

JOHN'S DECEIT

I USED to have many genuine and true friends, who knew the laws of friendship and observed them strictly. But there was one in this group who outstripped them all in his friendship for me and set his heart on leaving the rest as far behind him as they did the people who regarded me with indifference. He was one of my constant companions. We went in for the same studies and attended the same teachers. We had an equal eagerness and enthusiasm for the studies at which we were working, and the same high ideals produced by common interests. Not only while we were at school, but when we left it and had to decide what career would be best to choose, we were clearly of one mind. And besides all this, there were other bonds which held unbroken and secure. Neither of us could boast more than the other of his country's greatness. Nor had I too much money while he lived in extreme poverty; on the contrary, our means were as matched as our views. Our families were of the same class and everything was in keeping with our common opinions.

But when the time came to enter upon the blessed life of the monks and the true philosophy, the balance no longer remained even. His scale rose lightly upwards, while I, still fettered with worldly desires, dragged my scale down, weighting it with youthful vanities, and forced it to stay on a lower plane. From that time our friendship remained firm as before, but our intimacy was broken. For we could not share our activities when our interests diverged.

But when I, too, emerged slightly from the surge of life,

he received me with open arms. Yet not even then could we maintain our former equality; for he had got the start of me, and by displaying intense earnestness, was rising far over my head and was reaching great eminence. Still, since he was such a good man and valued my friendship highly, he withdrew from all the rest of his friends, and spent his whole time with me. He had been anxious to do this before, but, as I explained, he had been hindered by my indifference. For it was impossible for anyone who was always at the law-courts, and was thrilled by the pleasures of the stage, to associate often with a man who was glued to his books and never even went out into the market-place. For this reason he was cut off from me. But as soon as ever he had got me to follow the same plan of life as himself, he quickly produced the scheme which he had conceived long before. He would not leave me alone for a moment, but persisted in advocating that we should each abandon his own home and share a place together. He succeeded in persuading me, and the arrangements were in hand.

But the unceasing entreaties of my mother prevented me from doing him this favour—or rather, from accepting it from him. As soon as she saw that this was my intention, she took my hand and led me to her own private room. Sitting close by me on the bed on which she had given me birth, she burst into tears, and then spoke words more touching than tears. And this was her sad complaint :

"My child," she said, "I was not for long permitted to enjoy your father's virtues, for so it pleased God. His death followed very soon after my travail over you, and left you an orphan and me a widow before my time, with all the burdens of widowhood, which only those who have borne them can properly understand. No words could describe the stormy sea which a young girl faces, if she has only just left

her father's house without any experience of the world, and is suddenly struck with unbearable sorrow and compelled to shoulder cares too great for her age and sex. For, as I know too well, she has to correct the carelessness of servants, to guard against their misconduct, to thwart the schemes of relatives, and to bear with dignity the insults of public officials and their rudeness about payments of tax. And if her dead husband should have left a child, even when that child is a girl she will cause great anxiety to her mother, though not expense and fear. But a son fills her with a host of misgivings every day that passes, and even more anxieties. I say nothing of the heavy expenditure she must incur if she wants to bring him up as a gentleman. Still, none of these thoughts persuaded me to contract a second marriage and to introduce another husband to your father's house. No, I remained patient, while troubles surged around me, and I did not flinch from the iron furnace of widowhood. My chief help was from above. And I found great consolation in those trials in gazing continually at your face and treasuring in you a living and exact image of my dead husband. So while you were still a baby and had not even learnt to speak, at the time when children give most pleasure to their parents, you afforded me great comfort. You cannot even make it a reproach against me that I bore my widowhood with dignity, but only at the price of reducing your patrimony, through a widow's necessity—a fate which, I know, a good many who have had the misfortune to be fatherless have suffered. No indeed; I kept it all intact—and I did not omit any expenditure which your reputation demanded, but paid it from my own purse and from the dowry which I brought from my home.

"Please do not think I am telling you this now as a reproach to you. But in return for all this I ask for just one

favour : not to inflict on me a second bereavement and rouse again my sleeping grief. Be patient till my death. It may be I shall depart before long. Those who are young look forward to a distant old age; but we who have grown old have nothing to wait for but death. When you have committed me to the ground and united me with your father's bones, then set out on your long travels and sail whatever sea you please. Then there will be nobody to hinder you. But until I breathe my last, be content to live with me. Do not give needless offence to God by overwhelming me with such misfortunes, for I have never done you any harm.

"Of course, if you have reason to complain that I distract you with worldly cares and make you manage my property, then pay no attention to nature's laws or education or custom or anything else, but shun them as traitors and enemies. But if, on the contrary, I do everything to provide you with plenty of leisure for the pursuit of this kind of life, then let this bond, if nothing else, keep you by my side. Even if you argue that you have a thousand friends, not one will let you enjoy such freedom as this, for there is nobody who cares for your reputation as I do."

