

St. Charles Borromeo and the Reform of the Church and Priesthood from Within

- Introduction
 - A great new book will be published this spring by Sophia Press, Msgr. John Cihak's *Reform from Within: Selected Writings of Saint Charles Borromeo*. So little of St. Charles Borromeo's work has been translated into English and Msgr. Cihak has made available in one place the great reformer and implementer of the Council of Trent's writings and homilies with regard to the nature of reform in the Church, the reform of the Priesthood, the primacy of the Eucharist and the call and means of holiness of the laity. The book will be a rare gift. I'm grateful to Msgr. Cihak, who's an official of the Congregation for Bishops and a Master of Ceremonies for Pope Francis, for having done this work and opened up St. Charles' great wisdom to us all, so that we can learn from him principles of reform that pertain to every age in need of reform.
 - Today on his feast day, I'd like to focus on ten lessons we can learn from him about the Reform of the Church and the Priesthood that can profit us, today, as we collaborate with Pope Francis on the missionary metamorphosis of the Church. To set the stage, though, I'd like to go over some biographical elements.
- Biography of St. Charles
 - Msgr. Cihak begins the whole work saying, "Charles Borromeo should have been part of the problem." He was born in 1538 the second son of a noble family in Milan, his mother a Medici, his father a count of the Spanish crown. His uncle on the Medici side was elected Pope Pius IV in 1559 and made Charles a Cardinal the following month, even though he was only 21 and before he had received Holy Orders. A week later he was named what today would be called the Vatican Secretary of State, Administrator of the Archdiocese of Milan, administrator of the Papal States, Protector of Portugal, Belgium, lower Germany and the Catholic cantons of Switzerland, Papal Legate to Bologna, Romagna and the March of Ancona. His was a classic case of nepotism, but God used his faith and his talents to help reform the Church from within. After his brother Frederick died unexpectedly at the age of 27, his family, including his uncle the Pope, pressured him to leave the ecclesiastical path to marry and lead the family, but he did the Spiritual Exercises and emerged from it determined to become a priest and a bishop. He shifted the themes of his *Noctae Vaticanæ* from humanist topics to the Church's needs in times of Christ. He helped to bring the Council of Trent to conclusion and petitioned his uncle repeatedly to let him go to Milan. He reduced his income and changed his lifestyle to be less a Renaissance prince and more a shepherd of souls and spiritual father. He fasted, used the discipline, wore a hair shirt, slept four hours a night.
 - He never looked at Milan as a benefice but as a big spiritual responsibility. Milan hadn't had a resident bishop in over 80 years, despite having 3,000 priests and 600,000 faithful. Many priests lived in open concubinage, some after having stolen wives from their husbands. They carried weapons in public. Many didn't know the sacramental form of confession and thought they as priests were exempt from the sacrament. There was a popular saying at the time in Lombardy, "If you want to go to hell, become a priest." One convent of Benedictine nuns was so licentious that the nuns were simply called prostitutes. He would himself say: "A veritable forest of multiple evils came to be: basilicas left uncared for, the adornment of church furnishings reduced to nothing, the ritual and use of the ceremonies barely known, the correct celebration of the Divine Offices entirely disturbed, the discipline of choir rescinded, the duties of ecclesiastical functions disregarded and despised, sacerdotal and clerical residences deserted, all the duties of discipline at length thrown off and entirely laid aside, and furthermore the instruction and forming of the people was distorted. Corruption of morals appeared on all sides. The honor of feast days was violated by many sins. The upkeep of sacred places in many places suffered injury. The dignity of the sacerdotal order was

treated as if it were nothing. In sum everything was reduced to such a state as to be worthy of tears, mourning and commiseration.”

