324 Priest (*Sacerdos*)

Concerning the ministry of the priest it requires looking into for three matters: the order of the priesthood, the obligation of the precept, and the execution of the office. Of which the first requires honor, the second duty, and the third work. Honor requires the ornament of association. Duty looks to the fear of obligation. Work demands the labor of performance.

Concerning the first, 1 Tim. 5[:17]: “Let the priests that rule well, be esteemed worthy of double honor.” But alas it is said, Amos 8[:9]: “The sun shall go down at midday.” It is a terrible sign that the sun sets in midday when it should be clearer, more splendid, and hotter. Wherefore spiritually the sun, that is, the priest or the curate sets in multiple ways, as when he is corrupted in that truth of life, justice, and teaching.

Second, he sets when he who is placed among others as an example is converted into a scandal and a stumbling block. Wherefore Gregory *Super Evangelium*,[[1]](#endnote-1) I think God would not suffer a greater prejudice than from priests, while he has placed them for the correction of others, he sees them to give examples of depravity.

Third, he sets when he is deficient in that goodness, knowledge, and teaching. Wherefore Bernard,[[2]](#endnote-2) three matters are fitting for the pastor: goodness, knowledge, and discipline. And he alludes to that word of the Psal. [118:66]: “Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge.” And the pastor subdues by goodness, attracts imitation by discipline, and makes the matter teachable by knowledge.

Fourth, the sun sets in the midday when it is eclipsing. In the curate when faith in the underlings is not fervent but inactive, charity is not hot but lukewarm, the work does not shine but is tolerated. But on the other hand, concerning the good priests that is said in 1 Pet. 2[:9]: “You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people.”

These things belong to priests for their commendation, but on the other hand about which it can be said to their confusion,[[3]](#endnote-3) You are a venal reject of priests, an obstinate race, a people of perdition. In antiquity in the old law it was not said a royal priesthood, but a priesthood of the kingdom. Just as it said in Exod. [15:26; 19:5-6]: “If thou will hear and obey my precepts,” “you will be my peculiar possession and a priestly kingdom.” And the reason is because then the priesthood depended upon the kingdom, just as an adjective upon the substantive. But the apostle Peter imitated this order calling it on the other hand a royal priesthood because now the kingdom depends upon the priesthood, the empire upon the papacy. But far be it that it would be the contrary, as namely in a way it was not a race elected but rejected through the disrepute of the priesthood, not regal but venal through simony, not a holy race but a disreputable race through pride, avarice, and fraudulence, not a people of acquisition but of perdition through malice.

¶ Again, the first priest about whom mention is made in scripture was Melchisedech. About whom, Gen. 14[:18] who meeting Abraham offered him “bread and wine”. For he was a priest of the highest God in whom it is evident that a priest principally is ordained for offering his body and blood to God figured through that bread and wine. Wherefore concerning Christ who placed this figural offering in effect on the altar of the cross by the offering of God in the Psal. [109:4]: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.”

To this priest Abraham first gave tithes from all his possessions just as it is evident there. In whom also it is figured that priests ought to be taken from the occupations of the world and from others seek to receive necessities for themselves. Wherefore Gen. 47[:22]: It was ordained by the Egyptians that the priests receive necessities for themselves from “the public stores,” and therefore for a temporal hunger “they were not forced to sell their possessions.”

Just as others of the earth these priests were free for mathematics. Just as the Philosopher says, book one of the *Metaphysics*,[[4]](#endnote-4) from which it can be deduced that two things from the beginning of the world pertained to priests and to their office, namely, to offer sacrifice to God and to be free for the sciences.

¶ And third, it is supposed and expressed in the law to pray for the people of God. First therefore the office of the priesthood is to offer sacrifice. But because all the legal sacrifices have been limited to one, therefore to that one the office of the priesthood is applied, and as they are worldlier than when they were appointed to many sacrificial victims, continence is levied on them. In truth however Lothar the cardinal deacon, who afterwards was named Innocent III, in his little book, *De contemptu mundi*,[[5]](#endnote-5) says that the sin of lust afflicts all people, old, young, priests, and clerics. But concerning priests he adds that by night they embrace the works of Venus, and in the morning, they venerate the virgin. It is shameful to say, but more shameful to hear, and most shameful to do, but let it be said it is not allowed to be done.