All this and more my mother said to me, and I repeated to that good friend of mine. But, so far from being put out by these arguments, he was all the more insistent in his original requests.

While we were in this position—he constantly entreating and I not giving way—suddenly a rumour reached us which threw us both into confusion. The rumour was that we were to be promoted to the dignity of the priesthood. For my part, as soon as I heard this story, I was overcome with fear and bewilderment : with fear, that I should be seized against my will, and with bewilderment, as I tried again and again to guess what had induced the men concerned to form such a

plan for me. I examined myself and could discover nothing that deserved such an honour.

That good friend of mine came to me privately and shared the news with me, thinking I had not heard the rumour, and begged that in this too, as in other things before, we might be seen to act and to decide together. He said that he was ready to follow my lead in either course, whether to escape or let ourselves be taken. However, I knew his keenness, and I reckoned I should be to blame in the eyes of the whole congregation of the Church, if through my own weakness I should deprive the flock of Christ of a young man so good and so well fitted to govern. So I did not let him see what I thought about this, although I had never before dared to hide any of my opinions from him. But I said we ought to put off considering the question to another occasion, as at present it was not urgent, and persuaded him not to worry about it just then. I made him feel confident in me, that I should act in concert with him, if by any chance this kind of thing should happen.

But when a short time had passed, and the one who was to ordain us had come, I remained in hiding, while he, knowing nothing of this, was taken off on some other pretext. He submitted to the yoke, expecting from my promises to him that I too should certainly follow, or rather, thinking that he was following me. For some of the people with him, when they saw he was restless about being captured, deceived him by calling out that it was strange that the one everybody considered the more head-strong (meaning me) had bowed to the decision of the fathers with full submission, while the one who was far more reasonable and submissive acted so boldly and conceitedly, leaping about and shying off and arguing the point.

At this he gave way. But when he heard that I had

THE DIFFICULTY OF PASTORAL CARE

I could have argued at greater length that it is possible to use the power of deception for a good end, or rather that it is not right to call that kind of action deceit at all but an admirable kind of good management. But since I have said enough to prove my case, it would only be wearisome and tedious to prolong my argument. Now it is up to you to show that I have not used this method to your advantage.

Basil: What kind of advantage have I got from this good management or wisdom or whatever you please to call it, to persuade me that I was not deceived by you?

John: Why, what greater advantage could there be, than to be obviously doing what Christ himself declared was proof of love for Christ? Speaking to the chief of the apostles, he said, "Peter, lovest thou me?"; and when Peter confessed that he did, he added, "If thou lovest me, tend my sheep." The Master asked the disciple if he loved him, not to learn the truth—why should he, who lives in all men's hearts?—but to teach us how much he cares for the supervision of these flocks. Once this is evident, it will be equally obvious that a great, indescribable reward will be in store for the man who works hard at the tasks which Christ values so highly. When we see anyone caring for our slaves or our flocks we take his concern for them as a sign of his love for us—although they can all be bought for money. What gift, then, will he give as a reward to those who shepherd his flock, which he purchased, not for money or any such thing, but by his own death when he gave his blood for his flock's

II.1] THE DIFFICULTY OF PASTORAL CARE
ransom. And so when the disciple said, "Thou knowest, Lord, that I love thee", and called as a witness of his love the one he loved, the Saviour did not stop there but went on to describe the proof of love. He did not want to prove then how much Peter loved him (which was already clear to us from many pieces of evidence), but he wanted Peter and all of us to learn how much he loves his own Church, in order that we too might show great concern for the same thing.

Why did God not spare his only-begotten Son but surrender the only Son he had? It was to reconcile to himself those who hated him and to make them a people of his own possession.¹ Why did he shed his blood? It was to purchase the sheep which he entrusted to Peter and his successors. Those words of Christ, then, were natural and fair: "Who is the faithful and wise servant whom his Lord shall set over his household?"² Again the words denote perplexity but their speaker was not perplexed when he spoke them. On the contrary, as when he asked Peter if he loved him, he did not ask because he wanted to know his disciple's affection, but because he wanted to show his own exceeding love; so also when he asked the question, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?", he did not ask this because he did not know the faithful and wise man, but because he wanted to show how few there are and how important is this office. Notice, at any rate, the magnitude of the reward: "He will set him over all that he hath."³

Will you continue, then, to dispute with me that you were well deceived, if you are going to be set over all God's possessions, and are doing what the Lord said Peter would be able to outstrip the rest of the disciples by doing? For he said, "Lovest thou me, Peter, more than these? Tend my sheep." He might have said to him, "If thou lovest me,

¹ Titus 2.14.

