UDALSCALC OF AUGSBURG

The Life of Saint Conrad

Vita Chounradi

SABBATISMUS

Udalscalc of Augsburg (fl. 1120–1150)
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Prologue

To the most holy Pope Calixtus, Ulrich, servant of the Church of Constance, together with the whole fold of the Lord's flock entrusted to him: the vows of obedience and service that are his due, with earnest prayer. With the readier thanksgiving we magnify the clemency of the divine regard, which under the helm of your fatherhood comforts our days with many blessings, since we rejoice both in the peaceful state of affairs and in the new glory of the saints by which divers churches are made illustrious. For just as the splendour of the true Sun has pierced many parts of the world through the merits of his elect, as through so many rays, so too, turning towards our West, it has in our times flooded all Alemannia with no lesser light through the signal miracles of Conrad of happy memory, bishop of Constance. When, for the sake of his glory, I had long since besought the presence of the Apostolic See with frequent letters that he might be canonised, as is the custom of the churches, I received this answer, an unalterable decision: that his life must be read and approved in a general council, and that suitable witnesses to the signs which are being or have been wrought through him must also be brought there; so that the reverence of the faithful might rise up, universal, to meet

such great benefits of heavenly gifts, and envy, which spares not even the dead, might thereby be silenced in each particular, since the sorcerers of Pharaoh are overcome by the finger of God. Therefore I have taken pains to gather the following little work from the notes of the fathers, which contain this man's most worthy life before God rather than miracles, which are sometimes common to the reprobate and to the saints, and to send it to your Highness for examination, preferring that a simpler style should lie open to shame than that a city which ought to be set upon a hill should lie hidden any longer in the valley of torpor and oblivion. Lastly I have added, out of the countless signs for which, on credible testimony, very many nations rejoice in his memory, only a few, lest, as they are a joy to those who see them, so by their very abundance they should breed weariness in those who hear of them.

HERE BEGINS THE LIFE

1

Blessed Conrad, then, sprung from a noble stock of the Alemanni, like a shoot in paradise breaking into fuller flower, adorned the illustrious line of his birth. For him whom a lofty birth according to the flesh brought forth illustrious, nobility of spirit made more illustrious and more excellent still, so that from his tenderest years he passed over wholly into it. Heavenly grace accompanied his first years with the beginnings of virtue, and what manner of man he was to be was

already being shaped in him, in no small measure for his age. In due course his parents gave him to the brethren of the Church of Constance to be instructed in the knowledge of letters; received into their fellowship by the lot of Him to whom we belong, he was initiated into the Levitical ministry, to keep watch at the tabernacle which God has pitched. Nor was the anointing of the Spirit wanting to the heart of its pupil, and it did not suffer the labour of the man who taught him from without to be in vain, while he, as one taught of God, stored up the more ardently the seeds of every liberal discipline, to bring them forth one day in manifold fruit.

2

When in these studies he had passed the slippery stage of that age, he strengthened his mind by progress in sounder understanding and habit, so far that he tempered the heat of corruptible nature with the fear of God, and thereby a seat of wisdom was founded in his breast. For, seated as it were on the loftier throne of gravity of manners, he marvelled, when he looked back, that he had escaped the precipice of youth with unharmed step; yet, not presuming on the innocence he had kept thus far, he ruled his life by the observance of a stricter frugality.

3

At that time the reverend pontiff Noting presided over the Church of Constance; and