¶ By night they act like the son of Venus, in the morning, they offer the Son of the virgin on the altar, 1 Paral. 13[:10]: “The Lord struck Oza, because he had touched the ark” immediately after intercourse with his wife.

¶ Again, Exod. 19[:22]: “The priests that come to the Lord, let them be sanctified, lest he strike them.” What therefore will happen to those who carnally know their mistresses. John the Baptist nurtured in the desert, sanctified in the womb by the Lord, invited but did not dare to touch Christ coming to him, Matt. 3[:4-11].

Again, the people for three days before the reception of the law had to abstain from their wives. And however, Moses received it who for forty days before abstained, not eating food.

Again, Bede, upon that of *Mattheum* 8[:34]:[[6]](#endnote-6) “They besought him” to go away from them, says that those gentiles yet conscious of their fragility judged themselves to be unworthy of the presence of Christ.

Again, it was not permitted in the law for anyone to eat of the breads of proposition except only the priests and to this extent only if they were clean. Wherefore when David in necessity could give them to his men, the priest responded, “If the young men be clean, especially from women?” 1 Kings 21[:4-5] then he may eat. “And David answered, We have refrained ourselves from yesterday and the day before.” So, they who eat that sanctified bread ought to be continent for three days of continence, namely, of confession and satisfaction. Wherefore Lev. 22[:6-7]: in the law “he shall be unclean and shall not eat those things that are sanctified: but when he hath washed his” clothes. “And the sun is down.” Because until the priest is clean and the inordinate heat has subsided, he ought not consume the body of Christ. Seneca, book 4 *Declamationes* part 2,[[7]](#endnote-7) the law of the Romans was that the priest should be whole. Wherefore Metellus was blinded when he took the image of Pallas from the temple of Vesta when it was on fire, he was deprived of his priesthood. There it is proven that the priest ought to be whole in body. Wherefore Luke 22[:21-22] and concerning this the Philosopher, the second book of the *Politics*,[[8]](#endnote-8) concerning the priesthood especially it ought to be the guardian of cleanliness.

¶ Second, it pertains to the office of the priest that they guard the knowledge and require the law from their mouth because they do the business of the angel of the Lord. Wherefore Bernard, *Ad Eugenium,* book one,[[9]](#endnote-9) daily the laws make a great noise in your palace, not of the Lord but of Justinian. They however are not so much laws all the souls, by as contentions. You therefore are the pastor and bishop of which mind, you sustain these laws to chatter before you against the word, Psal. [118:85]: “The wicked have told me fables: but not as your law.” Therefore, it looks to the priests to know the law of God because it concerns them to teach it to others. For 4 Kings 17[:23-28]: when “from the land of the Assyrians” a great people were introduced into the land of Israel because it ignored the legalities of their land “the Lord sent lions among them, which killed them.” Ascertaining which, the king of the Assyrians sent for one priest to teach the people the law of the Lord and the destruction ceased.

Again, because a priest ought to know the law of the Lord, the leper ought to be brought to the priest so that he might judge concerning the leprosy, Lev. 14. Wherefore also Christ to one forcefully and healed by himself said, “Go, show yourself to the priest,” Matt. 8[:4]. Here however note that in the great churches it is allowed that there are great lights which are often extinguished. However there remains one light as if a torch always burning to which for having a light one may have recourse. So Sacred Scripture allows that the light which is of the Church in others may be extinguished frequently, in the priest however it should always shine clearly, whereby others are illuminated. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum* 34,[[10]](#endnote-10) it is a great confusion to the priesthood, when the laity are found to be more faithful and more just. For priests ought to rule the people and not be ruled in the sacerdotal sign of which. But Peter on the other hand, 1 Pet. 2[:9]: “You are a kingly priesthood.” It was an adjunct to the kingdom because then the kingdom was worthier than the priesthood. Wherefore Exod. 19[:6] it is said “You shall be to me a priestly kingdom.” But afterwards the Son of God was made a priest himself offering on the altar of the cross to God the Father the kingdom that adjoins the priesthood.