- Borromeo didn't set out to reform the Church, but began and persevered in converting his own life to Christ. The cause of the problems he knew was not implementing doctrine to daily life. Teaching didn't need to change, as the Protestants argued; people needed to change. Reform of the Church began not with teachings, or bishops, or others, but yourself. At the same time, he was determined to show that the Tridentine reforms could succeed by the way he would reform Milan. He held regular Provincial Synods to get the bishops on the same page and Diocesan synods to get his own Archdiocese on the right foot. He not only sought to correct abuses but laid out a positive vision of where the Church needed to go. He wanted to see his brother bishops and his brother priests become holy and ardent through the ordinary means of sanctification, liturgy, the sacraments of confession and the Mass, personal prayer, virtuous living and the works of charity. He was often openly resisted. Some members of a religious order hostile to reform even tried to assassinate him when he made a visit to the monastery of La Scala and the *Humiliati* tried to shoot him in the back in his chapel. But he approached everything with unflinching courage.
- He distinguished himself during the famine of 1571 by feeding 3,000 people a day from his own table and the devastating plague of 1576, where he assured the people he wouldn't leave and challenged his priests not to abandon their flock, urging them to prefer a holy death to a late one. When one of his priests lay dying he went to his bedside and prayed for his cure, saying, “You do not know the value of the life of a good priest,” and the priest recovered. He organized hospitals and work projects, provided for orphans, he personally took Holy Communion to thousands quarantined in their homes, he had Masses offered in squares and crossroads so that the people could worship from their windows.
- He pursued reform by his preaching. Even though he was short of stature and had a speech impediment, he preached in a constant visitation throughout his sprawling Archdiocese, conscious that the bishop's primary duty was to preach the Word of God so that people could come to faith or deeper faith. He really brought the faith to the outskirts, traveling on treacherous or non-existent roads, most often on foot.
- His reform of the Church began with the practical phrase “Be who you promised you would be,” in baptism, in marriage, in holy orders. He built seminarians, established colleges and founded institutions for the care of orphans, the destitute, girls and women at risk of prostitution, confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and our Lady, reformed the benefice system.
- His tireless labor, constant visitations and penitential practices took their toll. He died at 46 years old of a bacterial infection in his leg that led to a fever. He had pursued a holy life instead of a long one.
- At the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI decreed that his 12 orations to brother bishops and sermons to priests were to be published and sent to all the bishops of the world. Many of them are in Msgr. Cihak's book. While he should have been part of the problem, he was a driving force in the solution and one of the greatest reformers in the history of the Church.
- Bishops and Priests need to concern themselves with their flock and seek to heal their wounds.
 - First Provincial Council, 1565.
 - “This is indeed the task: to seek the things which are of God, not our own (cf. Phil 2:21). This is the ministry of the pastor. This is the office of the leader. These are the responsibilities of the pilot, namely, that he look out for what is best for the flock, the soldiers, the ship. For the safety of the superior is found in the salvation of his subjects. And since there are three things which the Tridentine Council especially ordered to be carried out and put into practice: namely, that delicts should be corrected, customs recalled to the highest standards of discipline, and controversies settled.”
 - “The method to be used in correcting delicts, following the nature of illnesses, is the one which adapts the medicine to the strength and quality of the sicknesses – now punishing faults with the light remedies of admonitions and blame, now employing a sharper cure, and finally applying iron and fire to the irritated parts, as the nature of the evil and the danger of contagion will demand, always remembering that we are fathers, not lords.”
 - “This is entreated of us by Christ Jesus, that he may note how we carry out our office on behalf of

his sheep which, redeemed by the price of his blood, he commended to our faith and prudence. May it never come about that he should require their blood from our hand. God forbid that we allow them to be destroyed or scattered on account of our faults or negligence.