when he learned of this man's commendable and honourable manner of life, he took him into the work of his own ministry, so that, like Joshua, he might be trained to be set over the people of God, and taught how, succeeding the bishop himself as Joshua succeeded Moses, he should one day exercise spiritual leadership. Applying himself, then, to the public and private business of the Church's charge, as one greater in counsel and readier in speech by the grace of him of whose fulness we have all received (Jn 1:16), he was heard by all with close attention and not without wonder, since in every cause and towards every person he remained the same in himself, yet seemed to others to vary as the nature of each case required. Towards the needy and the poor (Ps 41:2), as one who understood that there was a want which riches had kept far from him, he desired to know it by compassion, reckoning himself more wretched and lower than others if he did not succour each one as far as he could. For all the oppressed who in those days came to the bishop for relief, here was easy access, here an advocate not bought, here, in short, a helper in their troubles. But since a man of such virtue had to be proved in a worthier exercise, he was elected provost by the brethren, and thereby the common good was provided for. For, in keeping with the honour of the high office he had gained, the good he had hitherto done by will he now did towards all by the generosity of his means, the more so as he knew nothing of the blindness of ambition, which avarice surely begets; but the

greater he was, the more he pursued humility, and the more widely he embraced the kindness of charity. No less was he himself held honourable and lovable by all, now for reverence of his dignity, now for affection towards his fatherliness; and they judged that age truly happy in which a man of such example was given to the world by God.

4

Meanwhile the aforesaid bishop Noting, paying the debt of human nature, died; and his body was buried by the holy and venerable Ulrich, bishop of Augsburg. This father of admirable life, being guided by a heavenly oracle in the choice of a bishop for the widowed church, proclaimed a three days' fast to all the clergy and people, declaring it fitting that the chief counsels in divine matters should be sought with greater devotion from the Spirit of counsel. And when on the appointed day there was a great gathering of both sexes and of every age, all waited eagerly to see whom father Ulrich, full of God, would be the first to name as a fit shepherd for the Lord's flock. He, instructed by the Spirit, urged that Conrad, who was not only blameless but perfect in every point of the pattern by which the Apostle describes a bishop, be taken up for this good work. At once this cry was on the lips of all: “According to the wish of all, God has given us a bishop!” So Constance raised her Conrad, resisting and crying out that he was unworthy, to the pontifical throne, and lifted her elect to the very heavens with

praises. The clergy rejoiced that they had been granted such a bishop, one able to rule them with prudence and with providence, since the one chiefly concerns their order and of the other it stands in special need. For although the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light (Lk 16:8), yet their eye is much darkened towards that wisdom which is from above (Jas 3:17), whose rays shine more clearly upon those dedicated to God, as upon their own. And their purer gaze must be guarded by the watchful care of him who presides over them, lest it be troubled by any mist of this dark world. For the purple in which the golden altar of the tabernacle of the covenant is wrapped cannot bear the rain, whereas coverings of haircloth take the storm of whirlwind and showers without harm.

5

But to bring my pen back to the new bishop: the people rejoiced in so excellent a shepherd, by whose voice they were ceaselessly invited to the richest pastures of heavenly blessedness, and whose life in no way departed from sound doctrine. For since unlearned folk are so disposed that, if a preacher does not act according to the doctrine he teaches, they will not believe even the truth he speaks, this teacher of truth, this worker of justice, was carried on the praise of the people by the commendation of his works, and so won not a few souls for God. The poor declared that in him they had truly found a father; in

his days the furnace of their misery cooled, and their nakedness or hunger was comforted by the unceasing bounty of that hospitable man. For them, too, he built a house in the city itself, in which he arranged that twelve poor men, after the hallowed number of the princes of the Church, should be fed continually, besides others arriving at every hour. Lastly, the very nobles and the powerful of the world learned by his example to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet 5:6), and there was now no condition of mortals of either sex that was not instructed by his example or teaching, or refreshed by his kindness.

