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Chapter 15: The Priestly Power in Itself and Incidentally:

By the former, the priest is not inferior to the bishop; but by the latter, he is.

This is indeed a difficult question, and one that is very necessary to consider. It has been stated to us in the 15th [chapter] of the first book, and similarly recalled in the eighth [chapter] at the end of this one, that the human legislator himself, either in his own right or as a part of the ruling authority, is the effective cause of the institution of all offices or parts of the state. Additionally, we have remembered to say in the last part of the first [book] that the priesthood, or the priestly office of the new law, was first instituted by Christ alone, who, however, demonstrated that He renounced all secular rule and all temporal dominion, as shown in chapters 4, 11, 13, and 14 of this book, and was neither a human legislator, as we see in chapters 12 and 13 of the first book. For this reason, we seem to have stated that it is not the same person who is the founder of any office of the state and the human legislator or ruler. Hence, someone might rightly doubt from this whose authority it is to institute the priesthood, especially in the communities of the faithful, since the statements made on this seem to contradict each other.

Thus, in an attempt to remove this apparent contradiction in what has been said, we will first recall what we discussed in chapters 6 and 7 of the first book, namely, that some are the effective causes of any office of the state, in the sense that offices name dispositions of the soul; and others are the effective causes of them in the sense that they are parts of the state, instituted for the sake of obtaining sufficiencies from them, which also needs to be considered proportionally in the priesthood, just as in the other offices of the state. For the priesthood, inasmuch as it names a certain disposition of the soul (which the Sacred Scripture and Doctors call a character), has God as its immediate and principal efficient cause, imprinting this [character] on the soul, though not without some preceding ministry, as a sort of preparation. The beginning of this in the new law was from Christ: for He, who was both true God and true man, as human exercised the priestly ministry, which subsequent priests now perform. As God, He impressed the character on the souls of those whom He instituted as priests. Just as He first instituted the holy Apostles as His immediate successors, so consequently all other priests, though through the ministry of the Apostles and others succeeding them in this office. For when the Apostles or other priests laid hands on others and uttered the appropriate words or prayers for this purpose, Christ, as God, imprints this disposition or priestly character on those who wish to worthily receive it. And the same should be thought regarding the conferment of the other orders, from which some character is imprinted on the soul of the recipient. This priestly character, indeed, whether it is one or many, is the power by which a priest can consecrate, from bread and wine, the body and blessed blood of Christ with the proper pronounciation of words, and administer the other ecclesiastical sacraments, through which he can also absolve and bind people from sins. This character or power was received by the Apostles (according to the opinion of some) when Christ said to them, as it is written in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22. Since

the sequence of this is more fully revealed in Luke, let us refer to it as it is there: 'Taking the bread, He gave thanks and broke it (Christ, that is), and gave it to them (that is, the Apostles), saying, "This is My body, which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'" 'Do this' means, 'have the power to do this.' But some believe that this authority was given to the Apostles by what is written in John 20, when Christ said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins you retain, they are retained.' Others say this was done by what is written in Matthew 16, when Christ said to them in the person of Peter: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' etc. Or by what Christ said to them in Matthew 18: 'Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Yet others say that there are two priestly powers or authorities mentioned: one by which they can consecrate the sacrament of the Eucharist; the other by which they can bind or loose men from sins. They say these were conferred upon the Apostles at different times and through different sayings of Christ. However, which of these is more probable is not relevant to the present intention. For in whatever way or at whatever time the institution of this office was made in the Apostles, it is certain that this power was given to them by Christ; and likewise, through the aforementioned ministry of theirs and their successors, it is conferred upon others who are assumed into this office. Thus, in 1 Timothy 4: 'Do not neglect the grace that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.' In the same way, deacons receive a certain character through the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Of them, it is said in Acts 6: 'These they set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.' This priestly character, whether it is one or multiple, which we have said is the power to consecrate the sacrament of the Eucharist, that is, the body and blood of Christ, and the power to absolve and bind men from sins (which we will henceforth call the essential or inseparable authority of the presbyter, inasmuch as he is a presbyter), it seems to me probable that all priests have the same in kind, and the Roman bishop or any other bishop does not have a greater one than any simple priest. For in this authority, whether it is one or multiple, the bishop does not differ from the priest, as testified by Jerome, and even more clearly by the Apostle, as will be shown below. For Jerome says on that passage of Matthew 16: 'And whatever you bind on earth, etc.,' that 'the other Apostles have indeed the same judicial power (supplement, which Peter had) to whom, after the resurrection, Christ said (that is, Christ Himself): "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, etc.'" The whole Church has this power, with the presbyters and bishops placed in this, preferring presbyters in this matter, because this authority is due to the presbyter as presbyter first and foremost and inasmuch as he is one. Regarding the power of the sacrament of the Eucharist, no one disputes that it is equal in any priest to that of the Roman Pontiff. Therefore, it is surprising that some people stubbornly contend, albeit with less reason, that the Roman Pontiff has a greater power of the keys than other priests, when this cannot be proven from Scripture, but rather the opposite. For a clearer understanding of this, you should not be unaware that in the early Church, the names presbyter and bishop were synonymous, although they were assigned to the same office by different characteristics. For presbyter was a name

