

COLLECTION

The Canons and Pastoral Epistle of Ælfric

Ælfric of Eynsham

2 texts

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Ælfric's Pastoral Epistle to Wulfstan, Archbishop of York

Ælfric of Eynsham

Imperial · Early Medieval · Letter

STROMATA 205

INTRODUCTION

Around the turn of the eleventh century, Aelfric of Eynsham - England's foremost vernacular teacher - wrote this pastoral letter for Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, to be read aloud to parish priests who knew no Latin. It is less a treatise than a working manual: why clergy keep the seven canonical hours, what the seven church orders mean, why chastity binds the altar's ministers, and how four early councils shaped the Church's discipline. Aelfric moves easily between Old Testament precedent and apostolic example, plainly worried that ill-trained priests will mislead the very people they are meant to guide. Translated by Benjamin Thorpe in 1840, the voice is blunt, pastoral, and occasionally exasperated - a bishop's-eye view of parish life a thousand years gone, still recognizably concerned with the same question every clergy handbook asks: how do the ordained live up to what they've been given?

To Men in Orders,

- It behoves us bishops, that we disclose to you priests in the English tongue, the divine doctrine, which our canon prescribes to us, and which also the book of Christ teaches us; because ye cannot all understand the Latin, and yet we dare not silently refrain from telling you our Lord's commandments, lest we should be guilty, if we silently refrained therefrom; but we desire to guard ourselves: see ye to what ye may do afterwards.
- I know, however, for certain, that this our admonition will displease a good many of you; because to many men is unrighteousness too dear.
- I trust, however, that one or other will be stimulated by God, so that he desire to hear the holy doctrine, and will correct himself to his own benefit.
- The good will willingly hear God's commandments, but the evil will not, of their own will; but they shall, nevertheless, one day certainly be ashamed of their unrighteousness, and thereby, at least, desist from evil.
- Ye priests should religiously observe your order, and always adorn it with good habits, and with pure mind minister to Christ, at his holy altar, so as is befitting your order; because verily ye are placed as guides, and as teachers over God's people, that ye may gain them to God.
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Three periods are reckoned in this world. One period as before God's law, in the time of the patriarchs, who were of yore. The second, under God's law, in the time of Moses and the prophets. The third under Christ's own grace, in the Christian time, after Christ's advent

- First, in the earliest time after Adam, it was, that meti lived in fleshly lusts, and in enormous sins; and some heed' lessly lived in heathenism, and foredid themselves, by worship of the devil, and despised the Creator, who had formed them to men; and that they did through the devil's lore, who awhile before had misled Adam.
- Then the Almighty God, in the time of Moses, the great leader, established, as a guide to mankind, the five books, in which is God's law; and Moses wrote them, and commanded mankind, that they should not have any heathenism, but should ever worship the true God, who alone is the Almighty Creator. And the law likewise forbade mankind to perpetrate sins, and also lawfully punished those who perversely sinned.
- Then at last, verily, the righteous Christ himself; the Son of Almighty God, who created all things, came into this world, with real humanity, because he would redeem the sinful from the thralldom of the devil, and lost men bring into the way of life; and established Christianity in chastity; himself giving example, and teaching the chastity which he loves in his poor ministers, who have ever to serve him in chastity; that is in monks and mynchens, and especially in mass-priests. And the same Son of God chose him for mother the chaste maiden St. Mary. And he is himself the source of all chastity; and he lived alone in this world in perfect chastity, so as no other man. John also, the Baptist, who baptized him continued ever in celibacy, in great abstinence, and in chastity. And John the Evangelist, our Lord's kinsman, continued in celibacy and in chastity, till his life's end.
- Also the twelve Apostles, who followed the Saviour, when here in the world he dwelt with men; and the seventy two men, who continued with him during his teachership, these are named his disciples in books; all these forsook their worldly possessions, and wives, and continued in chastity, following Christ, so as Peter did, who to Christ himself thus spake: 'Ecce nos reliquimus omnia,' &c., that is in English: Behold, we have forsaken all our worldly things, and we follow thee now, and ever so will.
- Ye ought to know, if ye love wisdom, what difference there is between the two testaments; the old law, before Christ's advent, and the new testament, under Christ's grace; for before the law of Moses, men might live variously, and also under the law of Moses, mankind lived in another manner: it is our duty now to do otherwise, according to our Lord's doctrine.
- In ancient days, before Christ's advent, men lived too much after their own lusts; but he said, that we should, with strong mind, live more rigidly, and strive against sins, and despise evil lusts, that we, in return therefore, may possess the kingdom of heaven.
- And he also spake of the martyrs, who, he knew, were to be after his passion, who suffered afterwards for his love and faitli: Fear ye not,' said he, those who slay your body, for they cannot slay the soul; but fear those who can sink the soul and also the body into hell' Through this admonition, and through many others, many thousands were martyred widely over the world,

both men and women, for Christ's faith, and they so, with their constancy and firmness, merited the kingdom of heaven. Again spake our Lord of his holy confessors, whom, in holy books, we call confessores : 'Sint lumbi vestri prsecincti, et lucemae ardentes in manibus vestris,' Be your loins,' he said, 'girded about, and lamps burning in your hands.'