6

Moreover, he enriched the principal church of the Mother of God with a twofold treasure: with abundant relics of the saints gathered from every side, and with the precious brilliance of metals, of gold and of gems. He also built three basilicas, one outside the city wall and two within, and dedicated them with an ample endowment. In the one of them founded in honour of blessed Maurice he adorned all round with wonderful goldsmith's work a sepulchre of the Lord made in the likeness of that at Jerusalem; and there too he established twelve clerics, assigning them stipends. He also increased the number of the brethren of the cathedral church, giving them from his own property a spacious and memorable estate, lest, if those who serve as soldiers of God suffered too heavy a lack of food or clothing,

there should creep in that venom of the serpents, as among those who murmured in the desert, which is put to flight only by beholding the Lord's Passion. For although he knew that to them that fear God nothing is wanting (Ps 34:10), since they abound either in goods or in that patience alone by which they overcome want, he strove nevertheless in every way to take care that the little ones of Jesus should not be offended by any stumbling-block, even the least. For, full of eyes before and behind (Rev 4:6), he looked to things present and to things to come; and there was no pursuit of the Church's tradition or of religion from which the greatness of the labour could frighten his mind, burning as it was in God.

7

Three times he braved the perils of the sea, to see Jerusalem as often, even if only the earthly one; counting it no small thing to behold with the sight of the flesh the land of promise, where, passing beyond the figures of the patriarchs and the oracles of the prophets, he might contemplate with the eyes of faith God made man himself, whom they foretold, unlocking the seven seals of the humanity he had taken.

8

He enjoyed the friendship of the aforementioned father Ulrich, as David did that of Samuel, and exercised it in frequent visits to each other. And not unfittingly: for here a bishop was chosen

through a bishop in the same Spirit in which there a king was anointed through a prophet. Now there is in the territory of Constance a castle named Laufen from the nature of its site; and while they were staying there together, one day, as they marvelled at the vast flood of the Rhine plunging there as if into an abyss and boiling up again with a terrible look, they saw two birds circling with ceaseless flight about the rocks in the midst of the river. Again and again, as their circling flagged, they began to be all but swept down by the torrent, and rising once more they offered a pitiful spectacle to those who watched. Nor were the eyes of the saints long baffled, the matter unexplained; for they were taught by the Spirit that souls not yet fully purged were being tormented, under the form of birds, by that kind of torment. They hastened, therefore, to the most renowned succour of the heavenly table; and Ulrich, as the guest, was constrained to go first and offer the Victim of life. When this had been received by God, only one little bird was to be seen; the other Victim of salvation was offered by the master of the house, and the other soul was set free by a like passage.

9

Moreover, that the spirit of prophecy was not wanting to the most blessed Conrad we may gather from what follows. A matter had arisen, and to settle it he went out of the house where he was staying to take counsel with a few. Gebhard, a youth of the finest disposition, who was the

third bishop after him, had sat down in sport on his seat, which had been left in the middle of the room; and being found in it, he heard, not without blushing, these words from the father as he came back: "Too soon, Gebhard," he said, "have you seized my seat; before your time you have taken the bishop's place. He shall succeed me who sits in this chair before you." How true this was, the outcome proved. For when the man of God, blessed Conrad, had been taken from this present life, one Gamenold received the vacant throne. And when he in turn died before five years were out, Constance won the said Gebhard as her shepherd, truly the heir in all things of the holiness and manners of his predecessor Conrad.

10

To recount some of his virtues the narrow bounds of a letter by no means permit, especially since they are believed to be so great that the matter of his praise seems impatient of brevity. At last, then, as my pen hastens to the passing of father Conrad, out of the many things that might be told to God's honour among the deeds of his bishop, let one be set down which may be judged not unworthy of telling, as much for imitation as for wonder. The day of Easter joy had come, on which this man, in the solemn rite of the Mass, offered to God the Father the Lamb by whose blood both the lintel of our intention and the doorposts of body and soul are cleansed. Having received, then, the sacrament of the Lord's Body, he came to partake of his Blood. The chalice, as