¶ Third, it pertains to the office of the priest to pray for the people, Joel. 2[:17]: “The priests the Lord's ministers shall weep, and shall say: Spare, O Lord, spare your people,” [Causa] 10, quest. 1, [c. 13], *Quia [sacerdotes]*.[[11]](#endnote-11) Therefore, they are held to pray for the people because they receive offerings from them. Wherefore in 2 Mach. 1[:23] it is said, “The priests made prayer, while the sacrifice was consuming.” The pouring out for the people, which is between the delights of the devouring, between the torments of the vomiting. Wherefore 1 Kings 12[:23] when the people sought from Samuel that he might pray for them, he responded, “Far from me be this, that I should cease to pray for you, and I will teach you the good and right way.” And in Judith 8[:33] it is said that Judith said to the priests “Let nothing else be done but to pray for me to the Lord.” These two Christ did, he prayed by night and taught by day, Luke 6[:3-4] which two priests ought to do meritoriously, “Let the priests that rule well, be esteemed worthy of double honor: especially they who labor in the word and doctrine,” 1 Tim. 5[:17]. But as Jerome says,[[12]](#endnote-12) he loses the authority of teaching, whose word is not fulfilled by work.

Again, Anselm, *De spirituali* 42,[[13]](#endnote-13) the office of the priesthood under the law was to slaughter animals of diverse kinds. But such ought to be every office of our priests spiritually to repress the bestial motives. Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum,* homily 62,[[14]](#endnote-14) among all graces the greatest is the dignity of the priesthood, if one keeps it spotless. For when they surpass above all works of God. Theirs is the greatest reward. Wherefore Bernard, *Ad Eugenium*, book 2,[[15]](#endnote-15) in the mouth of seculars nonsensical things are only nonsense. In the mouth of priests, nonsensical things are blasphemies. You have consecrated the mouth of your priest to the gospel. He is permitted to open his mouth to such matters and to open continually is a sacrifice. Wherefore Augustine in some sermon,[[16]](#endnote-16) concerning the danger of the priesthood, thus he says, if for yourselves, each can hardly render an accounting on the day of judgment, what will be the future for priests, from whom souls are sought. Therefore, considering your peril, pray for yourselves, and for things committed upon your flocks so thus we lay out spiritual pastures, so for them we can render a good accounting.

See more concerning the priest: below c. [327] Sanctity (*Sanctitas*) toward the end; above chapter [297] Prelate (*Prelatus*) toward the end.

1. Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 1.17.14 (PL 76:1146): Nullum puto, fratres charissimi, ab aliis majus praejudicium quam a sacerdotibus tolerat Deus, quando eos quos ad aliorum correctionem posuit dare de se exempla pravitatis cernit, [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bernard, cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Institutione novitiorum* Prologus (PL 176:926): Via ad ipsum sunt scientia, disciplina, bonitas; per scientiam itur ad disciplinam, per disciplinam itur ad bonitatem, per bonitatem itur ad beatitudinem. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Augustine, *Sermones ad fratres in eremo commorantes* 39 (PL 40:1306): Pax vobis, quoniam non estis genus abjectum, sed electum; non venale, sed regale sacerdotium; non gens obstinata, sed sancta; non populus perditionis, sed acquisitionis. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1 981b21 (Barnes 2:1553): Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Innocent III, *De contemptu mundi* 2.22 (PL 217:725): invadit enim senes et juvenes, mares et feminas, prudentes et simplices, superiores et inferiores, ad extremam generationem etiam sacerdotes, qui nocte Venerem amplexantur, mane vero virginem venerantur. Turpe dictu, sed turpissimum actu, dici liceat quod agi non libeat. Nocte filium Veneris agitant iu cubilibus, mane filium virginis offerunt in altari. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Bede, *In Matthaei evangelium expositio* 2.8 (PL 92:45): Et ecce tota civitas exiit obviam Jesu, et viso eo, rogabant ut transiret a finibus eorum. Ut nonnulli arbitrantur, non superbia hoc faciunt, sed humilitate, conscii fragilitatis suae, judicantes se praesentia Domini indignos, quod et Petro contigisse legimus, quando dixit: Exi a me, Domine, quia homo peccator sum (Luc. V). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 4.2 (LCL 463:438-439): Sacerdos integer sit.

Metellus pontifex, cum arderet Vestae templum, dum Palladium rapit oculos perdidit. Sacerdotium illi negatur.