² Matt. 24.45.

³ Matt. 24.47.

practise fasting, sleeping on the bare ground, and prolonged vigils; champion the wronged; be 'as a father to the fatherless and instead of a husband to their mother'.⁴ In fact, he passes over all this. And what does he say? "Tend my sheep."

The other things I have mentioned could easily be carried out by many of those under authority, women as well as men. But when someone has to preside over the Church and be entrusted with the care of so many souls, then let all womankind give way before the magnitude of the task—and indeed most men. Bring before us those who far excel all others and are as much above the rest in spiritual stature as Saul was above the whole nation of the Hebrews in bodily stature—or rather, far more. Let us not look for a difference only "from the shoulder and upward"⁵ but let the difference between shepherd and sheep be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures, not to say even more, since matters of much greater moment are at stake.

A man who loses sheep through the ravages of wolves or the attacks of robbers or through murrain or some other accident, might perhaps meet with a measure of pardon from the owner of the flock. Even if he is called upon to pay compensation, the penalty stops at money. But anyone entrusted with men, the rational flock of Christ, risks a penalty not of money but of his own soul for the loss of the sheep. Moreover, he has a far greater and more difficult struggle. His fight is not with wolves; his fear is not of robbers; his care is not to protect the flock from pestilence. Well then, against whom is the war? With whom is the battle? Listen to St Paul. He says, "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against powers, against

⁴ Ecclus. 4.10. ⁵ 1 Sam. 9.2.

II.2] THE DIFFICULTY OF PASTORAL CARE
the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."⁶ Do you see the terrible host of enemies and the savage legions, not armed with steel, but relying on their own evil nature instead of any armour?

And would you like to be shown another cruel and savage army, which is lying in wait for this flock? You can see this, too, from the same point of vantage. The same man who spoke about the others shows us these enemies as well, speaking somewhere like this: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, adultery, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strifes, jealousies, wraths, factions, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults,"⁷ and more besides these. For he did not list them all, but let us recognize the rest from these examples.

In the case of the shepherd of irrational creatures, those who want to destroy the flock stop fighting with him when they see him running away, and are content to seize his animals. But in the other case, even if they snatch the whole flock, they do not leave the shepherd alone, but attack him all the more, act with more daring, and do not give up until they either throw him down or are beaten themselves. Besides this, the sufferings of animals are obvious—starvation, pestilence, injury, or anything else that might harm them. This is a great help in ridding them of their troubles.

And there is something else more important than this which makes the cure of this kind of disease rapid. What is it? Shepherds have full power to compel the sheep to accept the treatment if they do not submit of their own accord. It is easy to bind them when it is necessary to use cautery or the knife, and to keep them shut up for a long time when that is the right thing, and to introduce different kinds of food

⁶ Eph. 6.12.

⁷ Cf. Gal. 5.19-21 and 2 Cor. 12.20.

one after another, and to keep them away from water. And all other remedies the shepherds think will promote the animals' health they apply with perfect ease.

But human diseases in the first place are not easy for a man to see; for "no one knows the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him."⁸ How, then, can anyone provide the specific for a disease if he does not know its character and often cannot tell whether the man is ill at all? When it becomes apparent, then it is all the more intractable to him. You cannot treat men with the same authority with which the shepherd treats a sheep. Here too it is possible to bind and to forbid food and to apply cautery and the knife, but the decision to receive treatment does not lie with the man who administers the medicine but actually with the patient. That wonderful man, Paul, knew this fact when he said to the Corinthians, "Not that we have lordship over your faith, but are helpers of your joy."⁹ For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force. When secular judges convict wrong-doers under the law, they show that their authority is complete and compel men, whether they will or no, to submit to their methods. But in the case we are considering it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice.

For this reason a lot of tact is needed, so that the sick may be persuaded of their own accord to submit to the treatment of the priests, and not only that, but be grateful to them for their cure. If a man struggles when he is bound (for he may

⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 2.11. ⁹ 2 Cor. 1.24.

still choose to do so), he makes his sufferings worse. And if he ignores the words which cut like steel, he adds a second wound through his contempt, and the intention to heal becomes the occasion of a more serious disease. For the man does not exist who can by compulsion cure someone else against his will.

What, then, should you do? If you behave too leniently to one who needs deep surgery, and do not make a deep incision in one who requires it, you mutilate yet miss the cancer. But if you make the needed incision without mercy, often the patient, in despair at his sufferings, throws all aside at once, medicine and bandage alike, and promptly throws himself over a cliff, "breaking the yoke and bursting the bond."¹⁰ I could tell you of many who have been stranded in utter misery because they were called to pay the full price of their sins.

