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LATE FOURTH CENTURY FATHERS
ON THE PRIESTHOOD

“The lust for office on the part of men who do not fear the Lord leaps upon the positions of high authority and quite openly now the foremost place is offered as a prize of impiety; and consequently that man who has uttered the more horrible blasphemies is accounted the more worthy of the Episcopal direction of the people. Gone is the dignity of the priesthood. (...) Licence to commit sin has become widespread; for those who have come into office through the favour of men take this very means of returning thanks for the favour – conceding to sinners whatever will conduce to their pleasure. Just judgement is dead; each and every one proceeds according to the whim of his own heart. Wickedness goes beyond all bounds, the laity are deaf to admonition, their leaders are without freedom of speech; for those who have obtained power for themselves through the favour of men are the slaves of those who have conferred the favour. And already, to serve them as a weapon in their warfare with one another, ‘the vindication of orthodoxy’, forsooth, has been devised by some, and they, concealing their private enmities, pretend that they hate one another for religion’s sake!”

This paragraph from the letter XCII of Saint Basil presents us the lamentable situation of the Christian clergy in the second half of the fourth century. Ambition, greed, eagerness for power and authority are the main causes of this pitiful situation. Saint Basil sadly remarks that priesthood has become a prize for impiety. The race for power has had disastrous consequences in the ranks of the clergy and of the laymen too. The doctrinal divisions (especially the Arian controversy) among bishops as well as the personal rivalries and jealousies are a constant source for divisions among Christians. There are too many priests and the bishops, and they are too young and too unprepared to exercise this ministry, which they want only because of their ambition and greed for money and power. The competition for the highest positions in the religious hierarchy that Saint Basil mentions in the passage above striking, since even unbaptised laymen are raised within the space of a single day to the dignity of bishop. A priest is recommended by his social position and his fortune, not by his preparation

for this ministry. To this sad spectacle offered by the clergy lay people respond with complacency or inertia, eager more to find in their priest or bishop an orator who will divert them by his elegant eloquence than one able to preach the truth to them. They want more a good administrator or a powerful protector than a pastor to their souls¹. Under the weak government of Nectarius, the predecessor of John Chrysostom, in the ranks of the clergy in Constantinople could be found an adulterer and a murderer. Many other priests were living as parasites, spending their time going from banquet to banquet. The illicit cohabitation of the priests with consecrated virgins, a problem that had been condemned by the Council of Nicaea, was still a reality². Saint Basil is not the first or the only one who wrote about and deplored the situation of such degraded clergy. The most important religious figures of this late fourth century who consistently wrote on this subject are Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom. Both of them tried to oppose this sad reality.

The second *Oration* of Gregory of Nazianzus, also known as *De Fuga*, is an apologetic composition (ἀπολογητικός λόγος) and strongly influenced the dialogue that John Chrysostom wrote concerning the priesthood almost two decades later. John's personality and rhetorical virtuosity are obvious in every page.

Both Gregory and Chrysostom refused ordination. They were unwilling to become priests because they considered themselves unworthy of such a high vocation. But the Bishop of Nazianzus, Gregory's father, nevertheless ordained his son to the priesthood on Christmas day A.D. 361. Many years later Gregory still saw this ordination as an act of "tyranny" committed against him. Having been ordained at Christmas, he abandoned his father's church at Theophany and fled to Pontus where he could pursue the Christian "philosophy" of a monk's life. Not wishing to continue his disobedience Gregory returned to his post before Easter 362. The oration was written with this occasion and contains a full explanation of the motives that had led to his flight to Pontus.

The truth about the origin of John Chrysostom's treatise about priesthood is much less certain. According to Book I, John and his friend, Basil, were elected to be consecrated to the episcopate while still laymen. John heard in advance about this decision and went into hiding, but his friend Basil was ordained. The treatise is John's apology to his friend when they met again after the events. It is difficult to say if such a meeting really took place. But what is important in relation to this episode of Gregory's life is that both Gregory and John considered themselves unprepared for such a dignified position.

Gregory later gave other reasons for explaining his withdrawal: the shock of his forcible ordination and his longing to retire from the world. More important is another argument which incriminates the clergy who "without being better than ordinary people (...) with unwashed hands (...) and uninitiated souls, intrude into the most sacred offices; and, before coming worthy to approach the temples, they lay claim to the sanctuary, and they push and thrust around

¹ Jean Bernardi, *La Prédication des Pères Cappadociens*, Paris, PUF, 1970.