imposed based on age, as if meaning elder; while bishop was based on dignity or care over others, as if meaning overseer. Hence, Jerome, in a certain letter to the presbyter Evander, which is usually titled 'How Presbyter and Deacon Differ,' says: 'Presbyter and bishop are names of different ages and different dignities. Therefore, in the letters to Titus and Timothy, when speaking of the ordination of bishops and deacons, the word presbyters is entirely omitted because in the bishop the presbyter is contained.' This is also clearly evident in the first chapter of the Apostle's letter to the Philippians, where he says: 'To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.' Behold, the Apostle did not call them anything other than bishops. For it is certain that there were many bishops in one city, but only because there were many priests. The same is clearly shown again by the Apostle in Titus 1: 'For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what was lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you, if anyone is blameless.' And immediately after mentioning the qualifications of the presbyters to be appointed, he adds: 'For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God.' Behold, he called the presbyter to be appointed nothing other than bishop. The same is found in Acts 20, where he speaks to the priests of one church, namely Ephesus, saying: 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.' Behold, in the church of one municipality, namely Ephesus, the Apostle addressed several as bishops, which was only because of the plurality of priests, who were all called bishops, because they were supposed to oversee the people. However, this name was later retained only by the one who was first among the priests of the same city or place, instituted by the other priests and people. The Apostle, however, called them more bishops than presbyters to remind them of the care and concern they ought to have for the rest of the faithful. He called himself a presbyter, not a bishop, out of humility, as appears from the aforementioned passage in 1 Timothy 4, where he said: 'Do not neglect the grace that is in you,' etc. Similarly, Peter and John called themselves elders, that is, presbyters, because this name was imposed based on age. Hence 1 Peter 5:1: 'The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.' And 2 John 1:1: 'The elder to the elect lady and her children.' And again in 3 John 1:1: 'The elder to the beloved Gaius.' However, where the common text of the canon has 'elder' or 'fellow elder,' Blessed Jerome in the aforementioned letter everywhere uses the term presbyter or fellow presbyter, because the Apostles used these names as synonyms.

But after the time of the Apostles, as the number of priests notably increased, in order to avoid scandal and schism, the priests chose one among themselves who would direct and ordain others in the exercise of ecclesiastical office and service, distribute offerings, and manage the rest in a more convenient way, so that the economy and service of the temples would not be disturbed by each person doing as they pleased due to differing affections. This person, elected to regulate the other priests, retained the name bishop by later custom, as a superintendent, because he not only oversaw the faithful people, for which reason all priests in the early Church were called bishops, but also because he oversaw his fellow presbyters. Thus, such a person in Antioch retained the name bishop solely for himself, while others subsequently retained the simple name priest.

However, this election or institution by men did not confer upon the elected any greater merit, essential authority, or priestly power than that mentioned before: it only gave them a certain power of ordination and economic governance in the house of God or temple, such as the power to ordain other priests, deacons, and other officials. Just as a prior is given power over monks in these times: a power, I say, that is not coercive over anyone unless such has been granted to the elected by the human legislator (as demonstrated in chapter 4 and 8 of this work, and will be shown more fully in the following chapter), nor any other intrinsic dignity or power. In the same way, soldiers in the military choose a captain among themselves, whom they used to call a leader or commander in ancient times, although this name, 'commander,' has been transferred to a certain type or form of royal monarchy, and in this way is used in modern times. Similarly, deacons choose an archdeacon among themselves, to whom such election does not grant a greater essential merit or sacred order than that of the diaconate: but only a certain power (as we have said) of ordaining or governing the other deacons.

