

PART I

Concerning the Qualifications of the One Who Comes to a Position of Spiritual Leadership

§1 *The inexperienced should not obtain authority*

No one presumes to teach an art that he has not first mastered through study. How foolish it is therefore for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority when the care of souls is the art of arts.¹ For who does not realize that the afflictions of the mind are more hidden than the internal wounds of the body? And yet, how often do they who are completely ignorant of spiritual precepts profess themselves physicians of the heart, while anyone who is ignorant of the power of medicine is too embarrassed to be seen as a physician of the body.

By divine order, everyone in a position of authority in the present age is disposed to reverence religion, but there are many who through the temptation of authority in the holy Church aspire to the glory of honor. They want to be seen as teachers and they lust to be superior to others, just as the Truth attests, “they seek the first place at feasts and the first chair in the assemblies.”² They are all the more unable to minister worthily to the office of pastoral care because they have come to the position of teaching humility solely by the means

¹Cf. Gregory the Theologian *Apology for his flight to Pontus* (Or 2).

²Cf. Matt 23.6–7. Several textual variants give a more complete excerpt from the passage.

of vanity. For indeed, the message of the teacher is confused when one thing is learned and another taught.³ Against these persons, the Lord complains through the prophet saying: "They have ruled and not from me; they have been established as princes but I knew it not."⁴ They reign by their own authority, not by the will of the supreme Ruler. They are not sustained by virtue nor a divine calling but by the kindling of their own greed. They seize rather than attain a position of spiritual authority. Nevertheless, the internal Judge both advances and ignores them, because those whom by permission he tolerates, he surely by the judgment of condemnation will not know. Just as he said to those who came to him after the miracle: "Depart from me, workers of iniquity, I know you not."⁵ The inexperience of pastors is rebuked by the voice of the Truth when, through the prophet, it is said: "The shepherds themselves knew no understanding."⁶ Again the Lord curses them: "And those who held the law did not know me."⁷ In essence, the Truth laments that he is unknown by them and declares that he does not recognize the authority of those who do not know him, because those who do not know the Lord are not known by the Lord, as Paul says: "But if anyone know not, he will not be known."⁸

This inexperience of pastors often, in truth, coincides with the merit of the laity, because however much pastors are at fault for not having the light of knowledge, it is by the means of a severe judge that those who ignorantly follow also become offenders. It is for this reason that the Truth, himself, says in the Gospel: "If the blind lead the blind, then both fall into the pit."⁹ Also the psalmist, not speaking his own will, but through his ministry as prophet, declares: "Let

³The phrase *ipsa lingua confunditur* in this context is likely a reference to the confounding of speech at Babel. Cf. Gen 11.7.

⁴Hos 8.3.

⁵Luke 13.27.

⁶Isa 56.11.

⁷Jer 2.8.

⁸1 Cor 14.38.

⁹Matt 15.14.

their eyes be blinded that they not see and let their backs always be bent."¹⁰ For indeed, those persons are "eyes" who, placed upon the face of the highest dignity, undertake the office of leading others; while those who cling behind them are called the "backs." Therefore, the back is bent by the blinded eyes because when those who lead lose the light of knowledge, then certainly those who follow are bent down by carrying the burden of their sins.

§2 *No one should assume a place of leadership who cannot put to practice what he has learned by study*

Moreover, there are some who investigate spiritual precepts with great care but trample upon what they analyze by the way in which they live. Hastily they showcase what they have learned, not by practice but by study. And the very words that they preach, they impugn by their habits. Just as when a shepherd walks on steep ground, the flock follows him to the precipice, so too the Lord, through the prophet, laments the contemptible knowledge of pastors, saying: "When you drank the clearest water, you troubled the rest with your feet; and my sheep were nourished with that which you trampled with your feet and they drank that which your feet troubled."¹¹ Indeed, pastors "drink the clearest water" when, with an accurate understanding, they imbibe the streams of truth. But the same "disturb the water with their feet" when they corrupt the study of holy meditation with an evil life. Obviously, the sheep drink that which was muddied by feet when, as subjects, they do not attend to the words that they hear but imitate only the depraved examples that they observe. While the laity thirst for what is said, they are perverted by the pastor's works as if they were to drink mud from a polluted fountain. Consequently it is written: "[Bad] prophets are

¹⁰Ps 68.24.