² Louis Meyer, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. Maître de Perfection Chrétienne*, Paris, Gabriel Beauchesne et ses fils, 1933.vv.

the holy table, as if they thought this order to be a means of livelihood, instead of a pattern of virtue, or an absolute authority, instead of a ministry of which we must give account. In fact they are more in number than those whom they govern.”³ John Chrysostom deplored in his turn ecclesiastical elections where those who are recommended by their social position and their fortune are elected, rather than those most capable. In his dialogue on the life of John Chrysostom, Palladius describes the patriarch Theophilus as unwilling “to ordain good and shrewd men lest he make a mistake. He wished to have them all weak-willed men whom he could influence. He thought it better to control the weak-minded than to give attention to the wisdom of the prudent.”⁴

But a much more serious argument in the eyes of John and Gregory that they both bring to their defence is their unworthiness for this ministry. “I do not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or a herd, or to have authority over the souls of men”⁵ explained Gregory to his subjects. In the same way, John explains to his friend Basil that the “infirmity” of his spirit disqualifies him from being a priest (II.4).

To support this final argument and to convince their audience that their refusal was not just vainglorious or the result of their ambition for profitable office, they give a full explanation of what a priest should be.

A short investigation of the terms they use about priest or bishop, despite many points of similarity, will show us that their opinions about what a priest should be are not identical.

The word used in the New Testament for designating a priest is πρεσβύτερος and for a bishop, ἐπισκοπός. The believers ordained as priests are not called “sacrificers” ἱερεῖς, as are priests of the Old Testament. This is not to say that they did not intend to bring sacrifices to God. They had an altar, which Saint Paul calls θυσιαστηριον⁶. The Christians bring as sacrifice the blood and the flesh of our Lord, and this sacrifice is contrasted by Saint Paul with the sacrifice of the animals, or food and drinks⁷. Therefore the early Christians called these servants “presbyters” and not “sacrificers” because this name was still too closely connected with the idea of those who brought bloody sacrifices. Christians wanted to distinguish themselves in this aspect from the pagan and the Jewish world. Contrary to the bloody sacrifices of the Jews and pagans, the sacrifice of Christ was a “spiritual” sacrifice. Another name for the minister was needed to emphasise this essential distinction.

In the fourth century ἱερεῖς is the common name for a Christian priest. This word occurs in John’s treatise more frequently than any other to designate a priest (πρεσβύτερος, προστάτης, ποιμήν). The title of the dialogue itself is περὶ ἱερωσύνης. The original manuscripts give two variants for the title, ἱερωσύνης and ἐπισκοπῆς but the first one predominates. Ann Marie

³ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration II* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VII, Oxford, James Parker and Company, 1894.

⁴ Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of Saint John Chrysostom*, (transl. by Robert T. Meyer) New York, Newmann Press, 1985.

⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration II*.

⁶ 1. Cor. 9. 13.

⁷ 1. Cor. 10, 20 – 21.

Malingrey considers that for John Chrysostom ἱερεύς designates the one to whom are entrusted the holy things, τὰ ἱερά. This person can be a priest or a bishop and the word ἱερωσύνη designates here the priesthood as exercised by the priest or the bishop in the fourth century. Moreover, in his commentary of the Pauline epistles, John Chrysostom establishes an equivalence between the two words, ἱερεύς and ἐπισκοπός. John likes to use another term when he talks about priest or bishop and this word is ἄρχων “the one who has authority, the one who commands”. In relation with the priest or bishop seen as a ἄρχων, the Christians are called ἀρχόμενοι being those who submit to the authority, the subjects, those who are obedient to their ruler. Priests and bishops exercise their authority in the name of Christ. Emphasising this spiritual aspect of ecclesiastical authority John is ready to consider it superior to the authority of the parents, or even to the authority of the kings. In John’s dialogue, the role of a bishop as ruler ἄρχων is recognised, but that of a priest ἱερεύς seems to be the primordial thing.