the custom is, was covered with the paten; a spider was seen to have fallen into the liquor of life. The creature threatened the outward man with death, but meanwhile he was quickened by the immortal draught. What did the minister of the heavenly banquet do? Girded with the highest faith, he reckoned nothing in this mortal, nothing deadly; he eagerly consumed both what was sacrament and what was destruction, not forgetting that the venom of the old serpent had been made void by the antidote of the Lord's Passion. You might have seen his fellow ministers turn pale and signal to those standing round the danger of death which, as they supposed, hung over the bishop. All alike grieved and feared; the day of joy was turned to mourning. Yet when the distribution of Communion was over, beyond the hope of all he came to table to refresh limbs worn thin by fasting, but sat for some while without tasting food. They asked him quietly what he meant to do. “I am waiting,” he said, “for a guest who will be here shortly.” And leaning his head over the table, he gave the spider a way out through his open mouth; it had been able neither to die in the man of God nor to bring him death. How great then was the rejoicing of those at table, how great the wonder that arose at the man's constancy, let the reader conceive in his own mind rather than require it to be set out in words.

11

At length blessed Conrad, full of days, finished his course, kept the faith, and for the rest was to

receive from the Lord, the just judge, the crown of justice laid up for him (2 Tim 4:7–8). He passed from the darkness of this exile on the sixth day before the Kalends of December, in the nine hundred and seventy-sixth year of the Lord's Incarnation and the forty-second of his episcopate, having happily crossed the vast desert of this world by his progress in virtue, as though under this number of encampments. His spirit having thus been taken up to the heavenly homeland, his holy body was buried with all reverence in front of the church of the holy martyr Maurice, which he himself had built and in which, as we said before, he had adorned the sepulchre of the Lord with wonderful work.

12

The signal miracles of the blessed bishop Conrad, which we believe were countless in this life as well, are known in our times only in small number, through the negligence of writers; and for that reason we have refrained from committing to writing for posterity those we learned on less credible testimony; the more so as his merits have no need of ancient testimonies, being proclaimed ever anew at his tomb by the grace of every kind of healing.

13

To tell some of them, then: we have seen two men blind from birth given sight there at different times; and the promises of the Truth were

fulfilled: He that believeth in me, he says, the works that I do, he also shall do (Jn 14:12). For Christ gave sight to a man blind from birth; and what the Pharisees, who cavilled at it, cannot do under Moses, Conrad through Jesus can do, and will be able to do.

14

It is told that a certain man, deprived for four years of the use of both feet, went about for six months round this man's shrine propped on crutches, and continued night and day in frequent prayers for the recovery of his health. There, one day, as he leaned on his wooden legs and was more than usually intent upon his accustomed prayer, his sight was suddenly dimmed with darkness, his hands grew stiff, his strength failed, the crutches slipped from him, and the man fell. The bystanders ran up and tried eagerly to lift the fallen man, and since he lay without voice or movement, they believed him dead. Yet as they lifted the body to perform his funeral rites, behold, they saw the half-dead man slowly open his eyes, and, with greater joy, watched him stretch out his legs, crooked until then. Restored, then, wholly and in a moment, the man brought increase both of praise to God and of faith to mortals.

15

Although signs are given not to believers but to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22), believers too are

sometimes roused by the grace of healings, that they may grow in faith, that they may advance in the hope of eternity and in the fervour of charity. A certain boy, made helpless by a long bodily affliction, crawled on hands and feet, unlike the gait of a man. Touched by the fame of the blessed man's benefits, he begged his father earnestly to have him carried to Constance. The father, rejoicing at his son's faith, granted the request. Brought, then, by boat to the place he longed for, he was carried in a little crate and laid, like some motionless thing, before the bishop's tomb. Then, when the offering had been made, he was tipped out of it, so that the bystanders were moved to pity at his wretched state. You might have seen a human being crawling like a four-footed beast; and because on entering the sanctuary he was hindered by the edge of the threshold or of the steps, he was forced to stretch out his twisted knees. Climbing with such effort, he reached the altar of the Mother of God; and there, about to offer his little gift, he began first to cling to it, then to reach higher with his hands, until he had fulfilled his vows. In this way, then, the creature that had gone bent to the ground was left upright, and in place of a misshapen being the father received back his son whole. You would have believed that the Mother of the Lord had bestowed this, had the simpler faith of the one healed agreed with it. But that Conrad could do it through her and with her, no one doubts; and so what the needy one obtains is not unfit-

tingly ascribed to both, from the one in hope, from the other in fact.