Hence, the Roman bishop does not have any more essential priestly authority than any other priest, just as Blessed Peter did not have more than the other Apostles. For all received this same authority equally and immediately from Christ, as stated before with the authority of Jerome on that passage of Matthew 16: 'And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' and it will be further clarified in the following chapter. This was also the clear opinion of Blessed Jerome in the aforementioned letter, in which, after demonstrating from many authorities of the Apostles that the presbyter and bishop in the early Church or in the time of the Apostles were entirely the same in essential dignity given by Christ, he gave the reason for these statements, saying: 'But the reason one was elected to be placed over the others was done as a remedy against schism, so that no one, by drawing the Church of Christ to himself, would break it apart. For even in Alexandria, from Mark the Evangelist up to Heraclas and Dionysius the bishops, the presbyters always elected one among themselves, placed him in a higher position, and called him bishop, just as if an army were to elect a commander (that is, a leader or captain according to modern usage, not indeed according to what the term "commander" means in the modern usage of a monarch), or as deacons might choose among themselves someone they know to be capable and call him archdeacon. For what does the bishop do, except for ordination, that a presbyter could not do? as regards the acts of essential authority. For Jerome did not understand by ordination the power of conferring or bestowing sacred orders, since bishops do and did many things, even in his own time, which priests do not do, although any priest can administer all the sacraments with divine authority just as a bishop does. But he understood by ordination a certain economic power, which we previously discussed, given immediately by a man or men, which is also confirmed by the same Jerome's reasoning. For indeed, many bishops were elected by the entire people, such as Blessed Clement, Blessed Gregory, Blessed Nicholas, and many other saints, to whom it is certain that neither by the people nor even by their fellow presbyters was a higher sacred order or intrinsic character conferred, but only the power of ordering the affairs of the Church and governing persons concerning the exercise of divine worship in the temple or house of God. For this reason, such people elected to direct other priests in the temple and instruct the

people in matters of faith were called bishops by the ancient legislators, such as by Justinian and the Roman people, who then called them reverend economists, whose chief was also called the most reverend economist by the same. And therefore, according to the truth and the intention of Jerome, a bishop is nothing other than an archpriest. But that there is no other essential dignity of a bishop than that of a priest, nor a greater dignity between bishops or priests, was also expressed by Jerome in the aforementioned letter, when he said: 'Nor should the church of the city of Rome be considered different from the church of the whole world; for Gaul, Britain, Africa, Persia, the East, India, and all barbarian nations worship one Christ, observe one rule of truth. If authority is sought, the world is greater than the city. Wherever there is a bishop, whether in Rome, Eugubium, Constantinople, Reggio, Alexandria, or Rachis, they are of the same merit, they have the same priesthood. The power of wealth and the humility of poverty make a bishop higher or lower: otherwise, they are all successors of the Apostles.' There are indeed certain other institutions or appointments within the priestly offices that are not essential, such as the aforementioned election, by which one among them is chosen for the ordination or governance of others concerning matters pertaining to divine worship. These also include certain elections and institutions for teaching and instructing, and for administering the sacraments of the new law to a particular people and in a specified place, whether larger or smaller. Similarly, they include the distribution of certain temporal goods, both for themselves and for other poor people, as established and ordained by the legislator or individual persons for the support of poor evangelists in a certain province or community, as well as for the support of other poor people who cannot sustain themselves due to age, infirmity, or some other pitiable cause. However, this is only from what is left over after the sufficient needs of the evangelists have been met. These temporal goods, thus established, are called ecclesiastical benefits according to modern usage, as discussed in the fourteenth chapter of this work. These are entrusted to the ministers of the temples for distribution for the aforementioned uses—ministers, I say, who are appointed, elected, and ordained for this purpose in a certain province. For by that essential authority, by which they are successors of the Apostles, they are not more determined to instruct a single place or people and to minister the sacraments of the new law than to others; just as the Apostles were not entirely determined, to whom it was said in the last chapter of Matthew: 'Go, therefore, and teach all nations.' Christ did not determine them to specific places, but they later divided the peoples and provinces among themselves, in which they would proclaim the word of God or the evangelical law, sometimes even perceiving this through divine revelation. Hence also, in Galatians 2: 'They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (namely James, Cephas, and John) that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.'

Thus, from the aforementioned, it is evident by whom the priesthood and other orders, which are called sacred, are instituted; because it is by God or Christ immediately, although with a certain preparatory human ministry, such as the laying on of hands and the pronouncement of words, which perhaps do not themselves effect anything, but are thus preordained by a certain divine pact or ordination. It is also evident from what has been said that there is another human institution by which one priest is preferred over others; by this, too, priests are appointed to

certain provinces and peoples to teach and instruct in the divine law, to administer the sacraments, and to distribute temporal goods, which we have called ecclesiastical benefits.

It further appeared from these things that in the first authority (which we have called essential from the beginning), all priests are equal in merit and priesthood, just as Jerome said in the aforementioned letter, giving the reason that all bishops are successors of the Apostles. In this, he seems to imply that all the Apostles were of equal authority; and consequently, none of them individually had authority over another or above the rest, neither in terms of essential institution (which we have called the first) nor in terms of secondary institutions. Hence, it also seems reasonable to think similarly about their successors among themselves, to whom and in whom such institutions, which we have called secondary and made by human authority, may come to be; and what is reasonably their effective cause remains to be determined.