- The reform begins with the restoration of discipline among clergy
 - First Provincial Council, 1565.
 - “If we, Fathers, keep these things before our eyes as we must, we will easily understand what should be done by us in this age for the restoration of ecclesiastical discipline. For this, it will first be necessary to bear in mind that just as in designing and establishing the order of the Church, Christ the Lord began with the Apostles themselves, whom he willed to be teachers of the Christian life, so we too, in the reform and restoration of discipline, should begin with ourselves, the pastors who must hand on to others the right examples and precepts of living.”
 - In doing this, they needed to follow the saintly priests and bishops who came before them: “Let us propose for ourselves, I ask you Fathers, their holiness of life and their wisdom in discharging their duty. With integrity they were chaste, sincere, modest, humble, upright in morals, assiduous in prayer and reading, not high in their self-estimation, keeping in view the salvation of their neighbor, beneficial in their counsels and works, hospitable, sparing with adornment and meals at home, but beneficent and liberal with others: *they were watching over their flocks* (Lk 2:8), cultivating and guarding the vineyard of the Lord with the greatest diligence and labor. Assiduously they pastured the sheep entrusted to them on the threefold food of salvation: word, example, and the Sacraments, remembering and imitating the chief Shepherd, Christ, who for the salvation of his flock poured forth his blood and life. They themselves did not hesitate to take up any labor, undergo any hazard, or bear any violence and injury, in sum, to lay down their lives for their sheep like that Good Shepherd of the Gospel (cf. Jn 10:11), not expecting any return from that in this life, that they might obtain the greatest fruits in the heavenly reward.”
- The reform must involve perseverance and courage.
 - Second Provincial Council, 1569
 - St. Paul “admonished his disciple Timothy with these words: *Having a good conscience, which some rejecting have made shipwreck concerning the faith* (1 Tm 1:19). From where, Fathers, do so many old heresies once extinguished resurface again in our times if not from the depraved and contaminated morals of people?”
 - “This, Fathers, is our task. This is our office. If indeed we have been placed in the exalted Chair of episcopal dignity, then we must as if from a watchtower be on the lookout for and repel whatever dangers hang over those who come under our faithfulness and our care. If we are fathers, then likewise we must show paternal solicitude for the danger the children are in. If we are shepherds, we must never cast our eyes away from the sheep, which Jesus Christ rescued from the jaws and gullet of hell by his most holy death. ... In short, if any are wandering in the darkness of bad habits and ways, we must shed light upon them.”
 - It wasn’t enough just to begin a work of reform, but to persevere: “Let us not think, Fathers, that we completely did our part by the many things we established three years ago in this very place. For if we examine the whole matter in the way we really should, we will find that we indeed only began the work of our ministry. We certainly have not finished it. ... For at the time when we first came together in council, if indeed we gave to our people not only milk but also food, nevertheless at that time we were hardly able to give them the more solid foods” (cf. 1 Cor 3:2).
 - “It frequently happens that once farmers have cultivated a field well, purged it of useless weeds, pruned the vines and the trees, unless they repeatedly apply the same cultivation, the good field which came up by their efforts, will turn up wild and rough. So too it will be with the faithful, who *are God’s field*” (1 Cor 3:9).
 - “For if we do not strive to tear up the seeds of vices by the roots, but instead consider it sufficient to use a light touch to correct only certain external matters which cause offense to the popular mind, then it will turn out for us as it does for farmers.”
 - “Nor is there any reason to be frightened off from carrying out our essential task, either because in our pastoral efforts and actions we see the aroused irritation of mind of those who are sons of perdition, or because we hear those voices of the people, the voices with which, like bad figs with

leaves, depraved morals are also accustomed to cover themselves. It is the severity of the ancient canons that these times cannot bear. They say, “This is how we have been living for a long time, thus did the previous generation live and behave. There is no need to change anything in our way of life.”

