196 Praise, To Praise (*Laus, Laudare*)

Something is accustomed to be given in three ways. Either by comparison to a noble object, thus Cant. 4[:4, 7]: The betrothed commends her beloved by comparing him to the tower of “David.” Or by approval of virtue as there, “You are all fair.” Or by annihilation of deformity, as in that place “there is not a spot in you.”

Again, praise of a true name ought to proceed from things praiseworthy although it will be true what Seneca says,[[1]](#endnote-1) it is the same both to be praised by the wicked and on account of wickedness. Wherefore a certain person said,[[2]](#endnote-2) it is praiseworthy in the prudent to be abused by the wicked. Therefore, that one who is wicked in life if he praises someone, it makes him more suspect, because commonly each one praises another like to himself. For according to Eccli. [15:9]: “Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner.” In the *Historia Romanorum,[[3]](#endnote-3)* it is read that a certain deformed person spoke and put forward a very beautiful thought and everyone praised her for her birth so eloquently it was spoken. A certain one of the elders said she would be beautiful certainly if only from the beautiful things she had spoken, and certain others of them made her approved of life for what she said and then she was admitted, Prov. 26[:7]: “As a lame man hath fair legs in vain: so a parable is unseemly in the mouth of fools.” Where note that an object should be praised for four matters. For consistency of material as a vase of gold. For beauty of form as an image is well painted or sculpted. For utility as an efficacious medicine. For the sagacity of the agent as that the asp[[4]](#endnote-4) blocks its ear with its tail.

Again, some praise where there is nothing to be praised, Psal. [9:24]: “For the sinner is praised in the desires of his soul.” Others do not praise what is not to be praised, Eccli. 11[:2]: “Praise not a man for his beauty.”

Again, in the same place you do not praise a man before his death. Some praise what is to be praised, Psal. [108:30]: “I will give great thanks to the Lord with my mouth.”

Again, sometimes in other things one praises the evil and this is everywhere harmful because this encourages them to evil, Psal. [9:24]: “in the desires of his soul,” namely, sometimes the evil is praised as the good, and this is judging the one praising because thus he disparages himself, Eccli. 15[:9]: “Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner.” Sometimes the good praises the evil and this is inexpedient to that one so praised because in this he makes light of him, Luke 16[:8]: “The lord commended the unjust steward.”

Sometimes the good praises the good and this is fitting for the saved with due circumstances, according to this said the Psal. [112:1]: “Praise the Lord, children.” Here the Philosopher says,[[5]](#endnote-5) that the works are signs of the habit, because sometimes we praise those who do not deserve it because we believe them to be such. Therefore, Augustine says, *De verbis Domini*, book two,[[6]](#endnote-6) human praise ought not to be sought by those doing the right, so that from this they may profit, who can imitate what they praise. Wherefore the verse:[[7]](#endnote-7) If one follows it flees, if one flees it follows like a cloud. Thus, what is sought flees, and scorned praise is retained.

Isidore, *De summo bono,[[8]](#endnote-8)* if the skill in a piece of art returns praise, so the creator is praised through the created, Psal. [47:11]: “According to your name, so also is your praise unto the ends of the earth.” Chrysostom asks, *Super Mattheum in imperfectum*,[[9]](#endnote-9) what is human praise, if not the sound of winds passing? Men have ceased to speak, and man has lost his benefit. What is wisdom, to give things, and compare empty words, and thus lose the perpetual reward of God? A soothsayer approaches to the divine who desired to have his reward here. Wherefore Augustine, *83 Questionum*, chapter 36,[[10]](#endnote-10) virtue does not desire what is power in other men. Who therefore imitates the good, desires the praise of no man; who imitates the evil, he is not worthy of praise. For it is said 1 Cor. 4[:5]: “Until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God.”

1. Seneca, cf. Peter Cantor, *Verbum abbreviatum* 118 (PL 205:504): Tam turpe est laudari a turpibus quam ob turpia laudari. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II* ed, Thomas Wright and Peter Cross, Son of the Scottish Wars line 12 (Cambridge: University Press, 1996 [1839]) (p. 162): Laus est discretis a pravis vituperari.