¹¹Ezek 34.18–19.

a snare of ruin.”¹² Likewise, the Lord speaks again of [evil] priests through the prophet: “They were a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel.”¹³

No one does more harm in the Church than he who has the title or rank of holiness and acts perversely. This is because no layperson presumes to refute the delinquent. Moreover, because such a sinner is honored by the dignity of his rank, his offenses spread considerably by way of example. And yet everyone who is unworthy would flee from such a great burden of guilt if, with the attentive ear of the heart, he pondered the saying of the Truth: “He that scandalizes one of these little ones who believes in me, it would be better for him that a millstone was hung around his neck and that he was cast into the depth of the sea.”¹⁴ Indeed, the “millstone” symbolizes the circuitousness and labor of the secular life, and the “depth of the sea” suggests final damnation. Whoever, therefore, gives off the appearance of sanctity but destroys another by his words or example, it would be better for him that his earthly acts, demonstrated by worldly habits, would bind him to death than for his sacred office to be a source for the imitation of vice in another. Indeed, his punishment in hell would be less terrible if he fell alone.

§3 *Concerning the burden of spiritual leadership: every adversity should be despised and every prosperity feared*

This, then, we have said briefly so that we could show how great is the burden of leadership, lest he who is unqualified might rashly venture into spiritual guidance and through his own lust for rank lead others to perdition. This, indeed, James piously prohibits saying: “My brothers, do not become many masters.”¹⁵ Hence, the Mediator

¹²Cf. Hos 9.8.

¹³Ezek 44.12. This paragraph is reminiscent of an extended section of Gregory the Theologian's *Apology for his flight to Pontus* (Or 2.65–68).

¹⁴Matt 18.6.

¹⁵Jas 3.1.

Concerning the Life of the Pastor

§1 *How one who has in due order come to the position of leadership ought to conduct himself*

The active life of the leader ought to transcend that of the people in proportion to how the life of a shepherd outshines that of his flock. Necessarily, then, the one who is so highly regarded that the people are called his flock is bound to consider how important it is that he retain a life of righteousness. It is necessary, therefore, that he should be pure in thought, exemplary in conduct, discerning in silence, profitable in speech, a compassionate neighbor to everyone, superior to all in contemplation, a humble companion to the good, and firm in the zeal of righteousness against the vices of sinners. He must not relax his care for the internal life while he is occupied by external concerns, nor should he relinquish what is prudent of external matters so as to focus on things internal.

Let us now address these things that we have briefly enumerated and treat them at length.

§2 *That the spiritual director is to be pure in thought*

The spiritual director should always be pure in thought, inasmuch as no impurity ought to pollute the one who has assumed the responsibility of cleansing the hearts of others. For it is necessary that the hand that would cleanse must itself be cleansed, otherwise it will soil everything that it touches because it is itself dirty. On this account,

it is said through the prophet: "Be clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord."¹ They "carry the vessels of the Lord" who undertake, with a trust in their frequent consultations, to lead the souls of their neighbors to the eternal sanctuary. Let them determine, therefore, just how cleansed they ought to be to carry in the bosom of their own responsibility these "living vessels" to the temple of eternity.