- “But let us despise this type of thing and everything like it, and let us set before our eyes that freedom of spirit and virtue which armed our fathers the Apostles, fortified the martyrs, and equipped the holiest men of our order: Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Ambrose, bishop of this Church, and imbued other religious men who burned with a firm apostolic ardor for souls. They were not broken or weakened by anything, be they threats, the shouts of men, or fury from judges.”
- “For if we act otherwise, then in that fearful judgment of God to whom we will render an account for the souls which were entrusted to our faithfulness and care, we are going to hear the outcry of others accusing us and the irate judge likewise bitterly reproaching us with the following: “If you were the watchmen, why were you blind? If you were the pastors, why did you allow the flock entrusted to you to wander? If you were the salt of the earth, how did you lose your flavor? If you were the light, why did you not shine on those *that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death* (Lk 1:79)? If you were apostles, why did you forgo apostolic strength and instead do everything for the eyes of men? If you were the mouth of the Lord, why were you mute? If you felt yourself to be unequal to this burden, why were you so ambitious for the office? If you were in fact equal to it, why were you so lazy, so neglectful? The voices of the Prophets, the laws of the Gospel, the examples of the Apostles, piety, religion, the tottering state of the Church, the fearful day of judgment, rewards, punishments and eternal torments: did those things move you not at all?”
- Reform requires unity
 - Fifth Provincial Council, 1579
 - “Let us first understand why Christ the Lord convoked all the apostles at the same time for their apostolic commission, since he could have sent each apostle with his own personal instructions.”
 - “Fathers, you are aware of the truth of what we have been saying, but let us look at it from another angle. If anyone among you is frequently at prayer and in contemplation of heavenly things, regularly present in the episcopal residence, and likewise totally dedicated and given over to episcopal duties, zeal and tasks, abstinence and fasting; if anyone among you is hospitable, a true father and pastor of the poor, widows and orphans, a patron of the holy places and assiduous in promoting holy observances; and if on the other hand another bishop of the same province is remiss or negligent in all these things, or what is worse, does the opposite, or speaks disparagingly about his fellow bishop who acts rightly and diligently; well it is certain that all possible disadvantage will come from that, and the greatest harm.”
 - “Consider a bishop who holds himself to the rules of the best kind of pastor and unceasingly puts into practice the Tridentine Council’s precept of the duty of preaching. But then consider another bishop, who sets his soul on the grandeur of the episcopal dignity, not its labors; on its recompense, not its burdens; on a leisurely life, not the solicitude perpetually entwined with many cares, or who rarely, if ever, administers the nourishment of God’s words to the people. ... The first bishop strives with perennial zeal to perform the diocesan visitation, but the other knows not the face of his flock, nor does he make any effort in paternal charity so that he might be known by them. ... But this other one, since he measures all things with the standard of popular opinion, wants to please people, to cover over their sins, and often he himself proves to be the reason why many deviate from the right way. ... [He is] remiss, negligent and self-indulgent pastor – you yourselves can see this – almost no discipline in his clergy, no instruction of the people, no restoration and upkeep of the churches. In sum, everything which should shine brightly on account of the bishop’s care and concern instead lies in decay and squalor right in front of him.”
 - “There is another disadvantage, and the greatest of all, namely that on account of observing the differences in pastoral care, people in the vigilant bishop’s diocese become more obstinate and difficult in their obedience. They pull back from their pastor and father, wickedly censure his many good deeds, ignore his warnings; and since the human race is inclined to make excuses in sins (cf. Ps 140:4), they find protection for their stubbornness and for every vice, since they are able to use the neglect and excessive indulgence of another bishop as justification for themselves.”

- “Christ the Lord wished the spirit of the pastors to be one, joined in one bond of charity and spurred on by one concern and solicitude. To this end he instructed us, when in today’s Gospel he entrusted the office of preaching and the curing of diseases to his apostles convoked together, and prescribed to all of them certain rules for that apostolic office.”
- He finished with a prayer: “You, Lord God Almighty, who ordered seventy elders of the people to be convoked by Moses at the entrance to the tent of the covenant, and ordered them to be present, remaining together in the same place, and who deigned to grant one and the same spirit (cf. Nm 11:16-17); you who sent your Holy Spirit to your apostles gathered together in one place (cf. Acts 2:1-4), illumined their minds, and inflamed their hearts to the point that, burning with incredible ardor, when they knew and accepted that they were legates of the divine preaching, they carried out that mission most admirably, with one most burning zeal and with the same enactments of apostolic discipline over the whole world: we beg you today, be present to us who are called together into one in your name. Enlighten our minds with the splendor of your divine light, tend them with goodness. Rule and direct them by wisdom, and cause us so to carry out the duties and tasks of our commission with one counsel, the same vigilance, the same admonitions and the same example. May we do so in such a salutary way that we and the faithful of our province, made one in you, may entirely enjoy that eternal glory which is in you, the one God. Amen.
- The reform needs a reform of preaching
 - 1573 Oration following the Third Provincial Council
 - “If at times a priest cannot provide this service, then let him by all means make use of that aid and assistance which has been pointed out to him by those synods, in order that on the prescribed days the nourishment of the word be in no way lacking to the flock entrusted to his care.”
 - “Although the bishop, entirely occupied with the assiduous labors of his pastoral office, is often unable to preach the whole people committed to his care, still, he will take care to employ that most ancient means which goes back to the times of the apostles: sometimes preaching by pastoral letters to the peoples far away from him in his diocese. For this way of preaching was upheld not only by the apostle St. Paul, but also by the other apostles, who preached by epistles to those who were absent.”
 - “He who receives the task of preaching should be persuaded above all, that unless he lives rightly and in harmony with the laws of the Gospel which he preaches, he will not have much effect on the souls of his listeners.... The preacher’s life must correspond with his teaching, in such a way that his teaching gives him light by which to live, and his life likewise strengthens his teaching, giving it ever greater vigor. Since he preaches about abstinence, fasting, tears, prayer, almsgiving, patience and any other Christian virtue, his words will carry the greatest weight and importance for his hearers, if they can see in his whole life the virtue whose precepts he hands on by preaching.”
 - Glossing St. John Chrysostom on the beatitudes, he says: The teacher or preacher must be perfected with all virtues. For he must be poor in spirit, that he might freely rebuke all avarice and desire for gain. He must perpetually mourn over his own and others’ sins, that he might disturb those who have no fear of sin before they sin, and after sinning conceive no sorrow for the crimes they have committed. He must hunger and thirst for justice, so that those who are growing tired in their efforts and good works may be inspired by the word of God and rekindled with zeal by his example. He must be meek in order to be loved more than he is feared. He must be merciful toward others and strict with himself. He must be pure of heart, so that he neither takes on the empty and useless thoughts of this world, nor involves himself in worldly pursuits. He must be peaceful, so that the people whom he teaches will be solicitous to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. He must be prepared to bear all things, even the most difficult, for the glory of God and the Church, not by a certain vain impulsiveness of soul, but by a true constancy worthy of the martyrs.”
 - Purpose of preaching: “In order that a preacher may be more zealous and religious in carrying out his share of this most excellent ministry, which he must accept and bear in a holy manner, he will first of all reflect upon its dignity and authority. And he will perceive these four truths:
 - First, that the whole nature and power of preaching is concerned with the glory of almighty God and the salvation of souls
 - Secondly, that he who undertakes the office of preaching is the minister through whom the