It is not right simply to exact a penalty by the measure of the sins; some guess must be made about the disposition of the sinners, for fear that when you want to stitch up what is torn, you should make the tear worse, and in your eagerness to help up the fallen you should cause a worse fall. Those who are weak and dissipated and generally in bondage to worldly luxury—even more if they can pride themselves on their birth and rank—may be freed partially, if not perfectly, from the evils which master them, by being converted gently and gradually from the sins they commit. But if anyone applies a sudden restraint, he deprives them even of this small improvement. For once a soul is forced to be brazen, it becomes callous and thereafter neither responds to gentle words nor is checked by threats nor is influenced by kindness, but becomes much worse than the city which the

¹⁰ Cf. Jer. 5.5.

prophet reviled, saying, "Thou hadst a whore's forehead; thou refusedst to be ashamed before all."¹¹

So the shepherd needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes, to examine the soul's condition from every angle. As there are plenty of people who are puffed up into arrogance and then fall into heedlessness of their own salvation because they cannot stand bitter medicines; so there are others who, because they do not pay a proportionate penalty for their sins, are misled into negligence and become far worse, and are led on to commit greater sins. The priest, therefore, must not overlook any of these considerations, but examine them all with care and apply all his remedies appropriately, for fear his care should be in vain.

The shepherd of sheep has the flock following him wherever he leads; or if some turn aside from the direct path and leave the good pasture to graze in barren and precipitous places, it is enough for him to call more loudly, drive them back again, and restore to the flock those which were separated. But if a man wanders away from the right faith, the shepherd needs a lot of concentration, perseverance, and patience. He cannot drag by force or constrain by fear, but must by persuasion lead him back to the true beginning from which he has fallen away. He needs, therefore, a heroic spirit, not to grow despondent or neglect the salvation of the wanderers, but to keep on thinking and saying: "Peradventure God may give them the knowledge of the truth and they may be freed from the snare of the devil."¹²

That is why the Lord, speaking to the disciples, said: "Who, then, is the faithful and wise servant?" The man who practises asceticism helps no one but himself. But the advantage of a shepherd's skill extends to the whole people.

¹¹ Jer. 3-3.

¹² Cf. 2 Tim. 2.25-6.

The man who distributes alms to the needy or in other ways defends the wronged, has done some good to his neighbours; but less than the priest, as the body is less than the soul. It is not surprising, then, that the Lord said concern for his sheep was a sign of love for himself.

THE GLORY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

THE WORK of the priesthood is done on earth, but it is ranked among heavenly ordinances. And this is only right, for no man, no angel, no archangel, no other created power, but the Paraclete himself ordained this succession, and persuaded men, while still remaining in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels. The priest, therefore, must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself, in the midst of those powers.

The symbols which existed before the ministry of grace were fearful and awe-inspiring: for example, the bells, the pomegranates, the stones on the breastplate, the stones on the ephod, the mitre, the diadem, the long robe, the golden crown, the Holy of Holies, the deep silence within. But if you consider the ministry of grace, you will find that those fearful and awe-inspiring symbols are only trivial. The statement about the Law is true here also: "The splendour that once was is now no splendour at all; it is outshone by a splendour greater still."¹ When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the High Priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being tintured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you not at once transported to heaven, and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with soul naked and mind pure look round upon heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits

¹ 2 Cor. 3.10 (N.E.B.).

III.4] THE GLORY OF THE PRIESTHOOD
above with the Father is at that moment held in our hands, and gives himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace him—which they do, all of them, with their eyes. Do you think this could be despised? or that it is the kind of thing anyone can be superior about?

Would you like to be shown the excellence of this sacred office by another miracle? Imagine in your mind's eye, if you will, Elijah and the vast crowd standing around him and the sacrifice lying upon the stone altar. All the rest are still, hushed in deep silence. The prophet alone is praying. Suddenly fire falls from the skies on to the offering. It is marvellous; it is charged with bewilderment. Turn, then, from that scene to our present rites, and you will see not only marvellous things, but things that transcend all terror. The priest stands bringing down, not fire, but the Holy Spirit. And he offers prayer at length, not that some flame lit from above may consume the offerings, but that grace may fall on the sacrifice through that prayer, set alight the souls of all, and make them appear brighter than silver refined in the fire. Can anyone, not quite mad and deranged, despise this most awe-inspiring rite? Do you not know that no human soul could ever have stood that sacrificial fire, but all would have been utterly annihilated, except for the powerful help of God's grace?

Anyone who considers how much it means to be able, in his humanity, still entangled in flesh and blood, to approach that blessed and immaculate Being, will see clearly how great is the honour which the grace of the Spirit has bestowed on priests. It is through them that this work is performed, and other work no less than this in its bearing upon our dignity and our salvation.