- By the loins is signified, as we learn in books, foul libidinousness, and we ought to bind and control it, for our chastity, and have our lamps in hand; these are holy works constantly, in alms, and in all good deeds, for example to men.
- John the Evangelist, in his ghostly vision, saw our Lord, after he was ascended to heaven, clad in a white garment, and it was wide, down to the ankles, and his breast was confined with a golden girdle.
- He bade us begird our loins, so that we may despise foul libidinousness; and he himself was begirt with a golden girdle at his holy breast; therefore we also ought to have our mind's chastity always in our hearts; we especially who minister to Christ in his ministry.
- Again, Daniel the prophet wrote in his prophecy, that he saw God in his ghostly vision; and he said: He was clad in linen, and his loins were girded around.' John saw, as we before said, the Saviour girded about his holy breast; and Daniel saw the loins girded.
- Now is it truly thereby manifested to us, both in the old law, and also in the new, that God will have, in his spiritual service holy ministers male and female, who, with chastity of body and mind, may offer to him the holy housel, so as he himself taught, before his passion.
- Of this were mindful the great confessors, whom we call 'confessores,' and the holy maidens, who lived their lives ever in chastity.
- It happened, after the passion of our Lord, and after his ascension, that the Holy Ghost came from heaven to earth, as a burning fire, with broad flame, over Christ's apostles, as Christ before had promised to them, and filled them all, without peril, so that they all knew the languages of all nations, and all the lore, which we learn, they wrote in books, and established by God's own direction. They wrought also many miracles through Christ, and the same miracles which he himself had before wrought. And then, in those days, Peter preached in the city of Jerusalem to the Jewish people; and then it happened, that three thousand men submitted to baptism in one day; and again, at another preaching, yet more men, and were so greatly stimulated, that they sold all their possessions, and brought the worth to the feet of the apostles: and none of them had afterwards anything separate, but made all in common, each according to his need. And James, the righteous apostle, directed them all for thirty years.
- Here was established, through this holy company, the life of those monks, who live according to rule, under their abbot, and have all their things in common, as the abbot directs them. And then afterwards, the apostles went apart, far away, over all this world, working miracles, and preaching true faith; and the faithful they baptized, and raised churches and established bishops, and ordained mass-priests, and distributed many servants of God into the seven orders, as the canon tells us: and God's faith waxed afterwards, and heathenship waned.
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What then? After that it happened that there sprang up a boundless persecution against the Christians, far and wide, and they were martyred with manifold torments, and almost every one slain, who believed in Christ But God constantly wrought miracles among them through these; so that the heathens thereby the sooner believed in Christ. Oft even a thousand men together believed, where one martyr was slain, through the great miracles that the saint performed. And Christianity might not thenceforth be ever quenched; and God also gave afterwards peace and remission in the world, and the faith waxed far and wide.

- Then the emperor Constantino succeeded to the empire, in the city of Rome, and he swayed empire over all the world and he was the first emperor who believed in Christ, the son of Saint Helena, the blessed queen: and he then bade assemble a synod of bishops; he would hear the holy doctrine, and the true faith in the righteous God, in whom he believed. Then there came together, in the city of Nice, three hundred and eighteen bishops, assembled from afar; and the emperor came to meet them, and with all reverence welcomed them, and commanded abundant provision to be made for them all, and listened to their doctrine with faithful mind: and there were many of them who could openly work miracles through God; and they long continued there together.
- There was also then an impious priest, who was called Arius, from the city of Alexandria: and he was blinded in his mind, and the greatest heretic that had come of mankind. He would lessen the living Lord, and said, that in true godhead he was not equal to his father, but was less, in might.
- Then the bishops excommunicated the wicked heretic; but nevertheless, he would not cease from his heresy, ere he totally perished.
- A second synod was afterwards, of a hundred and fifty bishops, assembled from afar, in the time of Theodosius, the noble emperor; and they there condemned the heretical bishop, who was called Macedonius, and excommunicated him, because he denied, and said in his heresy, that the Holy Ghost was in no godhead with the heavenly Father, and the Saviour Christ But they there taught manifestly, that he is true God, ever dwelling in one godhead with the Almighty Father, and his begotten Son.
- The third synod was of two hundred bishops, under the younger Theodosius, and they there condemned Nestorius the heretic, who audaciously said, that in Christ were two persons; and they there totally extinguished his heresy; because verily our Lord is ever continuing in one person.
- The fourth synod was of six hundred bishops, and thirty priests, assembled from very far, in the time of Martian the great emperor. The synod condemned the diabolical abbot, who said in his heresy that our Lord's body and his godhead were of one nature. Then was he excommunicated from the great synod, because Christ is, as ye have often heard, true man and true God, ever continuing.