word of God is brought from the very font of the divine Spirit to flow into the souls of the faithful in a divine way.

- Next, that the preacher is to treat of holy things that have been divinely handed on.
 - Then, he will reflect that the office of preaching which he undertakes has not only been committed to the holy men of God, the prophets and apostles, but also bestowed by the Son of God, Christ the Lord himself.
 - “Neither will he trust in his own powers, but rightly acknowledging his own weakness, he will cast himself before God, from whose heavenly kindness he will receive help, no matter how cast down and unworthy of the preaching office he may be.
 - “The preaching ministry depends not on human knowledge or eloquence but on divine power and the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will judge that he must avoid above all else saddening the Holy Spirit by mortal sin, which adversely affects this work which was not only the ministry of the apostles, but of Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And so before he undertakes to handle the word of God, he will first purge his conscience of all impurity of sin by the Sacrament of Penance. He will certainly have the greatest fear of that most grave rebuke of the prophet: *But to the sinner God has said: Why do you declare my justices, and take my covenant in your mouth (Ps 49:16)?*”
 - “In order to inflame himself with ardent piety, even while he is studying and working out his sermon, he will place before his eyes the image of Christ the Lord nailed to the cross, or the apostle Paul preaching (as Chrysostom is said to have done), and consider it in silent meditation.”
 - “His greatest preparation will be the night before the sermon. Let him ardently pray to the God of all wisdom and author of all holy virtues, beseeching him to bestow the help needed for his divine service and the salvation of souls. In our own age, there have not been lacking those who are accustomed not only to shedding copious tears for those graces, but also to taking the discipline to petition for them.”
 - “Before ascending the pulpit, he will also resolve that his intention will be to preach a sermon suitable for a multitude of people hungering and expecting nourishment from his preaching, or suitable for a crowd of the lame, the paralyzed, people afflicted with dropsy, the mute, the blind, the deaf, those agitated by the Evil One, lepers, and others seeking benefit and strength.”
 - “Since he must keep this in his mind’s eye, he will therefore prepare himself in every part of his sermon to look only to the people’s condition and to their salvation, by counseling, consoling, and by every service and excellent remedy.”
 - “Besides this, he will consider himself to be a fisher of men. Therefore he must strain every nerve to keep fishing until he fills that Gospel net, by gaining the souls of men who are perishing for Christ the Lord. Therefore let him see to it that he does not grow faint in his office of preaching.”
 - “Since a sermon written by someone else’s labor is of little value in moving souls, let him never use the fruits of the industry of another preacher in order to put himself into the proper frame of mind, but let him by his own inspiration conceive all of that and bring it forth. ... The food of teaching will generate the strongest movements of soul toward holiness when it is presented to the people only after having been digested, so to speak, by the preacher’s own mind. Therefore let the preacher not brazenly regurgitate other preachers’ homilies.”
- The Reform requires risking one’s life for the flock
 - Sermon to superiors of monasteries and other religious priests at the time of the 1576 plague
 - “We know and see that as the body is wasting away by pestilence, so the devout souls of our brethren languish with desire for divine things. With voices only half-living, or by a gesture only, they request the Sacraments and implore mercy, but we with hard hearts delay or look away. As you know, we have kept the parish pastors in their post, but they are not enough for the multitude, as we know, unless each of them had the strength of many. In general, those who are led off to the quarantined houses are too far away to be helped by their own parish pastors. Not to mention the fact that parish pastors are often turned away by their subjects, if they have already ministered to the afflicted, until the passage of time can show that they themselves are healthy. And so it happens that even the residents of that priest’s neighborhood need the service of other priests. I have sought outside priests, and not in vain, but we still need more, for the multitude of people led off to quarantine still lies helpless. I do not find other priests willing to help, and I cannot force them, nor

