

Rather, Bishop of Verona (890-974), *Praeloquia* [PL 136:149-150]

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Ratherius wrote his "Praeloquia" (Prefaces) while in prison (934-936) in Pavia. It is a treatise that both criticizes the state of the clergy in his day and praises holy living. These sections come from his review and critique of the various social ranks of his day.

Book 1

While all the Lord's commands are, in a general way, suited to the entire church, individual ones are suited more specifically in individual ways in accordance with differences of time, order, condition, age, behavior, disposition, sex, or cause. Indeed, during times of peace, [our] tunic is commanded to be given,¹ while in time of persecution life itself may be ordered to be put [on the line] for the sake of a brother.² The Lord said: "Sell all that you have and give it to the poor and come follow me" [Matthew 19:21]; but if everyone were to follow this all at once, who would work [*excoleret*] the soil? Again, if everyone left his wife, how would children exist [*subsisteret*]? He says: "Give alms,"³ but what will he [have to] give, who keeps nothing for himself? On the other hand, the saying, "Give to any who ask of you," as is seen in Matthew,⁴ applies to all, implicates everyone, and exempts no one; if you have something that you might give, give, do not delay; if you don't have [anything], give yourself; offer the kind love of a generous mind. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will."⁴ And the Psalmist: "In me, O God, are your vows."⁵ Again, when he says, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and all of your mind, and all of your power, and your neighbor as yourself;⁶ thou shall not steal, thou shall not kill, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not bear false witness, thou shall not covet your neighbor's things or his wife," he speaks to all, young and old, men and women, servants and freemen, rich and poor, clergy and laymen; he spares none, excludes no one, and incorporates all. No one is exempt from these transgressions, no is able to commit any of them without it being a crime. [In short], there does seem to be a difference [in the applicability of the Lord's commands] of this kind.

Title I: The Duties of a Christian [*Christiani officia*]

You wish to be a Christian, a particularly good Christian [in comparison to the] many Christians, the people, the crowd, the throngs, the masses, the urban dwellers, and the country folk? Be not only a just laborer but a diligent one, content with your own [affairs], cheating no one, hurting no one, scolding no one, and falsely accusing no one. Fear God, pray to the saints; go to church; honor priests; offer tithes and the first offerings of your labors to God; give alms according to your resources; love your wife and know no other [woman] except your wife; on certain days—that is, on feast days and on the days of the fasts, keep yourself away from her, with her consent and out of fear of God; raise your children in the fear of God, visit the sick, bury the dead; that which you wish for yourself, provide for another [*alii impende*]; that which you do not want to be done to you, do not do to another.

Title II: Concerning Soldiers [*De militibus*]

You are a soldier. Beyond these [previously mentioned] things, listen to what John the Baptist says: "Do not strike anyone, nor falsely accuse anyone, and be content with your wages."⁷ Because if you are not able to

¹ Matthew 5:40: *And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.*

² 1 John 3:16: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.*

³ Luke 12:33.

⁴ Luke 2:14.

⁵ Psalm 55:12.

⁶ Matthew 22:37-38.

⁷ Luke 3:14.