16

We have seen a woman, so contracted that the soles of her feet furrowed her buttocks, roll herself about the mausoleum of the father so often named, and for some days beg his intercession with all her strength. When her former power of walking had been restored, she was for many years in that place a witness to the cure she had obtained.

17

Another woman, too, worn out by an illness of ten years, came to the point where ulcerous matter broke out dangerously both from her left side and from her neck. At length that loathsome flux somewhat dried up, but the arm with the hand on the same side remained wasted. Then she often saw in her sleep that she was standing at the blessed man's shrine and going away from it healed. On waking she grieved over a health that was only imagined, but was consoled by a certain more hidden hope. In this hope she entered the city with others whom the feast of that season had drawn; and while her companions hurried to the church, she alone was kept at her lodging by shame at her nakedness. O wonderful, O astounding judgments of the Creator! For many know it not: in perfect health they abound in riches, they are naked of justice, and

they go about adorned with gems and purple; but this poor little woman, afflicted with the cruellest torments, hid herself in shame like naked Adam, except that he grieved over his expulsion from paradise, she over her separation from the church; both, nonetheless, subject to death and therefore to the confusion of shame. Since poverty, then, kept this poor woman from public places, the wretched creature was tormented by a twofold grief, of frustrated hope and of beggary, and with streams of abundant tears she moved some who knew her to pity and compassion. So clothes were collected with popular zeal and she was dressed; and a great crowd led her to him who until then had appeared to her in vision. Over his sarcophagus, offering her withered hand supported by her right, she made with full faith a sacrifice of her misery. Nor was she long kept waiting in her supplication: the hand, together with the arm, was given back living movement, and she drew it back.

18

Likewise a girl accompanied the countless multitude that streamed to this place; from her mother's womb she had been tormented by fingers twisted into the palm. When she had been cured on the spot, she went out, from wantonness or simplicity, concealing the matter. At once she was seized by her former infirmity; crippled, at a loss in her utter bewilderment, she was in distress. Yet she quickly returned, confessed what

she had concealed, and, to the wonder of all, received again the health she had lost.

19

A certain Frenchman of Poitiers, lame for twelve years, came to the city of Constance, an aged wayfarer. He was not supported, as is usual, by a wooden stump in place of one foot; but, with crutches chafing his armpits, he went about three-footed. For his shin and foot had withered and been wasted almost to the thinness of a pipe, while all the harmful humour had gathered in the hollow of the knee, so that the knee had swelled to a very great size. So he stayed six months in the city, and, seeing such benefits of healing, he took heart in the hope of recovering his health. He frequented the church and humbly begged that the holy father would have pity on him, who had now spent a long time in pain and had come from far away. Meanwhile the most holy night of Pentecost came, which he spent devoutly keeping vigil about his tomb. When the vigils of Matins were reached, the said limbs, long since dead, began to be wrenched with a new torment, so that he was now more troubled by the sudden pain than by the loss of his walking. In a short while he lost consciousness, and his very voice was taken from him. The hour for singing the canticle "Te Deum laudamus" was at hand, and the man was recovering his strength together with his natural gait. So God was praised with humble jubilation, while the Spirit, the Paraclete, consoled all, both by his own feast and by the man's deliverance.

20

A certain boy, enrolled among the clergy but crippled by paralysis while still young, was brought by his parents to this patron. And because they were not of humble birth, many gathered who grieved with them over both the boy's affliction and his parents'. Surrounded, then, by no small crowd, they laid their sick one before the shrine of the man of God and threw themselves on the ground in supplication for him. What more? Their faith was regarded from on high, the sick boy was raised up by the merits of Conrad, the High Priest was honoured in the minister of the more perfect tabernacle, and God was proclaimed wonderful in his saints (Ps 68:36).