In the second Oration of Gregory of Nazianzus this order is reversed. He uses the extremely rare word πρεσβύτερος ἢ ἐπισκοπός : and the word ἱερεύς does not have the slightest theological implication⁸. He frequently uses words from the family of ποιμήν, but these words are of secondary importance here. The figure of the “shepherd-priest” is important because Christ himself used it and delegated Peter to feed his flock. The archetype for the priest seen as a shepherd is Christ himself. But in the development of his comparison between priest and shepherd, he emphasises not so much their likeness as their difference. It is easier for a shepherd to compel his flock to submit to the treatment that he knows is best for it, than for a priest to rule over his subjects. He cannot force them but must convince them to do what is good, and the difficulty of this charge lies in the variety of men’s characters. For Gregory the priest is the ruler of a community ἄρχων, he has authority given by God, ἡγεμονία, his role is to lead his subjects (ὀδηγεῖν), he disposes of ἐπιστασία (control or authority characteristic for a man not given to a woman) and προστασία (leadership)⁹.

He is also a προστάτης (patron) and a προεστώς, and he is invested with προεδρία (presidency). The subjects (ὑπήκοον) obey their leader and depend on their priest by whom they are dominated and led. The importance of such a dignity is expressed also in a material way, because the bishop stays in the βῆμα (sanctuary) on the βαθμός.¹⁰

His position in the Church is superior to that of his subjects. Therefore, Gregory sees in a priest not so much a shepherd, as a “patron”. The patron is the powerful figure who rules over cities and villages and sometimes over whole regions and to whom his subjects must show obedience. These are the qualities that Gregory expects from a bishop in the first place. As we saw already in the second Oration he defends himself before his congregation saying that he

⁸ Jean Bernardi, *Introduction* in Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 1 – 3*, Sources Chrétiennes, 247, Paris, Cerf, 1978.

⁹ These two qualities ἐπιστασία and προστασία required from a bishop or priest, make John Chrysostom to refuse the ordination of women.

¹⁰ G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961.

does not possess “authority” over the souls of the men. And in the Panegyric of his friend, Saint Basil, we find again the same kind of qualities praised in the person of the bishop. The bishop is essentially a patron, charged to defend his Church and his congregation. And this protection is exercised over all those who possess any kind of authority, such as magistrates and powerful proprietors.¹¹ The patronage concerns individuals but can also be extended to the whole population of a city, especially to the needy and to those who are in physical distress.¹² Other duties that Saint Basil had to deal with as a bishop were the care of maidens (John also talks of the care of widows and of consecrated virgins); written and unwritten legislation for the monastic life; arrangements of prayers; and adornments of the sanctuary. Gregory exposes the gravity of the famine in Cappadoce, in 369, and the role of the bishop in this critical situation.

“For by his word and advice he opened the stores of those who possessed them, and so according to the Scripture dealt food to the hungry (...). He gathered together the victims of the famine with some who were but slightly recovering from it, men and women, infants, old men, every age was in distress, and obtaining contributions of all sorts of food which can relieve famine, set before them basins of soup and such meat as was found preserved among us, on which the poor live.”¹³

In the conception of Gregory, the portrait of the priest is completed by two essential functions, expressed better by two Greek verbs: διδάσκω, and παιδαγωγέω. (For being able to accomplish these two functions in front of his congregation) the priest must prepare himself to perform these two functions before his congregation. He needs to study in order to teach orthodox doctrine and he needs to live a life of chastity and prayer, in order to teach virtue (παιδεύειν τὴν ἀρετὴν). Gregory requires long preparation from those who want to become priests in order to prove them worthy of their vocation. Too many priests start to study religion only when they are appointed to teach it; too many priests suffer no inconvenience for the sake of virtue, and begin cleansing the others before being cleansed themselves.¹⁴

Gregory insists that knowledge and virtue must be bound together in a priest. For one who is successful in culture or knowledge to be deficient in life seems to him to differ not at all from “one-eyed men”. But if knowledge and virtue are both necessary, they are not always sufficient. Although a priest may have reached the greatest heights of virtue, it will still be difficult to guide the man “who is the most variable and manifold of creatures”¹⁵. The primary

¹¹ Gregory Nazianzen *The panegyric on St. Basil*, 34, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

¹² *Ibid.* 34.

¹³ *Ibid.* 35.