should I. I have recourse to you, whose condition and state in life manifests a disdain for all human things so that you aim exclusively at the worship of God and concern for the salvation of men. If there is anyone whom we could expect to come and save others and imitate the Lord in this way, it would be you first of all.

- “How can those upon whom mercy has been given and liberally poured out be so tightly limited with theirs, and measure it out in accord with temporal and external necessities? The same Son of God, who for the sake of the salvation of all men, including his enemies and the impious, was fixed to the cross and died in the greatest shame and the bitterest torment, invites us to go forward into the danger of a quiet and glorious death for devout brethren. He to whom we owe as much repayment as we could not obtain by dying a thousand times without end, does not even request this pathetic life of ours, but only that we put it at risk. We see many go through these dangers without escaping death. Moreover, we even see many who are free from fear but still die. But if we do not escape it, this will not be death; rather it will be a quicker attainment of blessed glory, which is true life.”
- “Just like almost countless others, who nevertheless looked out for themselves with all diligence, we are going to die.”
- I wish, brothers, for you to show this service to God, which, as I hope, you will accept. ... If my very great worry and sorrow is alleviated by your virtue, when I see some of you here ready to go ahead and offer your life to God and to me in this blessed test for the sake of this most holy work, then I do not doubt that with the open entrance into these ranks of several or even only a few of you, many others who are now terrified and as it were paralyzed by their apprehension of something so unusual, will follow the joyful example of going in the way now opened wide.”
- “Our Fathers, incited by the spirit of God, did the same in similar circumstances. They taught that this is what should be done, as one can see clearly enough in the writings of the ancients collected and edited by our command. Moreover they extolled a work of this kind because it has the greatest power to motivate our souls to confirm that they are the stuff of martyrs. It is indeed a desirable time now when without the cruelty of the tyrant, without the rack, without fire, without beasts, and in the complete absence of harsh tortures that are usually the most frightful to human weakness, we can obtain the crown of martyrdom. What is even more, we can do so without the terrible hardship which always tends to accompany a disease of this type, in which the sick are abandoned by everyone and given no support or help from anyone.”
- “But if someone does contract the disease, and others are no longer there, then I myself, who will be going about among you every day on account of the sick, will be there. I shall be charged with caring for your health in both body and soul. I will willingly come to your aid. I offer myself to you right now as a minister of the Sacraments if that should be necessary. Relying indeed on divine help, I have decided to spare no labors or dangers in order to fulfill my pastoral office and to serve the flock committed to me in any way I can for their salvation.”
- The reform requires priests of pure intention
 - Homily to Ordinands, 1577
 - “You should likewise think about and ponder on this in your souls, namely that if it is necessary for us to take precautions in this great affair, so as not to be negligent in your regard, and to implore the help of the Holy Spirit with devout and fervent prayers, then how much more necessary is it for you to labor to obtain divine help, you, who will be found guilty if you accept Sacred Orders with anything other than that pure intention of soul we mentioned earlier.”
 - “It is indeed a most excellent and outstanding ministry to which you aspire today, and would that you consider with the intimate thoughts of your souls how excellent and outstanding your rank is going to be. Nevertheless, if you are going to avoid making yourselves unworthy of it, then not only must your life be characterized by the holiness and doctrine, faith and prudence with which you will be able to worthily bear the weight of so great an office, but then you must consider to what end you are seeking it. For if you have come here with the idea of providing yourselves with everything necessary for keeping fed and clothed, then your purpose is nothing other than financial advantage, no different from a sordid business deal. Then the best thing for you to do would be to turn around and go far away from here. For just as it is the greatest sacrilege to approach the altar for the sake of

gain and profit, so no one will hesitate to acknowledge that it is no light sacrilege to receive this Sacrament of Order, which prepares us for the ministry of the altar, for the sake of gain. The one who serves the altar should live by the altar, still, everyone recognizes that it is never permissible to place any personal need whatsoever before the worship owed to God.