- Afterwards there were very often other synods of wise bishops widely throughout the world, but these were the principal, who with full doctrine confirmed the faith, and excommunicated the heretics, who with their heresy would turn wrong to right, and seduce mankind from their Lord.
- These four synods then also appointed all the services which we have in God's ministry, at mass, and at matins, and at all the canonical hours: and they forbade all marriages ever to ministers of the altar, and especially to masspriests.
- Seven canonical hours they appointed for us to sing daily to the praise of our Lord; as the prophet David said in his prophecy: 'Septies in die,' &c. 'Seven times, my Lord,' said he, 'I have said thy praise in one day, for the righteousness of thy judgments.' The first canonical hour is matins, with the after song appertaining thereto, prime, tierce, sext, none, vespers, compline. These seven canonical hours ye should sing with great attention, to the praise of your Lord, daily in church, always at the appointed hour; and, in like manner, celebrate mass at the appointed time. And it is much that mass may be celebrated once in one day, though it be not celebrated oftener; because our Lord suffered once, and redeemed us all; and now is the mass, which men celebrate, a memorial of his great passion; and much can it effect for all mankind, both living and departed, so as we learn in holy books; and therefore should mass also be fervently celebrated, with great chastity, so as those holy men did, whom we call confessors. Some of these ever continued without wife, some of them forsook that unallowed thing, and served Christ in chastity, so as the canons inform us, and openly command: that is, that no bishop nor priest have in his monastery, or in his house, any woman, unless it be his mother, or his sister, father's sister, or mother's sister, or a relation of them, from whom no evil report may spring up: and if he do otherwise, the canon says, that he should forfeit his order.
- This to you priests will seem grievous, because ye have your misdeeds in custom, so that it seems to yourselves, that ye have no sin in so living in female intercourse, as laymen; and say that Peter the apostle had a wife and children; and we also say that he had so; and some others, who followed our Lord, had also wives and children, before their conversion, but they abstained therefrom after they came to Christ's teaching, and forsook their possessions and wives, and all their worldly things.
- Beloved, we cannot now forcibly compel you to chastity, but we admonish you, nevertheless, that ye observe chastity, so as Christ's ministers ought, in good reputation, to the pleasure of God; as those saints did, whom we before mentioned, who all their lives lived in chastity.
- Beloved, seven orders are appointed in books for God's ministries in Christ's church. One is ostiarius, the second is lector, the third exorcista, the fourth acoluthus, the fifth subdiaconus, the sixth diaconus, the seventh presbyter or episcopus. Ostiarius is the doorkeeper, who holds the keys of the church. Lector is the reader who reads in church. Exorcista is an adjuror, who reads over men diseased in mind, and the infirm. Acoluthus is he who bears the light at God's ministries. Subdiaconus is the under deacon, who bears the chalice and the dish at the mass, and ministers to the deacon. Diaconus the minister is called, who ministers to the mass-priest, or to the bishop at the mass, and reads the gospel: he may also give the bread, and baptize children, if need be.
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Beloved, understand that both are of one order, the bishop and the mass-priest, that is, of the seventh church-order, as holy books tell us; and both celebrate mass, and preach to men, and both ought alike to observe chastity, and preach righteousness to other men, and set good example: and no order is reckoned for the holy ministry, except the seven orders which we have before mentioned.