¹⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *On the Great Athanasius*, 9, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

¹⁵ *The panegyric on St. Basil*.11.

¹⁶ II, 16.

priestly role of guiding men to God and, more than that, of making Gods from men as God himself became man for our sake, is considered by Gregory as “the art of arts and the science of sciences”.¹⁶

He asks that a priest be first of all educated. That means that he has to possess knowledge and practice virtue. From the second century there was an anti-intellectual tradition among Christians, due especially to Tatian. This attitude was motivated by the identification of the pagan culture with polytheism and morals very suspect in the eyes of Christians. Gregory asks the priest not to neglect this “external culture”. There are many advantages that Christians derive from the study of such a culture.

“As we have compounded healthful drugs from certain of the reptiles, so from secular literature we have received principles of inquiry and speculation, while we have rejected their idolatry, terror and pit of destruction. Even these have aided us in our religion, by our perception of the contrast between what is worse and what is better, and by gaining the strength for our doctrine from the weakness of theirs.”¹⁷

To his knowledge of pagan culture Gregory requires the priest to add the knowledge of Christian doctrine. The role of the priest will be to talk to his subjects about the covenants, the first and second coming of Christ, his Incarnation, sufferings and death, resurrection, the last days, judgement and recompense and, to crown all, to teach them the doctrine of the blessed Trinity¹⁸. Teaching the doctrine of the Trinity is the most important and at the same time most difficult task of the priest διδάσκαλος. Gregory recalls three theological infirmities errors that the priest must avoid when he is dealing with this doctrine: atheism, Judaism and polytheism. The first is taught by Sabellius, the second by Arius of Alexandria, and the third by some of the ultra-orthodox.¹⁹

The perfect example for illustrating this ideal idealistic portrayal of the priest διδάσκαλος, is given to us again by Gregory’s description of Saint Basil. His education was broad, he was well-versed in the worship of God and guided by sound elementary instruction to a future perfection. His learning covered both art and science. He studied rhetoric, grammar, history, philosophy but also astronomy, geometry arithmetic and medicine, “and that with unexampled success, passing through any one of them, and attaining such eminence in each as if it had been his sole study. The two great sources of power in the arts and sciences, ability and application were in him equally combined.”²⁰

The priest παιδαγωγός is concerned with the cure of our soul from bad habits, passions, wills, and with removing from our nature everything brutal and fierce.

For Gregory a priest has to possess all these qualities, to be a προστάτης, a διδάσκαλος and a παιδαγωγός for his congregation and more than this. He

¹⁷ *The Panegyric on St. Basil*, 11.

¹⁸ II, 36.

¹⁹ II, 36.

²⁰ *The Panegyric on St. Basil*, 23.

admires to his friend St. Basil knowing how to find the middle way between active life *πρᾶξις* and contemplative life *θεωρία*, so accomplishing the harmony and the equilibrium that Gregory requires every Christian to realise in his life.

*“Moreover he reconciled most excellently and united the solitary and the community life. These had been in many respects in variance and dissension, while neither of them was in absolute possession of good or evil: the one being more calm and settled, tending to union with God, yet not free from pride inasmuch as its virtue lies beyond testing or comparison; the other, which is of more practical service, being not free from tendency to turbulence. (...) He brought them together and united them, in order that the contemplative spirit not be cut off from society, nor the active life be uninfluenced by the contemplative.”*²¹

Gregory says almost nothing about the role of the priest in the Eucharist, or in baptism. The liturgical function, as important as it might be, seems to have for Gregory a secondary relevance. Jean Bernardi remarks that whenever Gregory wants to condemn the faults of the priests, he uses examples from the Old Testament. It is as though he sees a natural continuity between the “sacrificers” of the Old Testament and Christian priests. And at the liturgical level, there is indeed continuity between the two priesthoods in the sense that in both cases the agents of the divine authority are charged with the cult due to God.²² Probably Gregory was much more concerned to draw a completely Christian image of the priest, or an image with which his contemporaries are familiar. Another possible reason for this emphasis on the moral functions of the priest could be that they were necessary for somebody who was expected to approach the Holy Table and the Holy gifts. Last but not least, the portrayal of the ideal priest had to be the antithesis of what fourth-century people usually observed in priests.