- “But if any of you have been led to seek this station in life by ambition and desire for gain, then I beg you, *depart*; again I say, *depart* (Is. 52:11). ... Those who desire their enrollment or promotion because they have been led here by some other reason than serving, honoring and adoring the majesty of the good God, I want to warn again and again, so that they thoroughly understand how much more fitting it would be for them to have a millstone hung around their neck as they are cast into the depth of the sea (cf. Mt 18:6), rather than enter the sheepfold of Christ by this way, a way other than the gate, which Christ himself in the Gospel testifies is the way of thieves and robbers (cf. Jn 10:11). Do not, I beg you, so sadden this Holy Spirit, the Spirit who is indeed gentle, but also angered by those who offend him and sin gravely. For clerics and priests of this type, who receive sacred orders so unworthily and with such a lack of holy intention, not only do not receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, but are also such that nothing can be more unhappy, miserable and disastrous for the Church of God than them.
- “So as to avoid that supreme unhappiness and misery, most dearly beloved, you must have the greatest concern and zeal, and leave no effort or labor undone. Therefore be strong in spirit. If anything sordid has perhaps crept in sideways into your hearts on account of your having come here with something less than the zeal and diligence demanded, may it all be cleansed and put back in order by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose gifts are to be most lavishly poured into your souls, provided of course that you yourselves do not place any obstacle. For as regards those who are restricted by some grave sin or ecclesiastical censures, or those who will approach stained by some blot on their soul, I do not even want to think that there might be some like that. Therefore may we undertake this holy and utterly divine work well, for it is of the Holy Spirit, whose octave we are still celebrating. And let us implore him: *Come, Holy Spirit, and emit a ray of your heavenly light; wash what is sordid, bend what is rigid, set right what is disordered;* To those *faithful* who this day supplicate you, *give the sevenfold gift; Give the reward of virtue, and the goal of salvation, give perennial joy.*
- The reform requires holy priests
 - Ordination homily, 1578
 - For this ministry is what we find in *Exodus: The priests also that come to the Lord, let them be sanctified, lest he strike them* (Ex 19:22). ... These words are *sanctificentur* (“let them be sanctified”) and *percutiat* (“lest he strike them”). ... What wonder is it, therefore, if those who approach him must be *sanctified*, so the eyes of his most pure majesty are not offended by anything stained or sordid? if indeed men about to be brought forth into the sight of an earthly king are accustomed to dress in more luxurious clothing so as to shine before their prince with all possible splendor, taking care that nothing should appear out of order or unfitting in their bearing and outward gestures, then how much more concerned must you be, brethren (if you are not utterly thick and stupid, brothers) so as to stand before our most great and high Lord and God with the adornment of the most precious interior virtues of soul. ... And they are holy humility, obedience, patience, abstinence, chastity, forbearance, piety, and charity, which is the most perfect of all.
 - “You then who are about to approach the Lord must *be sanctified*; otherwise it is to be feared that you will *be struck* most severely by his avenging hand. ... I do not consider that any churchman, even the most learned, will ever come close to expressing how much power, and how much energy there is in that verb.”
 - “Therefore I beg of you, dearly beloved, through the profound depths of mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, diligently think on what you do here today, and take care with all effort of soul to flee the anger and fury of God. I am looking out for your own good, but I am also thinking of the other faithful of Christ who earnestly ask to be enlightened by you, as by light in the world, and who must also be seasoned, as if with apostolic salt, as you have so often heard it put to you by Christ the Lord: *You are the light of the world; You are the salt of the earth* (Mt 5:14 and 13).”
- To be holy, a priest must avoid spiritual worldliness
 - Moses, wrote concerning the ministers of the altar in the Book of Leviticus, in the following

passage, where he spoke at the divine command about this to Aaron the priest: *Whosoever of your seed throughout their families, has a blemish, he shall not offer bread to his God. Neither shall he approach to minister to him: if he be blind, if he be lame, if he have a little, or a great, or a crooked nose, if his foot, or if his hand be broken, if he be crookedbacked, or blear eyed, or have a pearl in his eye, or a continual scab, or a dry scurf in his body, or a rupture: Whosoever of the seed of Aaron the priest has a blemish, he shall not approach to offer sacrifices to the Lord, nor bread to his God* (Lv 21:17-21).