- The bishop is, however, appointed, in some degree, for greater benediction than is the mass-priest; that is, to hallow churches, and to ordain priests, to confirm men, and to bless the oil; because it were too multifarious, if all mass-priests must do this.
- It is proper, for priests, however, on account of that seniority, to be humbly subordinate to their bishop, and live by his direction and wisdom; and that he superintend them, and heed their courses, so as his name expresses: his name is called episcopus, that [is] in English, overseeing because he constantly oversees his subordinates, and directs them to proper manners, ever as he can most earnestly.
- The first bishop, whom God himself anointed in the old law, was called Aaron, he was the brother of Moses the great leader; but he never celebrated mass, because no mass was established, before Christ himself, in the new covenant hallowed housel, and commanded us afterwards so to do in remembrance of him.
- Now was the mass established by our Lord Christ; and the holy apostle Peter appointed the canon thereto which we call 'Te igitur.' Aaron, and the old bishops, who were of yore, offered, it is said, to God, in the old manner, bulls and rams, and cattle of every kind, so as no man in these days may do; because all those offerings betokened the slaying of our Lord, who was slain for us, and fastened on a rood, for our redemption; and he then so ended the old covenant And then, in those days, must Aaron, and his successors afterwards take to them for mate, according to the law of Moses, a pure maiden; because no one of any other race might come to the degree of bishop, except of Aaron's race; nor might they marry with any widow, nor with a repudiated wife, with leave of God, but with a pure maiden; and they should, nevertheless, preserve their chastity, always as often as they offered the sacrificial offerings which were then usual. They must then of necessity have wives in those days, that, at all events, the great episcopal race, which came of Aaron, might not be extinguished; because no race might come to that degree, except that one race which came of Aaron; and thus it ever stood in the old covenant.
- Now is the old law ended after Christ's advent; and men now, under this Christian law, do not choose' another bishop of any episcopal race, but of any race, provided he be chaste, and grown up in manners for God's ministries, whether from monkhood or from priesthood. Martin was a monk, and he was afterwards a famous bishop; Gregory was a monk, and he was a famous bishop; Cuthbert was a monk, and a famous bishop; and many others were bishops from monkhood, as we read in books. And also from the priesthood living in chastity were many bishops and mass-priests, in great renown, very holy men, whom we call confessors. But ye priests will some be, as we think and greatly fear, of that evil crew of men in orders, of whom our Lord spake, in his holy gospel: 'Multi dicunt mihi in illo die, hoc est in die iudicii, Domine, Domine,' &c. He said: 'Many will say to me in that great day of judgment. Lord, beloved Lord, in our lives we

wrought in thy honour many miracles in thy great name, and we also prophesied for thy honour.' Then said our Lord unto them: 'I know ye not, nor reck I of you; but depart quickly from me ye unrighteous doers, and dwell ever henceforth there, where there is eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

- Christ knoweth all things, but he will not then, however, acknowledge with any kindness those unchaste ministers of the altar, who did not ere please him here in life with the chastity which they ought to have preserved; nor also shall they then have any thing pleasing to them, nor may they so foul enter into his fair heavenly hall, but shall be shut out into the eternal pains of hell's torments. And yet the evil priest cannot with his evil, although he be wicked and sinful in deeds, he cannot ever defile God's ministry, nor the baptism, nor the mass; but all shall come to his own harm, that he has done unrighteously. Now ye have heard concerning men in orders, both in the old law, and in the new covenant, how it was constituted: be heedful for yourselves as ye will.
- Beloved: the canons teach us how we should regulate our lives. Canons the right rules are called which direct us, and they ordain, that he who of the lay order takes a widow to wife or a repudiated wife, be never afterwards deacon or mass-priest; and they direct, that the man in orders, who commits foul fornication forfeit his order.
- We dare not silently refrain from reciting to you the holy ordinances which ye ought to observe: we shall be guiltless, if we recite them to you; know ye, whether yourselves will secure your souls, and direct yourselves. Ye have not lawfully intercourse with woman at any time; but laymen may marry and justly hold their lawful wives; and the layman, after his wife's decease, may, if needful, marry a second time; and a young widow may marry again after her husband's decease; but, nevertheless, the bridal benediction may not be given them, unless she be a maiden, but they should do penance for their incontinence.
- Beloved: ye priests should be provided with books, and with vestments, so as is befitting your order. A mass-priest should, at least, have a mass-book, books of canticles, and reading books, psalter and manual, penitential, and numeral; and these shall be sufficiently correct; and he should have clean mass-vestments, for Christ's ministries. And ye should sing sunrise matins, and mass-matins, always nine intervals with nine readings.
- And know, that every chalice be wrought of molten material, of gold or of silver, of glass or of tin; let it not be of horn, especially not of wood. No man may celebrate mass with any other vessel save with the chalice which is hallowed to Christ; and let his altar be clean, and always well covered, and not befouled with dung; and let no man ever celebrate mass without wine.
- Be careful also now, I pray, that ye be better and wiser in your ghostly craft for Christ's ministries, so as is rightly befitting you that ye should be, than the secular men are in their worldly crafts. Long should he learn who has to teach; and if he will not learn to be a teacher of right wisdom, he shall afterwards be a teacher of great error, as Christ himself said in his gospel: 'Caecus si cceco ducatum praestat, ambo in foveam cadent:' 'If the blind man be the guide of the blind, then will they both fall into one pit.' Blind is the guide, who has to teach God's folk, if he neither have learning, nor be willing to learn, but misleads himself, and his parishioners along with him.

- The mass-priest shall rightly preach the true faith to men, and recite sermons to them; and visit sick men, and baptize children, as speedily as they most speedily can be prepared for baptism. And if the sick layman desire to receive unction, let him then confess him, and forgive every grudge, before the unction: and if he recover, and, after the unction, become hale, he may, unless he have vowed the contrary, enjoy the society of woman, and flesh, if he himself will.
- In the unction there is healing and forgiveness of sins; and it is no ordination, as some men imagine. And if the man be again sick, let him again receive unction, when it be needful; and if it happen that he dies, let the corpse be wisely buried and the soul earnestly committed to God.