For earth's inhabitants, having their life in this world, have been entrusted with the stewardship of heavenly

things, and have received an authority which God has not given to angels or archangels. Not to them was it said, "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose, shall be loosed."² Those who are lords on earth have indeed the power to bind, but only men's bodies. But this binding touches the very soul and reaches through heaven. What priests do on earth, God ratifies above. The Master confirms the decisions of his slaves. Indeed he has given them nothing less than the whole authority of heaven. For he says, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."³ What authority could be greater than that? "The Father hath given all judgement unto the Son."⁴ But I see that the Son has placed it all in their hands. For they have been raised to this prerogative, as though they were already translated to heaven and had transcended human nature and were freed from our passions.

Again, if a king confers on one of his subjects the right to imprison and release again at will, that man is the envy and admiration of all. But although the priest has received from God an authority as much greater than that, as heaven is more precious than earth and souls than bodies, some people think he has received so slight an honour that they can imagine someone entrusted with it actually despising the gift. God save us from such madness! For it is patently mad to despise this great office without which we cannot attain to salvation or God's good promises.

For if a man "cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven except he be born again of water and the spirit,"⁵ and if he that eateth not the Lord's flesh and drinketh not his blood

² Cf. Matt. 18.18. ³ John 20.23. ⁴ John 5.22. ⁵ John 3.5.

is cast out of everlasting life,⁶ and all these things can happen through no other agency except their sacred hands (the priests', I mean), how can anyone, without their help, escape the fire of Gehenna or win his appointed crown? They are the ones—they and no others—who are in charge of spiritual travail and responsible for the birth that comes through baptism. Through them we put on Christ and are united with the Son of God and become limbs obedient to that blessed Head. So they should properly be not only more feared than rulers and kings, but more honoured even than fathers. For our fathers begot us "of blood and the will of the flesh"; but they are responsible for our birth from God, that blessed second birth, our true emancipation, the adoption according to grace.

The priests of the Jews had authority to cure leprosy of the body, or rather, not to cure it, but only to certify the cure. And you know what rivalry there used to be for the priesthood then. But our priests have received authority not over leprosy of the body but over uncleanness of the soul, and not just to certify its cure, but actually to cure it. So people who look down on them are far more execrable than Dathan and his company and deserve more punishment. For although they claimed an office which did not belong to them, at least they had a marvellous opinion of it, as they showed by wanting it so much. But the people we are considering have done just the opposite at a time when the priesthood has been so embellished and enhanced. Their presumption, therefore, is far greater. In the assessment of contempt there is no comparison between coveting an honour which does not belong to you and making light of it. Between one and the other there is all the difference between admiration and disdain. Who could be so beggarly-minded

⁶ Cf. John 6.53.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

IF IT is true that those who are entrusted with civic government subvert their cities and ruin themselves as well, unless they are wise and very watchful, what about the man whose task is to adorn the bride of Christ? How much strength in himself and from above do you think he needs to avoid complete failure?

No one loved Christ more than Paul; no one showed more earnestness than he; no one was endowed with more grace. Yet for all that he went in fear and trembling for his authority and those who were under it. He says, "I fear lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve, so your thoughts should be corrupted from the simplicity which is towards Christ."¹ And again, "I was with you in fear and in much trembling."² Yet he was a man who had been "caught up to the third heaven,"³ and shared in the unspeakable things of God,⁴ and endured "deaths"⁵ every day he lived after his conversion. He was a man who did not want to use the authority given him by Christ in case one of the believers should be offended.⁶

If, then, one who did more than he was commanded by God and never aimed at any advantage for himself, but only for those under his direction, was always in fear, because he kept in view the magnitude of his responsibility, what will become of us, who often aim at our own advantage, and, so far from doing more than we are commanded by Christ, for

¹ 2 Cor. 11.3. ² 1 Cor. 2.3. ³ 2 Cor. 12.2.

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 12.4. ⁵ 2 Cor. 11.23. ⁶ 1 Cor. 9.12.

THE GLORY OF THE PRIESTHOOD [III.6
as to make light of these great blessings? No one, I should say, except the victim of some demonic impulse.

But, to return to the topic from which I digressed, God has given greater power to priests than to natural parents, not only for punishment, but also for help. The difference between the two is as great as between the present and the future life. Parents bring us into this life; priests into the life to come. Parents cannot avert bodily death nor drive away the onset of disease; priests have often saved the soul that is sick and at the point of death, by making the punishment milder for some, and preventing others from ever incurring it, not only through instruction and warning, but also through helping them by prayer. They have authority to remit sins, not only when they make us regenerate, but afterwards too. "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."⁷ Again, natural parents cannot help their sons if they fall foul of the prominent and powerful, but priests have often appeased the anger of God himself, to say nothing of rulers and kings.