earn wages by being a soldier, pursue a living by laboring with your hands; flee booty, guard against murder, and avoid sacrilege. What [is meant by] sacrilege, you say? Clearly that which the Psalmist frightfully recalls; listen: “Those who have said: ‘Let us possess the sanctuary of God for an inheritance.’ My God, make them like a wheel; and like stubble before the wind; like a fire that burns the forest, like a flame burning the mountains: So shall you pursue them in your power: and shall you trouble them in your wrath.”⁸ The sanctuary of the Lord is whatever is offered to God, that which belongs to his house. You [should] consider it this way, as Moses says: “Everything that is offered to the Lord is holy; it belongs to the saints of the Lord, and it pertains by right to the priests.”⁹ Listen how greatly plundering displeases the Lord: “On account of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor, now will I rise up, says the Lord.” Rising up, that is, preparing to avenge himself, he makes clear what he himself might do, when he says: “will not the Lord avenge his elect who cry to him, and will he exercise patience on their behalf? Amen I say to you, that he will quickly avenge them.”¹⁰ Hear what kind of vengeance it will be: “the vengeance of the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.”¹¹ And then, you say, it will be fire, but extinguishable fire, and worms, but mortal worms; but the prophet disagrees: “their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched.”¹² By “flesh” [see above] you should understand the whole man [as being] expressed by the *lesser* part, just as often in scripture [the whole man] is understood [in reference to] the *greater* part through the soul alone. “The Lord will not accept any person against a poor man, and he will hear the prayer of him that is wronged. He will not despise the prayers of the fatherless; nor the widow, when she poureth out the complaint of her groaning. Do not the widow’s tears run up the cheek, and [is not] her cry against the one making them fall? For from the cheek they go up even to heaven, and the Lord that heareth will not be delighted with them.”¹³ “The bread of the needy, is the life of the poor man: he that defraudeth them thereof, is a man of blood. He that taketh away the bread gotten by sweat, is like him that killeth his neighbour.”¹⁴ The holy apostle John says: “that no murderer hath an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”¹⁵

But maybe because the Lord says, “Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity,”¹⁶ you think yourself to be able to be redeemed from rapine itself. Hear the same who [spoke] above [in Ecclesiasticus]: “The offering of one sacrificing out of iniquity is stained, and the mockeries of the unjust are not acceptable.” And again: “the most High approveth not the gifts of the wicked, neither does he have respect for the oblations of the unjust, nor will he be pacified for sins by the multitude of their sacrifices. He that offereth sacrifice out of the goods of the poor, is as one that sacrificeth the son within sight of his father.”¹⁷ Whence Maximus [of Turin], writing about fasting [says]: “How does it profit you to not eat your own bread and snatch the food of wretched?” And again: “Rightly will you give a denarius to a poor man if you have not taken it away from someone else.”¹⁸ Again from him, as above: “Do not offer wicked gifts, for God will not receive them, for the Lord is judge, and with him there is no glorifying of person.”¹⁹ Also the prophet [Isaiah]: “Woe to thee that plunders, shalt not thou thyself also be plundered?”²⁰ And also Job: “the soul of the wounded hath cried out, and God doth not suffer it to pass unavenged.”²¹ And truly says the Psalmist: “To thee is the poor man left, thou wilt be a helper to the orphan.”²² Therefore keeping in mind these few things, backed up by the infinite testimony of divine law, exercise your military service in this world in such a way that you will by no means lose your soul, which lives on eternally.

⁸ Psalm 82:13.

⁹ Leviticus [?].

¹⁰ Luke 18:7-8.

¹¹ Ecclesiasticus 7:19.

¹² Isaiah 66:24.

¹³ Ecclesiasticus 36:16-19.

¹⁴ Ecclesiasticus 36:25-26.

¹⁵ Based on I John 3:15.

¹⁶ Luke 16:9.

¹⁷ Ecclesiasticus 34:21-24.

¹⁸ Maximus of Turin (d. 865), Homily 44 [PL 57:337]

¹⁹ Ecclesiasticus 35:14.

²⁰ Isaiah 33:1.

²¹ Job 24:12.

²² Psalm 9:35.

Title III: Concerning Craftsmen

Are you a craftsman? Listen: "The prayer of the craftsmen shall be in the work of their craft, applying their soul [to their work], and searching into the law of the most High,"²³ so that you may understand that you, with these your labors, are able to offer acceptable praise to God, that is to say, [an acceptable praise] of prayers, if you are diligent about "applying your soul" to God and "searching into the law of the Most High," by keeping the words of his teaching. This will happen if you busy yourself with your craft, while it is there for you to help the body, so that it may also offer some kind of support for the soul. From the same [labor], offer alms, and give tithes to the Lord. Be mindful that out of all things that he confers, he always demands what it yours. Fear that if you do not bear his part of this, that you deprive your present and your future.

²³ Ecclesiasticus 38:39