- But some priests, however, misdo altogether too much; they rejoice when men depart hence, and unbidden gather about the corpse, like greedy ravens, wherever they see a dead carcass; but it properly becomes them to bury those men who belong to their minster: and no one ought to go in another's following to any corpse, unless he be bidden. And know also, that no priest may rightfully be a rapacious monger, nor a public spoiler in 'gerefa'-ship, nor drink altogether too frequently in wine houses, nor be too given to drinking, nor too proud, nor too boastful, nor too showy in his garments, nor adorned with gold, but with good habits do honour to himself.
- He shall not be litigious, nor stir up strife, but he shall pacify the litigious always, if he can. And he may not, who is God's soldier, lawfully wear weapons, nor go to battle; because the canon teaches us, if he be slain in a national fight, or on account of some dispute, which he himself has made, that no man may, on any account, celebrate mass for him, nor openly pray for him, but, nevertheless, he may be buried in a clean grave; and so leave afterwards all to God's judgment.
- Now some priests say, that they, in case of need, may wear a weapon and say that Peter was armed, when he would defend his Lord; that was when he hacked off the sinful one's ear, who was in that gang, where Christ was bound: but we soothly say, that the righteous Son of God, and those who followed him, did not go armed, nor came thither with any worldly warfare; although among them, when the Jews were binding him, two swords [were] at hand, so as it is said: 'Domine ecce duo gladii hie,' 'Beloved Lord,' said those who followed him, 'here are two swords:' but if they had been there before, they would not have said so. And if Peter might have slain the man outright, then Christ would not have commanded him to desist from the work; but he said to him: 'Put the sword into the sheath quickly, and desist from the fight;' and he forthwith healed him whom Peter had wounded. He might, had he willed it, have instantly had warlike force abundant, but he suffered all for our need what he then suffered. And the same Peter, who was then fighting, was afterwards hanged on a rood, for our Lord's true faith, and he then strove against nothing, neither with word nor with deed, but suffered patiently, for his Lord's love, and for the true faith, all that was done to him, and therefore he has for reward heavenly mirth. By this God's servants may know, that they ought not to go anywhere with war or with secular contest, but with ghostly weapons fight against the devil. Neither wife nor secular warfare are in anywise befitting them, if they will rightly obey God, and hold God's law, as is properly becoming their order.

Sit nomen Domini benedictum (In the Name of God).

Amen.

Source: Translated by Benjamin Thorpe, in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (London: Record Commission, 1840).

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The Canons of Ælfric (Of the Synod of Priests)

Ælfric of Eynsham

Imperial · Early Medieval · Rule

STROMATA 206

INTRODUCTION

A companion piece to Aelfric's pastoral epistle, this short set of numbered canons instructs England's parish priests in the discipline of their office - chastity, sobriety, the seven clerical degrees, the books and vestments a priest must keep, and the reverent handling of the sacrament. Drawing on the canons of Nicaea and the later ecumenical councils, Aelfric speaks bluntly to a clergy he judges lax, pairing scripture and patristic precedent with plain practical instruction - down to how the housel should be stored so it does not grow mouldy. Translated by Benjamin Thorpe for his 1840 edition of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical law, the numbered canons read almost like a field manual for tenth-century parish life. Expect terse, didactic prose - less a treatise to ponder than a rulebook meant to be obeyed.

- I say to you priests, that I will not bear your negligence in your service but I will truly say to you how it is constituted with regard to priests. Christ himself established Christianity and chastity, and all those who walked with him, in his way, forsook all worldly things, and society of woman; for he himself said in one of his gospels: He who hateth not his wife is not a disciple worthy of me.
- Then after Christ's ascension again to heaven's kingdom, and after the death of his venerable apostles, so great a persecution was raised up in the world, that God's servants could not be assembled in a synod, by reason of the heathen murderers, who meditated their death; until the emperor Constantino turned to Christianity, who had the whole globe in his power.
- He then assembled a synod in the city of Nice, of three hundred and eighteen bishops, of all nations, for confirmation of the faith. There were so many great bishops at that synod, that they might have wrought miracles, and so they did. They there excommunicated the mass-priest Arius, because he would not believe that the Son of the living God was as mighty as the great Father is. Then they all condemned the devil's man, but he would not cease, till, at last, his intestines all fell out, when he went to the house of office.
- At this synod were appointed the holy church services and the mass-creed, and many other things respecting God's worship, and God's servants.
- They all decreed, by an unanimous determination, that neither bishop, nor mass-priest, nor deacon, nor any regular canon, should have in his house any woman, unless it were his mother, or his sister, or his father's sister, or his mother's sister, and that he who should do otherwise should forfeit his order.