   It is praiseworthy in the prudent to be abused by the wicked. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Hortensia in Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 8.3.3 (LCL 493:212-213): Hortensia, daughter of Q. Hortensius, pleaded the cause of women before the Triumvirs resolutely and successfully when the order of matrons had been burdened by them with a heavy tax and none of the other sex ventured to lend them his advocacy. Reviving her father’s eloquence, she won the remission of the greater part of the impost. Q. Hortensius then lived again in his female progeny and inspired his daughter’s words. If his male descendants had chosen to follow her example, the great heritage of Hortensian eloquence would not have been cut short with a single speech by a woman.

   Cf. Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon* 6.21 (Rolls 41.7.142-144): Item accedens aliquando iste imperator Dominica Quinquagesimae ad quandam capellam juxta forestam ut missam latenter audiret, ubi deformis quidam sacerdos ministrabat; mirabatur autem rex in animo cur Deus formosus tam turpem creaturam sua permitteret tractare sacramenta. Cum autem ad versum tractus ventum fuisset quo canitur. *Scitote quoniani Dominus ipse est Deus*. Sacerdos quasi socordiam clerici sui increpans, respiciendo versus imperatorem dixit, "Ipse fecit nos, et non ipsi nos." Quo dicto imperator repercussus, ipsum cito post promovit in episcopum; qui locum et gradum probis moribus honestavit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Augustine, *Sermones de sanctis* 316.2.2 (PL 38:1432-1433): Sicut enim dicuntur aspides, quando incantantur, ut non prorumpant et exeant de cavernis suis, premere unam aurem ad terram, et de cauda sibi alteram obturare, et tamen incantator producit illas: sic et isti adhuc in cavernis suis stridebant, quando in suis cordibus [Col.1433] aestuabant. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* 3.1 1109b30 (Barnes 2:1752): Since virtue is concerned with passions and actions, and on voluntary passions and actions praise and blame are bestowed, on those that are involuntary pardon, and sometimes also pity, to distinguish the voluntary and the involuntary is presumably necessary for those who are studying the nature of virtue, and useful also for legislators with a view to the assigning both of honours and of punishments. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, *De sermone Domini in monte* 2.2.5 (PL 34:1269): Laus enim humana non appeti a recte faciente, sed subsequi debet recte facientem: ut illi proficiant, qui etiam imitari possunt quod laudant; non ut hic putet aliquid eos sibi prodesse, quem laudant. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. *Thesaurus Proverbiorum Medii Aevi* ed. Samuel Singer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000) Schatten 6. Verschiedenes 75, 10:34: Si sequeris, fugiet, si fugeris, umbra sequetur, / Sic optata fugit laus et contempta tenetur.

   Wenn du folgst, wird er fliehen, wenn du geflohen bist, wird der Schatten folgen. So flieht das erwünschte Lob, und das verschmähte behält man.

   Cf. Seneca *Epistles* 101.5 (LCL 77:160-161): Id quoque, quod tenetur, per manus exit et ipsam, quam premimus, horam casus incidit.

   The very thing that we grasp slips through our hands, and chance cuts into the actual hour which we are crowding so full. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Isidore, *Sententiae* 1.4.2 (PL 83:543): Sicut ars in artificem retorquet laudem, ita rerum Creator per creaturam suam laudatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus Imperfectum in Mattheum,* Homilia 13 ex cap. 5.1(PG 56:706): Quid est enim aliud hominum laus, quam ventorum transeuntium sonus? Cessaverunt homines loqui, et perdidit fructum suum, quia propter homines fecit, ut ab eis laudaretur. Quae est autem sapientia, res dare, et verba vacua comparare: aut certe mercedem Dei contemnere in perpetuum manentem in caelis, et fugienes hominum sermones eligere? [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus 83* 36.3 (PL 40:26): virtus autem non appetit quod in aliorum hominum potestate est. Qui ergo imitatur bonos, nullius hominis appetit laudem; qui malos, non dignus est laude. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)