Will anyone still dare to accuse me of arrogance after this? I think that after what I have said, such reverence must fill the minds of my hearers that they can no longer accuse of conceit and presumption those who avoid this honour, but only those who seek it of their own accord and are determined to get it for themselves.

⁷ Jas. 5.14-15.

the most part actually break his commandments? "Who is weak", he says, "and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I burn not?"⁷ That is what a priest should be like; or rather, not just like that, for even that is little or nothing in comparison with what I am going to say.

And what is that? "I could wish," he says, "that I were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh."⁸ If anyone can say that; if anyone has a soul capable of that prayer, he would be to blame if he evaded the priesthood. But anyone who falls as far short of that standard as I do, deserves hatred, not for evading but for accepting it.

If it were a question of choosing someone for a generalship, and those responsible for conferring the honour dragged forward a coppersmith or a cobbler or some other workman of that sort, and tried to put him in charge of the army, I should not congratulate the poor man for not running off and doing all he could to avoid pitching himself into inevitable disaster.

If it is enough simply to be called a "shepherd of souls" and to undertake the work anyhow, without risk, blame me for vainglory if you like. But if, on the contrary, the man who accepts this responsibility needs great wisdom and, even before wisdom, the grace of God in good measure, and an upright character and a pure life, and more than human goodness, then do not withhold your forgiveness from me because I do not want to damn myself without rhyme or reason.

Suppose someone brought a merchant ship of great tonnage, fully equipped with rowers and loaded with valuable freight, and sat me at the rudder and told me to cross the Aegean or the Tyrrhenian Sea, I should jump off at his first

⁷ 2 Cor. 11.29.

⁸ Rom. 9.3.

words. And if anybody asked me why, I should say, "To save sinking the ship!" When it is only money that is at stake, and the risk is at most of bodily death, no one will blame a man for looking well ahead. But where the fate of the shipwrecked is to fall, not into the sea, but into the abyss of fire, and what awaits them is not the death which separates soul from body, but the death which consigns both together to eternal punishment, will you be angry with me and hate me for not throwing myself headlong into such a calamity? I beg and beseech you not to. I know how weak and puny my own soul is. I know the importance of that ministry and the great difficulty of it. More billows toss the priest's soul than the gales which trouble the sea.

First of all there is the dreadful rock of vainglory, more dangerous than the Sirens' rock of which the poets have marvellous tales to tell. Many have had the strength to sail past this rock and escape unscathed. But to me it is so dangerous that even now, when no necessity is driving me towards its cleft, I cannot keep myself untainted by the terrible thing. If anyone entrusted this charge to me, he would be as good as binding my hands behind my back and delivering me to the wild beasts that inhabit that rock, to savage me every day. And what are those beasts? Anger, dejection, envy, strife, slanders, accusations, lying, hypocrisy, intrigue, imprecations against those who have done no harm, delight at disgraceful behaviour in fellow priests, sorrow at their successes, love of praise, greed for preferment (which more than anything else hurls the human soul to destruction), teaching meant to please, slavish wheedling, ignoble flattery, contempt for the poor, fawning on the rich, absurd honours and harmful favours which endanger giver and receiver alike, servile fear fit only for the meanest of slaves, restraint of plain speaking, much pretended and no

real humility, failure to scrutinize and rebuke, or, more likely, doing so beyond reason with the humble while no one dares so much as to open his lips against those who wield power. All these wild beasts and more are bred upon that rock. And people who are once seized by them cannot help being dragged into the kind of servitude which makes them do over and over again, even to please women, things that are too bad to mention.

The divine law excluded women from this ministry, but they forcibly push themselves in, and, since they can do nothing personally, they do everything by proxy. They have got such power that they appoint and dismiss priests at will. Topsy-turvy (you can see the truth of the proverb borne out) "the followers lead their leaders"—bad enough, if they were men; but they are women, the very ones who are not even allowed to teach. Do I say "teach"? St Paul did not allow them even to speak in church.⁹ But I have heard it said that they have assumed such freedom of speech that they even rebuke the prelates of the churches and upbraid them more bitterly than masters would their slaves.

But do not let anyone think that I am bringing these charges against all the clergy. Many there certainly are who have escaped these entanglements—more indeed than those who have been caught in them. And I do not venture to blame the priestly office for these evils. God forbid that I should be such a fool! Wise men do not blame the knife for murder, nor wine for drunkenness, nor strength for insolence, nor courage for recklessness. No; they blame the men who make wrong use of the gifts of God, and punish them for it. The priestly office might well accuse us of not handling it rightly. It is not itself the cause of the evils I have mentioned. It is we on our part who have smirched it

⁹ 1 Cor. 14:34.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PRIESTHOOD
with stain upon stain, by entrusting it to commonplace men. And they eagerly accept what is offered to them, without first examining their own souls or considering the gravity of the matter. And when they come to exercise this ministry, their eyes are blinded with inexperience and they fill the congregations entrusted to them with a thousand and one troubles.