- Now this will seem to you strange to hear, because ye have brought your wretchedness so into a custom, as if it were no danger that the priest live as the 'ceorl.' Now ye say, that ye cannot be without the services of a woman; but how could then those holy men live without wives? They have now, therefore, the meed of their mind's chastity, ever without end, in the life eternal. Priests now often say, that Peter had a wife: they say very truly, because he must so then, by the old law, before he turned to Christ; but he forsook his wife, and all worldly things, after he had turned to Christ, who established chastity.
- By the old law, a bishop must take to him a pure maiden, and with her cohabit at fixed times; because that one race should always be of that order, and of no other tribe might there be any bishop; he might not, however, marry more than once nor might he marry a widow, nor a repudiated woman, but, as we before said, a maiden. They might well have wives in those days, because they never celebrated mass, nor administered the housel to men, but offered beasts in the old wise, until Christ hallowed the housel before his passion, and appointed the mass, which now stands through him.
- There was also determined at that same synod, that he who took a widow, or a repudiated woman, or he who married again, that he should never afterwards be received into any order, nor hallowed for a priest; but he who before had a pure wife was chosen to the pure order, so as the apostle Paul hath written in his epistle.
- Nor may any priest be at the marriage anywhere where a man marries a second wife, or a woman a second husband, nor together bless them, as may be signified to him; so that it were better for them that they continued in chastity. The layman may, however, with the apostle's leave marry a second time, if his wife desert him; but the canons forbid the blessings thereto and have established penances for such men to do.
- Seven degrees are established in the church: one is ostiarius, the second is lector, the third exorcista, the fourth acoluthus, the fifth subdiaconus, the sixth diaconus, the seventh presbyter.
- Ostiarius is the church door-keeper, whose duty it is to announce the hours with bells, and unlock the church to believing men, and to shut the unbelieving without
- Lector is the reader, who reads in God's church, and is ordained for the purpose of preaching of God's word.
- Exorcista is in English, he who with oath conjures, in the Saviour's name, the accursed spirits, which torment men, that they forsake those men.
- Acoluthus he is called who bears the candle or taper, in God's ministries, when the gospel is read, or when the housel is hallowed at the altar; not to dispel, as it were, the dim darkness, but, with that light, to announce bliss, in honour of Christ, who is our light
- Subdiaconus is truly underdeacon, who bears forth the vessels to the deacon, and humbly ministers under the deacon, at the holy altar, with the housel vessels.
- Diaconus is the minister who ministers to the mass priest, and sets the offerings upon the altar, and also reads the gospels at God's ministries. He may baptize children, and housel the people.

They shall minister to the Saviour in white albs, and lead a spiritual life in chastity, and all be efficient persons, so as is befitting the order.

The priest, who continues without a deacon, has the name, but has not the services.

- Presbyter is the mass-priest, or old 'wita;' not that every one is old, but that he is old in wisdom. He hallows God's housel, as the Saviour commanded. He has to instruct the people in belief with preaching, and with pure morals give example to Christians, and his life should not be as that of laymen. There is no difference betwixt a mass-priest and a bishop, save that the bishop is appointed for the ordaining of priests and confirming of children, and hallowing of churches, and to take care of God's dues; for it would be too multifarious if every mass-priest so did: but they have one order, though the latter have precedence.
- There is no order appointed in the ecclesiastical ministries but these seven, as we have just said. Monkhood and abbothood are in another manner, and are not reckoned in this number, nor also is nunhood named herein. These orders are holy, and bring to heaven the souls of those priests who seriously observe them.
- Now it behoves mass-priests, and all God's servants, to officiate in their churches with holy service, and to sing the seven canonical hours therein, which are appointed to them, so as the synod has directed: matins, prime, tierce, sext, none, vespers, and compline seventh.
- And they shall fervently pray for the king, and for their bishop, and for those who do good to them, and for all Christian people.
- He shall also have for the spiritual work, before he is ordained, these weapons; that is, these holy books: psalter, epistle book, gospel book, and mass book, book of canticles, and manual, numeral, and pastoral, penitential, and reading book. These books the mass-priest should necessarily have, and he may not be without them, if he will properly observe his order, and rightly inform the people, who look to him; and let him be careful, that they are well directed.
- He shall also have mass-vestments, that he may reverently minister to God himself; so is it becoming, that his vestment be not dirty, nor by any means torn, and his altar cloths in good condition. Let his chalice also be wrought of pure material, incorruptible, and so also the dish, and the corporale be clean, such as is befitting Christ's ministries. Such things cannot be produced without labour, but they will forever be honourable with God, who well minister to him, with wisdom and with chastity.
- The mass-priest shall, on Sundays and mass-days, tell to the people the sense of the gospel in English, and concerning the Paternoster and the creed also, the oftenest that he can, as a stimulus to men, that they may know the faith and cultivate their Christianity. Let the teacher warn against that which the prophet says: 'Canes muti non possunt latrare,' 'Dumb dogs cannot bark.' We ought to bark, and preach to the laymen lest, for want of teaching, they should perish. Christ has said in his gospel, of unskilful teachers: 'Caecus si caeco ducatum praestet, ambo in fossam cadunt,' 'If the blind be the guide of another blind, then they both fall into a blind ditch. Blind is the teacher, if he know not book learning, and deceive the laymen by his ignorance; therefore take ye heed against this, so as ye have need.