Thus, it was assigned by the divine Voice that on the breast of Aaron, the vestment of judgment should be closely bound by bands.² This was so that the heart of the priest would not possess fluctuating thoughts but be bound by reason alone. Nor should he consider indiscrete or unnecessary thoughts. The one who is an example for others should always convey, by the seriousness of his life, what a wealth of reason he bears in his breast. And concerning this vestment, it was strictly added that the names of the twelve patriarchs should also be depicted.³ For to carry always the inscribed fathers on the breast is to meditate on the life of the ancients without interruption. For now, the priest walks blamelessly when he admires the examples of the fathers who came before him, when he considers unceasingly the footsteps of the saints, and when he suppresses evil thoughts so as to avoid stepping beyond proper order. Further, it is fittingly called a "vestment of judgment" because the spiritual director should always discern between good and evil and carefully consider what things are suitable in themselves: for whom, when, and how. He should not seek anything for himself, but reckon his neighbor's well-being as his own advantage. Concerning this it is written: "But you shall put on the breastplate of judgment, the doctrine and truth, which will be on Aaron's breast, when he goes before the Lord, and he will bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his breast in the sight of the Lord continually."⁴ This bearing of the of the judgment of the children of Israel before the sight of the Lord

¹Isa 52.11.

²Cf. Ex 28.15.

³Cf. Ex 28.30.

⁴Ex 28.30.

means that when the priest investigates the causes of his subjects' [behavior, he does so] with the sole intention of the internal Judge, so that he does not add an element of human reasoning as he dispenses his judgments on behalf of God. Otherwise, personal afflictions might get in the way of zealous correction.

And when he shows himself to be zealous against the vices of others, let him prosecute his own, so that hidden envy does not defile the tranquility of judgment, nor headlong anger disturb it. But if one fearfully considers the One who presides over all things, that is the internal Judge, then he will not direct his subjects without fear. And such a fear purges as it humbles the mind of the spiritual director. Without it, the mind will be either exalted by the spirit of presumption or defiled by the pleasure of the flesh, or obscured by the insolence of impure thoughts through a lust for earthly things. Because these things will disturb the soul of the spiritual director, it is necessary that he hasten so that they may be conquered by resistance. Otherwise, the vice that tempts through suggestion will subdue him by gentle delights and then slay him with a sharp sword because he was too slow to repel them.

§3 *That the spiritual director should always be the first in service*

The spiritual director should be the first in service so that by his way of life he might show the laity how to live, and so that the flock (which follows the voice and behavior of its shepherd) may advance all the better by his example than by his words alone. For indeed, the one who is compelled by his position to speak of the highest things is also compelled, by necessity, to show the highest things by his example. For his voice more easily penetrates his listeners' hearts when his way of life commends what he says. Thus, what he enjoins by speaking he helps by showing how it is to be done. This, indeed, is spoken through the prophet: "Ascend to the top of a high moun-

tain, you who bring the good news to Zion.”⁵ In other words, the one who employs heavenly preaching must have already abandoned the works of the world and be seen as though standing above such things. He will more easily draw his subjects to better things if, by the merit of his life, he proclaims them from on high.

Thus, by divine law, the priest receives a shoulder from the sacrificed animal—that is, the right shoulder—and separated, so that it would be not only useful, but singular.⁶ For he should not only do what is honorable among evil men, but also transcend the good in virtue. Both the breast and the shoulder are offered to him for food, so that he may learn from the sacrifice that he has received to offer a corresponding sacrifice to the Creator of all things.⁷ Not only is he to have right thoughts in his breast, but by [putting his own shoulder] to good works he invites to sublime heights those who watch him. Likewise, he may not desire prosperity in the present life, nor fear adversity. He must despise the charms of the world by respecting the fear they cause within him, and then condemn these fears in the expectation of the sweet delights of internal contemplation.

Thus, by the command of the supernal voice, the priest is bound on each shoulder by the Ephod robe so that he will always be protected against adversity or prosperity by the ornament of virtue.⁸ Or, in the words of Paul, walking “by the armor of justice on the right hand and on the left,” striving solely after those things that are interior so that he may avoid the deceptive pleasures on either side. Let him not be elated by prosperity, nor dismayed by adversity. Let not flatterers soften his resolve, nor the cruel lead him to despair, so that by not cowering to the passions, he will display the great beauty of the Ephod that covers both of his shoulders.