That was the very thing that all but happened to me—only that God quickly rescued me from these dangers, in mercy on his Church and on my soul. Tell me, where do you think all the disorders in the churches originate? I think their only origin is in the careless and random way in which the prelates are chosen and appointed. For the head ought to be the strongest member, in order to be able to control the evil exhalations which proceed from the rest of the body, and regulate them properly. But when it happens to be weak in itself, it cannot ward off those infectious attacks, becomes weaker than it naturally is, and destroys the rest of the body along with itself. To prevent this happening in the present instance, God has kept me safely in the category of "feet"—where I originally belonged!

who have kept themselves under discipline all their life and exhausted their bodies with fasting, and who, as long as they were allowed to live alone and attend to their own needs, were acceptable to God and every day made great progress in this philosophy. Yet when they returned to normal society and had to correct the follies of the common people, they either did not begin to cope with so great a responsibility, or else, when compelled to remain at their post, abandoned their former high standards, brought a heavy penalty on themselves and were not of the least use to others.

Again, if a man has spent all his life in the lowest order of the ministry and has reached extreme old age, we will not, simply out of respect for his age, promote him to the next order. What if he should still be unsuitable, even after a lifetime? I do not say this out of disrespect for grey hairs, nor am I laying down a rule that we should entirely exclude from such responsibility those who come from the monastic fraternity. It has turned out that many even from that body have shed lustre upon this office. But I am anxious to show that, if neither piety by itself nor old age alone are sufficient to prove a man worthy of the priesthood, the reasons I have mentioned are hardly likely to do so.

Other people go on to give reasons which are stranger still. Some are enlisted in the ranks of the clergy to prevent their siding with the enemy, and others because of their bad character, to stop them causing a lot of trouble if they are overlooked! Could any worse violation of the right take place than that corrupt men, replete with vices, should be courted for the very things for which they ought to be punished, and promoted to priestly dignity for the very things for which they ought to be forbidden to cross the threshold of the Church? Tell me, do we need to look any

PARTICULAR DUTIES AND PROBLEMS
further for the cause of God's anger, when we expose the most sacred and awe-inspiring things to defilement by wicked or worthless men? When some men are entrusted with things unsuited to them and others with things quite beyond their powers, they make the Church as unstable as the Euripus.

I once used to deride secular rulers because they distributed honours, not on grounds of inherent merit, but of wealth or seniority or worldly rank. But when I heard that this stupidity had swaggered into our own affairs too, I no longer reckoned their action so strange. For why should we be surprised that worldly people, who love the praise of the mob and do everything for money, should make this mistake, when those who claim to have renounced all these desires are no better? For although they are contending for heavenly rewards, they act as though they had to decide merely about acres of land or something else of the kind. They simply take commonplace men and put them in charge of those things for which the only-begotten Son of God did not disdain to empty himself of his own glory and to be made man and to receive the form of a servant and to be spat upon and buffeted and to die the most shameful death.

And they do not stop at this, but go on to other actions stranger still. They not merely choose the unworthy; they reject those who are suitable. As though it were necessary to undermine the safety of the Church in both ways, or as though the first reason were not enough to kindle the wrath of God, they have added another reason no less serious. For I think it is as bad to keep out the capable as to bring in the useless. And this is done to prevent the flock of Christ from finding comfort or a breathing-space anywhere. Does not this deserve a hail of thunder-bolts? Does it not deserve

some special hell and not just the one we are threatened with? Yet all these evils are suffered and borne patiently by the one who does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live. How can we marvel enough at his love for man, or wonder at his mercy? Christians damage Christ's cause more than his enemies and foes. But the good Lord still shows his kindness and calls us to repentance.

Glory be to thee, O Lord! Glory be to thee! What an abyss of love is in thee! How great are the riches of thy forbearance! Men who through thy Name have come to be worthy and respected instead of mean and worthless use that honour against thee who gavest it, and dare what is forbidden, and insult what is holy, rejecting and excluding the earnest, in order that evil men may have perfect freedom and full security to subvert whatever they desire.