- The holy fathers appointed also, that men pay their tithes into God's church. And let the priest go thither, and divide them into three: one part for repair of the church, and the second for the poor, the third for God's servants, who attend the church.
- They also established, that no one should celebrate mass within any house, unless it were hallowed, except for great need, or if any one be sick.
- And if an unbaptized child be suddenly brought to the mass-priest, that he must baptize it forthwith with haste, so that it die not heathen,
- And that no priest do his holy ministry for money, nor demand anything, neither for baptism nor for any ministry; that he be not like to those, whom Christ himself drove with a whip from the temple, because they wickedly trafficked therein. Let not the servant of God do God's ministry for money, but to the end that he may merit eternal glory thereby.
- Nor let any priest, for any covetousness, go from one minster to another, but ever remain in that to which he was ordained, as long as his days continue.
- Nor let any priest, through folly, drink immoderately, nor force any man to much drink; because he shall be prepared, if there be a child to baptize, or a man to housel, so that he have his wits: and though it may not so happen,
- Nor let a priest be a monger, nor a covetous merchant; nor let him forsake his divinity; nor take to worldly conversations; nor let him wear weapons; nor work strife; nor let him drink at wine houses, as secular men do; nor let him swear oaths, but, with simplicity, ever speak truly, as a learned servant of God.
- He shall also, with discretion, shrive sinners, each according to his degree, as he may bear; and he shall housel the infirm and sick, while the sick can swallow the housel; and he shall not administer it, if he be half living, because Christ commanded that the housel should be eaten.

- The priest shall have hallowed oil apart for children, and apart for sick men, and always anoint the sick in bed. Some sick men are fearful, so that they will not consent to be anointed in their illness: now we will tell you how James, the apostle of God, taught respecting that point: he said to the faithful thus: *Tristatur aliquis vestrum, oret aequo animo et psallat*, 'If any of you be sad, let him pray with even mind, and praise his Lord' 'If any one among you be sick, let him order to be fetched to him the mass-priests of the church, and let them sing over him, and pray for him, and anoint him with oil, in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of a faithful man shall heal the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your sins among yourselves, and pray for yourselves among yourselves, that ye may be saved.' Thus spake James the apostle concerning the unction for sick men: but the sick must confess, with inward groaning, to the priest, whether he has any crime unatoned for, before he anoints him, as the apostle here before enjoined: and no man may anoint him, before he pray for this, and do his confession. If he were before sinful and heedless, let him then make confession, and promise cessation, and give alms, before his end; and he shall not be condemned to hell, but shall attain to God's mercy.
- There were four synods, for the true faith, against the heretics, who foolishly spake concerning the Holy Trinity, and the Saviour's humanity. The first was at Nice, as we said long before; and the second was afterwards at Constantinople, of a hundred and fifty bishops, holy men of God; the third was at Ephesus, of two hundred bishops; and the fourth was at Chalcedon, of many hundred bishops. And they all were unanimous among themselves for the ordinance that had been established at Nice, and they amended everything of it that had been broken. These four synods are to be observed, so as the four books of Christ, in Christ's church. Many synods have been held since, but these four are, nevertheless, the principal, because they extinguished the heretical doctrines, which the heretics heretically invented against God; and they also appointed the church services.
- How dare ye now despise all their ordinances, while monks hold the ordinances of one man, the holy Benedict, and live according to his direction? and if they anywhere violate it, they make amends afterwards, by their abbot's direction, with all humility. Ye also have a rule if ye would read it, in which ye may see how it is established with regard to you; but ye love worldly conversations, and will be reeves and neglect your churches, and the ordinances totally.
- We will, however, recite the ordinances to you, lest we ourselves perish along with you: Ye shall not rejoice on account of men deceased, nor attend on the corpse unless ye be thereto invited; when ye are thereto invited, then forbid ye the heathen songs of the kymen, and their loud cachinnations; nor eat ye, nor drink where the corpse lieth therein, lest ye be imitator of the heathenism which they there commit. Nor shall ye be proud, decorated with rings; nor let your garments be made too proudly, nor yet too poorly, but let every one wear what befits his order; so that the priest have that to which, he is ordained; and let him not wear monk's clothing, nor laymen's, any more than a man wears women's garments. Christ said of his disciples, who zealously ministered to him, that they should ever be with him in bliss, there where he himself shall be, in that true life; to whom is glory and honour to all eternity. Amen,

