lies with Vicaress, who when anyone comes complaining about Mater only confirms them, rather than speaks well of her. For which reason the witness doesn't seek her out.

Says also that the Vicaress tries to stop any novices from going to speak with Mater, which the witness experienced herself as a novice. Adds that the last professed, who has since died, complained to her that when Vicaress was busy she didn't dare go speak to Mater on her own to seek solace.

Wishes that the Offices wouldn't be read consecutively in the mornings, but only to Prime.

And wishes that the Jesuit wash would be halted because of many inconveniences.

Prays last of all that they may be placed under the Franciscans.

- 15 Sister Adriana Truis, Mater, 43 years old, professed 27 years, has handed over a certain letter which she wishes to be regarded as if she had composed it here, and labeled D.

15 October 1633 [The Lay Sisters]

- 1 Sister Marie van Roy, Sacristan [of the church], 56 years old, professed 37 years. After promising as others to speak the truth. Says that the community is unified without any remarkable dissension. The statutes and rule are observed well. Silence is observed well. Wishes there were more means to care for the sick, for in such a state everyone must now care for herself. Complains that Sister Joanna Schoenssetters makes herself too much the boss, and busies herself with everything and everyone, which causes much unrest. Says that she herself must provide for everything in the church, wine, Mass-bread, and communion-bread, except light which the convent provides. Prays to be released from her office. And since she's been asked by others to pray to be placed under the Franciscans, so does she request the same, though disposing herself to the will of her superior.

- 2 Sister Anna Schaapmeesters, age around 70, professed 36 years. Says she has noticed that Sister Joanna Schoenssetters is very difficult toward the community, that she speaks coarsely when someone reacts to her. Prays that the convent may be placed under the Franciscans, for every week now they have to go search them out [to confess], though it's improved a bit lately.

/8/

- 3 Sister Magdalena Remmens, 50 years old, professed 25 years, after promising, etc. Says things would go better here if Mater and Vicaress

could get along, supposes that the cause is that Vicaress doesn't subject herself enough to her superior, and they've had misunderstandings from the beginning. Says Mater could fulfill the office of bursar and her own office as well as the current bursar fulfills hers alone. Says that Joanna Schoenssetters makes herself master of all, such that Mater doesn't even dare set herself against her. Prays that the convent may be placed under the Franciscans. Gives for reason that it suits her better, and for the love of God.

- 4 Sister Lesken Joos, Gardener, 43 years old, professed 24 years. After promising, etc. Says there are no remarkable faults, and those that occur are corrected in chapter, which is held every Friday. Admits that Bursar is a bit harsh and that the lay sisters are sometimes unsettled because of it. Sister Joanna Schoenssetters spares no one, neither Mater nor confessor, and wishes to follow her own will in all things, and to be commanded by no one, to be boss in everything. Complains that Vicaress agrees with her too much, and comes to gossip with her in the kitchen. If anyone comes complaining to Vicaress, she agrees with them all, whether they're for Mater or against, and seeks not to be a reconciler. Admits that Sister Marcelis under guise of illness has a special barrel of beer in a special cellar, and has the key to it, which Mater goes along with to keep the peace. Says that sisters wanting any good beer must buy it from bursar with money kept by Mater, and in which case she gives it out. But the sick are provided for by the convent if they have no money [of their own]. Wishes that beguines who come from outside the city may be allowed to lodge here, as our sisters who travel outside may lodge in beguinages. Prays that this convent may be placed under the Franciscans, in the hope that they would show more affection to the same. Says that people coming from outside have bread and butter set before them, but not people from town. And the religious never eat nor drink at the grille.

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- 5 Sister Joanna Schoenssetters, age 38, professed around 10 years. After promising as usual. Says in the first place that the Mater is very lax in

observing the statutes. Silence is not well observed. And though there are warnings in chapter about faults, there is no consequence. The portresses do not watch the gates well, but often let children inside. It happened this summer that a friar came for a sick sister, and at that time a daughter from In the Leopard brought in coal (*colen, which could be cabbage too*), and then the religious led her around to the infirmary, and the choir, and the cellar, and other places. Also says that the cloister-sisters are always ready to let people in when they bring wood or other things, under the pretext of helping them, and in the meantime they go into various places, including the dormitory. Admits that some sisters go to talk in the neighborhood, and tell the faults of the convent, for hours on end and then bring back what others have said, namely Sister Lesken Joos. Complains that Mater is much too often at the grille with laypeople, two or three hours, which causes inconvenience in the community, since they cannot then go ask her permission to do this or that, and don't dare ask the Vicarress, for Mater wants everyone to ask her each time. Complains that in choir and in the infirmary there's too much chattering, so that the priests in the church can hardly hear, and sometimes during Mass there is often much walking to and fro in the dormitory above the church. Complains also that this convent is visited seldom [by the archbishop] and through this the hearts remain closed. Says that Mater has many poor friends to whom she gives much, but which the convent needs. And conspiring with her are the Bursarress, Maria de Smet, Vignarola, Margaret Geraerts, Lesken Joos, and Margaret Leyniers. Complains that some ingratiate themselves among the confessors, which restricts the consciences of others.