If you want to know the reasons for this scandal, you will find they are like those I mentioned before. They have one root and, so to speak, one mother: malice. Yet they are not all of one kind, but different. One man says, "Reject him, because he is young"; another says, "Because he has not learnt how to flatter"; another, "Because he has offended so-and-so". Or again, someone says, "Reject him in case so-and-so should be hurt to see his own nominee rejected and this man appointed"; another says, "Reject him because he is good and just"; another, "Because sinners fear him"; and another gives some other such reason. They have ready to hand all the prettexts they require. Even the number of existing clergy is sufficient argument, when they have no better. Or they argue that it is advisable not to promote a man to this honour suddenly, but gently and by degrees. And they can find as many other reasons as they want.

But I should like to ask you now what a bishop ought

to do when he has to contend with so many winds. How can he stand firm against such great breakers? How can he repel all these attacks? If he settles the question by honest assessment, all men become enemies and foes to him and to those whom he has chosen. Everything they do is meant to create hostility to him. They stir up feuds daily and heap endless ridicule on those he has chosen, until they either depose them or get their own men in. It is like a captain having pirates sailing with him on board ship and continually plotting hour by hour against him and the sailors and crew. If, on the other hand, he prefers popularity with them to his own safety and so chooses unsuitable men, he will incur God's enmity in place of theirs. And what could be worse than that? And his relations with them will be more difficult than before, since they will all conspire together and become so much the stronger. When fierce winds meet from contrary quarters, the sea which before was quiet suddenly rages and towers, and destroys those who sail on it; so the calm sea of the Church, when evil men are accepted, is filled with surf and wreckage.

Consider, then, what qualities a man needs if he is to withstand such a tempest and deal successfully with these obstacles to the common good. He must be dignified yet modest, impressive yet kindly, masterful yet approachable, impartial yet courteous, humble but not servile, vehement yet gentle, in order that he may be able calmly to resist all these dangers and to promote a suitable man with full authority, even though everyone opposes him, and reject an unsuitable man with equal authority, even though everyone favours him. One thing alone he must consider: the edification of the Church. He must do nothing out of hostility or favour.

Well, then, do you think it was unreasonable to excuse

myself from serving in this capacity? And even yet I have not made all my points to you; I have still more to say. So do not lose patience with an intimate friend who wants to convince you that he is clear of your imputations. For what I say will not only be of service to you in my defence but will probably afford considerable help towards your own exercise of the office. For anyone who is about to enter upon this walk of life needs to explore it all thoroughly beforehand and only then to undertake this ministry. And why? Because if he studies the difficulties beforehand he will at any rate have the advantage of not being taken by surprise when they crop up.

2. *Widows and the Sick*

Would you like us, then, to pass on next to the superintendence of the widows, or the charge of the virgins, or the difficulties of the judicial work? For in each of these there is anxiety of a different kind and more danger than anxiety.

First, to begin with what appears to be easier than the rest, the ministry to the widows seems to involve those who are in charge of them only in responsibility of a financial nature. But this is not so. On the contrary, here, too, close scrutiny is needed when they are enrolled. Entering their names carelessly and casually has led to untold troubles. They have wrecked homes and broken marriages and often been detected stealing and procuring and committing other disgraceful offences like these. To support women like that from Church funds brings down vengeance from God and utter condemnation from men, and discourages those who want to do good. For who would ever choose to spend the money which he is commanded to give to Christ on those who bring Christ's name into dishonour. That is why it is necessary to make a long and precise scrutiny, to prevent

PARTICULAR DUTIES AND PROBLEMS
those whom I have described, as well as those who can provide for themselves, from plundering the table of those who cannot.

After this scrutiny there follows another big anxiety: to see that the means for their support should pour in abundantly, like water from a spring, and never fail. For involuntary poverty is an insatiable evil, querulous and unthankful. Great wisdom and plenty of energy are required to take away all occasion for complaint and stop their tongues wagging. When people see anyone superior to avarice, they at once point him out as suitable for this administration. But I do not think that honesty by itself is enough. You must look for it first of all, since without it a man will be a spoiler rather than a guardian and a wolf instead of a shepherd. But you must look for the possession of another quality as well, and that is forbearance, the source of all human blessings, which guides the soul to anchorage and escorts it into a fair haven.

Widows, as a class, owing partly to their poverty, partly to their age, and partly to their sex, use an unbridled freedom of speech—to call it no worse! They scold out of season and find unnecessary fault and lament what they ought to be thankful for and criticize what they ought to welcome. The man in charge of them must bear it all politely and not be provoked by their inopportune fussing or their unreasonable complaints. For persons of this kind deserve to be pitied, not insulted, for their misfortunes. And it would be a mark of utter cruelty to take advantage of their misfortunes and add to the pain of poverty the pain of insult.

That is why a very wise man, observing the avarice and indifference of human nature, realized the terrible characteristic of poverty, that it debases the most generous soul and often teaches it to lose all shame on such matters. And so,