- I pray you, that you take heed of yourselves, so as your books instruct you, how you should do in these days to come. Housel may not be hallowed on Good Friday, because Christ suffered on that day for us; but there must, nevertheless, be done what appertains to that day: so that two lectures be read, with two expositions, and with two collects, and Christ's passion; and afterwards, the prayers. And let them pray to the holy rood, so that they all greet the rood of God with kiss. Let the priest then go to the altar of God, with the housel bread that he hallowed on Thursday, and with unhallowed wine mixed with water, and conceal it with his corporale, and then immediately say: *Oremus preceptis salutaribus moniti;* and *'Pater noster'* to the end. And then let him say to himself: *'Libera nos quaeso Domine ab omnibus malis,'* and aloud: *'Per omnia secula seculorum.'* Let him then put a part of the housel into the chalice, as it is, however, usual; then let him go silently to the housel; and for the rest, let look who will. We sing on the Thursday, our canonical hours together, and all these prayers to ourselves, and *Miserere mei Deus,* and the collects. On the Friday we sing all the canonical hours separately to ourselves, except the matins only, which we sing together. In like manner, on the Saturday, until nones have been sung, let no oil be put into the font, unless a child be baptized therein. On Easter eve, let there not be sung at the mass-offering, neither *'Agnus Dei'* nor *Communiam;* but among those who desire the housel, let the chanter begin: *'Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,'* and the psalm thereto: *'Laudate Dominum omnes gentes,'* then the anthem: *'Vespere autem Sabbati'* and *'Magnificat'* to the end. Then let the priest say: *'Dominus vobiscum'* *'Oremus,'* and the collect: *'Post communionem;'* and end the mass so with one collect, *'Post communionem.'* Some priests hold the housel, that was hallowed on Easter day, over a year, for sick people; but they misdo very deeply, that the holy housel should become mouldy, and will not understand, how great a penance the Penitential enjoins, if the housel be mouldy or discoloured, or if it be lost, or if mice or beasts eat it through negligence. The holy housel should be kept with great care, and not be retained; but other new be hallowed for sick men, always every seven days, or fortnight, that it may not at least be mouldy; because the housel that was hallowed today is just as holy as that which was hallowed on Easter day. The housel is Christ's body, not bodily but spiritually; not the body in which he suffered, but the body about which he spake, when he blessed bread and wine for housel, one day before his passion, and said of the blessed bread: *'This is my body;'* and afterwards, of the hallowed wine: *'This is my blood, which shall be shed for many, in forgiveness of sins.'* Understand now, that the Lord, who could, before his passion, change the bread to his body, and the wine to his blood spiritually, that the same daily blesses, by the hands of his priests, the bread and wine to his spiritual body and blood. But the priest shall purely and carefully do God's ministries, with clean hands and with clean heart; and let him see that his oblations be not oldbaken, nor ill seen to; and let him always mix water with the wine; because the wine betokens our redemption through Christ's blood, and the water betokens the people for whom he suffered. Great honours they merit who minister to God with zeal and devotion; and also it is written, that he is accursed, who doth God's ministry with carelessness. We may by this know, that a man who has not his sight should not dare to celebrate mass, when he sees not what he offers to God, whether it be clean or foul. No man shall celebrate mass with any other vessel, save the chalice which is blessed thereto. We command you, mass-priests, that ye command all the people, who look to you, and over whom ye are confessors,

that the four first Easter-days be freed from all servile work; because at that tide all the world was freed from the thralldom of the devil. And let Sunday's festival be held, from the noon of Saturday until the dawn of Monday; and every mass-day's festival which in the days of our royal lord's ancestors, and of our forefathers, was appointed and ordered for a festival. And also let as many days be held as fasts as were then established for fasting, and for which service is appointed. And let every man fast every Friday during the year, except from Easter to Pentecost; and again, from Christmas till seven days after twelfth day, unless it be a festival of the whole people, or there be full service thereto; otherwise no man ought to break the &Bt of this day. And we bishops have ordained, when we were together, that all the nation should first before the massday of Saint Mary, and on the mass-days of the holy apostles; and that there be sung every Wednesday, in every minster, the mass 'Contra paganos;' and that every mass-priest do the same in his church.

- Now ye have heard positively what ye have to do, and what to forego: whether ye will do any of them or not, is not in our controls but we wish to be pure at God's judgment, May God grant you, that ye may so resolve as may be beneficial to you.

Source: Translated by Benjamin Thorpe, in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (London: Record Commission, 1840).

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Translation: Author (Aelfric of Eynsham) died c. 1010. Thorpe's 1840 translation is public domain (translator died 1870). The extracted text itself contained an archive.org URL pointing directly at Thorpe's 1840 volume, confirming the edition.

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