Moreover, it is rightly ordered that the Ephod be made of gold, hyacinth, purple, twice-dyed scarlet, and fine twined linen so that

⁵Isa 40.9.

⁶Cf. Ex 29.22.

⁷Cf. Lev 10.14–15.

⁸Cf. Ex 28. The Ephod was the upper garment worn by the Jewish priest.

it may be clear the great number of virtues that the priest ought to demonstrate.⁹ And so in the priest’s robe, the gold shines more than everything else, so that in him the understanding of wisdom beams the most brightly. The hyacinth is added, which is resplendent with the color of the sky, so that through everything that he penetrates with his understanding, he does not sink to earthly things but rises up to the love of heavenly things. He must be careful not to be seized off-guard by praise or else he will be stripped of the understanding of truth. With gold and hyacinth, purple is also added, which symbolizes that the heart of the priest, while hoping for the high things that he preaches, should suppress even the slightest suggestion of vice. And he should reject them with a royal power, always considering the nobility of internal regeneration and defending, by his way of life, his robe of the heavenly kingdom. It is of this nobility of the spirit that Peter says: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.”¹⁰ With respect to the power by which we subdue the vices, we are fortified by the voice of [the Beloved Disciple] John, who says: “But as many as have received him, he gave to them the power to become sons of God.”¹¹ And this dignity of fortitude the psalmist considers, saying: “And to me, God, your friends are greatly honored; their principality is greatly strengthened.”¹² For certainly, the mind of the saints is exalted to princely eminence, while externally they were thought to suffer abasement. And to the gold, hyacinth, and purple, twice-died scarlet is also added to signify that all virtue should be adorned with charity before the eyes of the inner Judge. And everything that shines before human eyes must also be kindled with the flame of internal love before the sight of the hidden Judge. And further, this charity, which embraces both God and neighbor, shines with a luster of something twice-dyed. Whoever, therefore, pursues so completely the beauty of his Maker as to neglect the care of his neighbors or,

⁹Cf. Ex 28.8.

¹⁰1 Pet 2.9.

¹¹John 1.12.

¹²Ps 138.17.

conversely, whoever attends to the care of his neighbors so as to grow listless in divine love (whichever of these two he neglects), he does not know what it means to have twice-dyed scarlet in the adornment of the Ephod. But while the mind is intent to pursue the precepts of charity, it must follow that the flesh is softened through abstinence. And also, with twice-dyed scarlet, fine twined linen is added. Now, fine linen comes from the earth with a glittering hue. And what else is designated by fine linen but chastity radiant in the beauty of bodily purity? The twisted linen is woven into the beauty of the Ephod, signifying that chastity is led to perfect radiance of purity, when the flesh is worn out by fasting. Thus, in the presence of other virtues, a tempered flesh reveals its merit, just as fine twined linen reveals its radiance in the diverse beauty of the Ephod.

§4 *That the spiritual director be discerning in silence and profitable in speech*

Accordingly, the spiritual director should be discerning in his silence and profitable in his speech, otherwise he might say something that should have been suppressed or suppress something that should have been said. For just as reckless speaking leads someone into error, so indiscreet silence leaves in error those who might have been instructed. For often, reckless directors, who fear to lose human favor, are afraid to speak freely about what is right. And, according to the voice of the Truth, they fail to attend to the care of their flock as shepherds and act instead as mercenaries.¹³ This is because they flee and hide themselves in silence whenever a wolf approaches. Thus, the Lord scolds them through the prophet, saying: "Dumb dogs, who cannot bark."¹⁴ Again he complains, saying: "You have not gone up against the enemy nor have you built a wall for the house

¹³Cf. John 10.12.

¹⁴Isa 56.10.