John Chrysostom’s dialogue also had a solid moral basis. But he did not neglect the role of the priest as *ιερεύς*. He describes the awesome dignity and terrifying responsibilities of a priest privileged as he is, to baptise, to absolve sinners, and to make Christ present at the altar during the Eucharist.

More than Gregory, John Chrysostom insisted on stressing the divine origin of the priestly dignity, which goes back to Christ himself who asked Peter to feed his flock.

*“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.”*²³

²¹ Ibid. 62.

²² Jean Bernardi, *Introduction*.

²³ John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, New York, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984, III, 4.

The continuity between the Jewish ἱερεὺς and the Christian ἱερεὺς is obvious for John Chrysostom also. He invites Basil to imagine Elijah surrounded by a vast multitude sacrificing to God, and the fire which comes from heaven for burning the “consecrated” victim. If he is completely aware of this cultic continuity he is also aware of the great difference which exists between the two cults. On the Christian altar where lies the “holy” victim, the priest through his prayer brings down not fire but the Holy Spirit. The Christian priest does not approach during the sacrifice an animal, or food or drink like the Jewish or the pagan priests; rather he is in the proximity of the blessed and immaculate body and blood of Christ.

*“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.”*²⁴

They are privileged to offer the sacraments, which have trait to our dignity and to our salvation. Through this ministry, “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 and archangels”²⁵

Moreover during the mystery of the Eucharist it is not just that Christ is present at the altar, and not just that God has descended among men, but also that the participants are transported to heaven and having purified their mind and soul are allowed to observe heavenly things²⁶. This power opens for us the kingdom of heaven through our baptism, and feeds us with the holy blood and flesh of our Lord giving us access to eternal life. Baptism and the Eucharist can only be accomplished through the work of these holy hands, the hands of the priests. Without them we would not be able to escape the fire of hell. After the ascension of Christ to heaven, the priests were charged with our spiritual rebirth through the baptism. Therefore they are worthy of greater honour than our parents who just gave us birth to life in the world, and for the present life, while the priests have given us birth into life in God, and prepare us for the future life.

*“They are responsible for our birth from God, the blessed second birth, our true emancipation, the adoption according to grace”*²⁷

This power is also the one of binding and loosing the souls for heaven, of absolving sins. The Father gave his power to judge to the Son²⁸, and the Son entrusted it to the priests²⁹.

²⁴ Ibid. III, 5.

²⁵ Ibid. III, 5.

²⁶ Ibid. III, 5.

²⁷ Ibid. III, 5.

²⁸ “ οὐδε γὰρ ὁ πατήρ κρίνει οὐδένα, ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσας δέδωκε τῷ υἱῷ”. (John, 5, 22.)

²⁹ John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, III, 5.

The heavenly power bestowed on the priests makes them more culpable before God for their behaviour. On the one hand a priest may reach a state of perfection through the holiness of the priesthood; on the other he runs the risk of perdition through the difficult nature of the task.

The pastor of souls will pay for the loss of his sheep not with money but with his own soul. And the difficulty of his task rests in the fact that enemies much more dangerous than wolves are ready to attack his flock. They are not content just with the sheep but attack the shepherd also. The cure of his flock's diseases is more complicated for a priest than for a simple shepherd, because a priest cannot use force to save a lost sheep. The constraint could be inefficient and dangerous. It is not an easy task to discern what is more effective for each soul, indulgence or austerity, gentle remedies or radical measures. For those who lose the way of virtue there is only one solution to bring them back: persuasion and charity.

The priest must not forget the conduct of his own soul. He can be an easy prey for vainglory, ambition, anger, and impatience. These vices will take away from him all calm and self-control and are a negative example for his subjects, for even the small faults will appear detestable in this privileged servant of God.

*“ Those who are set upon the pinnacle of this honour not only catch every eye; more than that, however trifling their offences, these little things seem great to others, since everyone measures sin, not by the size of the offence, but by the standing of the sinner.”*³⁰

For priests of every rank, the same faults cost more than if simple subjects commit them, because a greater knowledge is the cause of a greater punishment. A priest will not be responsible for his own soul and his own sins alone. He will be condemned more for the sins of others if he leads them into perdition without trying everything possible to save them. Before such great responsibilities John exclaimed with some pessimism that there are not many priests who are going to be saved. This pessimism is understandable in terms of the degradation of the clergy in that time.