A priest must be without defect.

When the temple of Vesta was on fire, the high priest Metellus lost his sight grabbing the image of Pallas. His rights as priest are refused him. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.4 1262a25-40 (Barnes 2:2003): Again, how strange it is that Socrates, after having made the children common, should hinder lovers from carnal intercourse only, but should permit love and familiarities between father and son or between brother and brother, than which nothing can be more unseemly, since even without them love of this sort is improper. How strange, too, to forbid intercourse for no other reason than the violence of the pleasure, as though the relationship of father and son or of brothers with one another made no difference. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Bernard, *De Consideratione* 1.4.5 (PL 182:732-733): Et quidem quotidie perstrepunt in palatio leges, sed Justiniani, non Domini. [Col.0733A] Justene etiam istud? Tu videris. Nam certe lex Domini immaculata, convertens animas (Psal. XVIII, 8). Hae autem non tam leges, quam lites sunt et cavillationes, subvertentes judicium. Tu ergo pastor et episcopus animarum, qua mente, obsecro, sustines coram te semper silere illam, garrire istas? Fallor, si non movet tibi scrupulum perversitas haec. Puto quod et interdum compellat clamare ad Dominum cum propheta: Narraverunt mihi iniqui fabulationes, sed non ut lex tua (Psal. CXVIII, 85). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum im Mattheum* hom. 40 ex cap. 21 (PG 56:851): Et vere magna confusio est sacerdotum, et omnium clericorum, quando laici inveniuntur fideliores eis, aut justiores. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Decretum*, Causa 10, quest. 1, c. 13, *Quia [sacerdotes]* pro omnibus orare solent, quorum elemosinas et oblationes accipiunt, qua fronte presumunt laici oblationes, quas Christiani pro peccatis suis offerunt, uel ipsi comedere, uel aliis concedere, cum ipsi non debeant ex offitio pro populo orare? Ob hoc, Papa gloriose, mittere oportet illos presumptores in excommunicationem perpetuam, ut ceteri metum habeant, et amplius hec in ecclesia non fiant. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jerome, *Epistola* 69.8 (PL 22:662): PERDIT ENIM auctoritatem docendi, cujus sermo opere destruitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Anselm, cf. Eadmer, *Liber de sancti Anselmi Similitudinibus* 94 (PL 159:661-662): Officium sacerdotis erat in Lege generis diversi pecora mactare; hujus ergo similiter officium debet esse leonem irae et crudelitatis interficere, lupum rapacitatis, taurum ferocitatis, vulpem astutiae, [Col.0662A] hircum immunditiae, glirem somnolentiae, equum et mulum luxuriae, asinum pigritiae, aliaque bestialia vitia in se occidere. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. (Pseudo)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum super Mattheum* hom. 51 ex cap. 24(PG 56:928): inter omnes autem maxima est sacerdotalis dignitas, si quis eam immaculate custodiat. Nam si super omnia opera sua pretiosiores existimat Deus animas hominum: quanto magis credibile est, ut super omnia bona sua constituat eum, qui confert Deo lucrum animarum? [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Bernard, *De consideratione* 2.13.22 (PL 182:756): Inter saeculares nugae, nugae sunt; in ore sacerdotis, blasphemiae. Interdum tamen si incidant ferendae fortassis; referendae nunquam. Magis interveniendum caute et prudenter nugacitati. Prorumpendum sane in serium quid, quod non modo utiliter, sed libenter audiant et supersedeant otiosis. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Augustine, *Sermo* 287.1 De periculo sacerdotis (PL 39:2287-2288): Si pro se, fratres charissimi, [Col.2288] unusquisque vix poterit in die judicii rationem reddere, quid de sacerdotibus futurum est, a quibus sunt omnium animae requirendae? Et ideo considerantes periculum nostrum, orate pro nobis, ut commissis nobis gregibus ita spiritualia pascua studeamus jugiter providere, ut pro eis rationem bonam reddere mereamur.

Cf. Alphonsus de Liguori, ed. Eugene Grimm, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest* (New York: St. Athanasius Press, 1889), (p. 148 n. 3): Serm. 287: Si pro se unusquisque vix poterit in die judicii rationem reddere, quid de Sacerdotibus futurum est, a quibus sunt omnium animae requirendae. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)