21

In a certain convent of nuns two virgins were suffering from different illnesses: the one, from constant vomiting, had kept down no food for eight months and was despaired of; the other, undone by a very grave paralysis, was in danger. When they learned of the fame of this father's powers, they were drawn by holy hope from the very bars of the cloister, but were held back from appearing in public by shame both at their sickness and at their tender age. So they waited for night to resolve this wavering, and in it, placed in a boat, they reached the city at the first watch, for they were not far away. Brought in, and placed as it were before the very feet of the bishop, they prostrated themselves with fullest faith; and

spending the night there they poured out prayers with tears for the health so long hoped for. Now in that same place a wooden cup of the said man has been kept to this day with due veneration; and when they had tasted a little water from it with the greatest eagerness, a certain heavenly power went with the water and wrought a perfect cure in them. Voices of praise were raised to heaven on every side; for with the very joy with which the clergy and people of the city escorted them, the virgins were received safe and sound by their sisters.

22

We have seen also another woman, paralysed from infancy and healed there when already grown. Forgetful of the grace she had obtained, she wandered about too wantonly; and having lost her virginity, she became pregnant by a certain cleric under vows. So she conceived sorrow and brought forth iniquity (Ps 7:15), for at once she put on again the confusion of her former infirmity. The wretched woman was driven to penance; she sought again father Conrad's clemency, and, healed once more through him, obtained pardon. Yet afterwards she never recovered entirely, so that her weaker limbs might lament the integrity of her violated soul.

23

Now, as his fame drew them, the illustrious man was sought out by the sick not only where

he rests, but in every land his help was implored and invoked in all their straits. Thus a certain youth, wishing once at evening to cross the river Thur by an untried ford, was suddenly caught fast in the muddy bottom and among the roots of trees heaped together by the water. He was driven on by the stronger current, and since, held fast as he was, he found no place to resist or to turn aside anywhere, he spread both legs apart to swim. He furrowed the river with his hands, but as his feet were held motionless, his head was overwhelmed by the force of the water and the brushwood. Those who were minding on the bank the clothes he had taken off to go in naked, stunned, called the young man's parents with loud cries. The pitiful event was told with sobs, in broken voices, by his two sisters (for they had come with the brother who was drowned); the place of the danger was shown; they ran this way and that, searched, and did not find him. The whole village, struck by the wailing of those who cried out, came running; and as the one they sought did not appear, they toiled with nets at least to recover the body for burial. The darkness of night was already coming on, which put an end to the search and denied the hope of finding him. So by the common wish of all the man was commended to the special patronage of blessed Conrad, whether in the body or out of the body (2 Cor 12:2), and so they went back to their sorrowing homes. When a third part of the first watch of the night had passed, behold, the water, grown heavier, as though indignant at the

obstacle, gathered itself into a kind of whirlpool about the creature in its way, and, bursting forth in this winding rush, carried him across to the bank on the other side of the water. Brought to land, he marvelled at the dry ground as at something foreign to him; he did not in the least suspect that water, which had been unable to destroy him, was contrary to his nature, since the Creator is served by both alike, whether for life or for death. Moreover, wondering within himself at the change of things, and why he who had gone under the waters in broad daylight should now suffer this darkness, he reckoned, the order reversed, the long delay of his peril to have been very short, whereas on the contrary everything delightful is thought short and everything perilous long. Coming to himself at length, he went back home, not yet mindful of his nakedness. Yet, recognised as their son, he was received into his parents' embrace. The next day dawned, and, as one risen from the underworld, he was hemmed in by a crowd rushing upon him as upon a messenger from another world; they asked him what had befallen him and how he had escaped. No other manner of his deliverance, then, was found, after no small inquiry, than the one which, by the agreeing faith of all, was proved most true: that he had been set free by the merits of him to whom, bereft of all mortal help, he had been singularly commended.