The heavenly functions that the priest has to carry out do not necessarily lead him to holiness in his personal life. They call him to realise this holiness in him, and if he does not listen to this call, he will offend God, whose voice and offer he neglected.

*“ Anyone who, by his ambition to obtain this office, professes that he is suitable to exercise this ministry cannot make inexperience the excuse for his failure after he has been entrusted with it.”*³¹

³⁰ Ibid. III, 14.

³¹ Ibid. IV, 1.

³² John Chrysostom does not use the words παιδαγωγός and διδάσκαλος, but the demands which he has from the priests correspond exactly to these two functions, which are explicitly presented in *Oration II* of Gregory of Nazianzus.

So that priesthood becomes for the priest a state of perfection, and not of perdition, John requires that he attain a holiness greater than that of a monk. He has to possess all the virtues make for a good monk, and to those he has to add the qualities of a ἱερεύς and παιδαγωγός³². The priest is the official mediator between God and the people he has to represent them before God. For approaching the holy sacraments, the priest has to have a pure soul and to be able to say: ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός.³³

A Priest is exposed more to impure thoughts, earthly temptations than is a monk living in the desert, far removed from city and the marketplace. He mixes with men who have wives and children, own property and occupy public positions and he needs to have knowledge of worldly affairs. He is in daily contact with women more than are monks, and “it is not just a loose woman’s glance, but a chaste woman equally can upset and trouble a man’s soul”³⁴. The virtue of a monk consists in physical exercises: fasting, sleeping on the floor, and in exhausting works. A good monk needs good health. What makes the role of a monk easier in comparison with that of a priest is that he practices virtue for himself in a place apart from the worldly temptations, while the priest is in the middle of the busy world and, in addition to the practice of virtue, has to take care of earthly affairs and to teach virtue to others.

Moreover, a priest has to add knowledge to his virtue, for “*what use are a man’s labours, when after all his exertions he falls into heresy through sheer inexperience and is cut off from the body of the Church (...)*”³⁵

The one who has the responsibility of teaching others must be experienced in the doctrinal conflicts. As a teacher, a priest needs extensive knowledge, because he does not have the gift of miracles to convince people. His only weapon is his word. Thanks to his knowledge of the word of God he will be able to combat the enemy with the right faith. A priest needs good knowledge to avoid false or contrary doctrines. Many voices are raised to criticise St. Paul and his so-called ignorance. But by comparison with the normal priests, St. Paul had the gift of miracles and incomparable virtue, zeal and charity. If he had no talent for rhetoric, he was not ignorant of the knowledge of God. His victories are due to the power of speech, and his reputation to the doctrine contained in his letters. Moreover, he advised Timothy to read the scriptures: “Give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching”³⁶. “For in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee.”³⁷

Both Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom anchored their portrait of the ideal priest in the Old and New Testaments. They are conscious of a continuity existing between the Jewish and Christian priesthoods. For example Gregory counts Athanasius as a follower of the priests of the Old Testament, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Enoch. At the same time they are aware of the differences between

³³ Gal. 2, 20.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, VI, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.* IV, 9.

³⁶ 1 Tim. 4, 13.

³⁷ 1 Tim. 4, 16.

them. John probably more than Gregory will emphasise the uniqueness of the Christian priesthood at the liturgical level. But both prove to be more moralists than theologians when dealing with this subject. Their reaction against the harsh realities of their time can be easily understood. In addition to this they make use of the same moral arguments declaring themselves unworthy of this great ministry. The greatness of priesthood lies in its divine origin, its difficulty lies in the complex moral demands made on the priest who is called to approach God.

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СВЕТИ ОЦИ ЧЕТВРТОГ ВЕКА О СВЕШТЕНСТВУ

Четврти век, веома важан период за хришћанство, завршава се победом православља над аријевском јереси. Пошто је много свештеника у Византији тог доба потпало под јерес аријанства, дела светог Јована Златоустог и светог Григорија Богослова, посвећена свештеничкој служби, била су уперена баш против онога што је у том критичном тренутку била реалност у цркви. Њихови списи представљају одговор друштву у коме су особе озлоглашене по богохулним учењима представљале духовно вођство људи.