- Certainly in our time as well, those who approach the ministry of the altar must be free of such flaws and defects of body, unless they have obtained a dispensation from one who has the faculty. Nevertheless it is with far greater zeal and diligence that we must be careful that the souls of those who are to be promoted are not polluted by the stains revealing vices. If we look rightly into the reality itself, what could blindness mean if not the darkness of ignorance by which our mind is so bound that it can in no way discern the things which should be seen? What could be meant by lame, if not that unsteadiness of spirit by which those who labor under such a vice are easily swept this way and that, like dust by the wind, carried off, bent and almost impelled to first one thing and then another? And by nose, which by a wonderful and most subtle power discerns the varieties of all odors, can anyone deny that the virtue of discretion is being signified, since those who lack the help of this virtue are found going now slack, now to excess, now to disorder in what they do, and sin in such a way that they weaken and corrupt even the acts of their remaining virtues, if they have any? And what is meant by the feet by which we walk or by the hands by which we work when these are called broken, if not the man who is not progressing rightly on the path of virtue, nor really bringing his virtuous works to completion? Likewise, what is represented by a crookedness in the shoulders but a man bent down to the ground, or by a crookedness in the chest but a man with his face lifted up against heaven? Is it not the man bent over earthly occupations, or the man raised up by worldly pomp or ambition? And then we have a bleary eye. If someone considers what vice drips forth from overflowing and bad bodily humors, he will indeed understand the bleary eye to represent the man who is so wrapped up in carnal desires that he is barely free to turn the intention of his mind to doing anything right. And whoever contemplates a pearl in the eye, which is a thin, white membrane or film preventing vision, will be aware that it signifies practically nothing else except the man who takes too much credit for the brightness of his own righteousness. But what is meant by that continual scab, from which, once contracted, a man's members are never freed? Who would not affirm that this signifies the filth of longstanding lusts, which render the men they infect similar to pigs lying in a perpetual slough of mud, and that without some great force of divine grace to aid them, it is almost to be despaired that they will ever escape that most tenacious of all filth? Nor should it sound strange if we say that dry scurf signifies avarice, since just as a skin eruption can indeed attack the body without any pain yet greatly disfigures its beauty, and then usually ends in the incurable and abominable disease of leprosy, so avarice seduces the soul with the sweet desire of riches, and then gradually invades and infects all the powers of the soul, so as to end in that detestable vice which is a serving of idols (Eph. 5:5), as the apostle Paul testifies.
- Nor should anyone judge it amiss if we say that a man with a rupture, such a burden to himself when the intestines have broken the peritoneum and descended, means the man of base thoughts and earthly concerns weighed down with cares, whose heart is in such drudgery that he can in no way lift his mind to contemplation of heavenly things. There is no one who would doubt that all these crimes and vices, which are grave in any Christian, are extremely grave both in priests and in everyone else assigned to the sacred ministry. For these men must so shine before all other men with splendor of doctrine and integrity of morals, so that having been instituted and elevated by Christ the Lord for the office of a light-bearing lamp, they may fulfill that office with a minimum of earthly cares without being held back in any way by allurements of the flesh, nor puffed up by worldly pomp, nor held bound or deflected by any of these passing or ephemeral goods (which are not truly good), nor subject to agitations of soul, but well-disposed to their neighbors, resting in the Lord, and having souls so perpetually fixed on the thought of divine mysteries, that they always *seek and mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth* (Col 3:1-2).

- In the reform, the priest must place his treasure in God
 - Ordination homily, 1583

- “Look and see, all of you, whether it can be truly be said of you that, in the words employed by Holy Mother Church, *This is the generation of them that seek the Lord* (Ps 23:6). Let each of you think carefully about why he is giving himself over to this divine service. Let him ask himself whether it is in order to escape poverty, to attain high ecclesiastical and clerical ranks, to become a parish pastor, to raise up indigent parents, to take life easy in leisure afterwards, or for other reasons like those. If anyone among you is like that, let him hold back on this, I beg you through the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ, so he does not bring such great insult and injury upon this most noble Sacrament. Let him beware of directing such a noble dignity to such an ignoble end. Otherwise woe to him; woe to him whose aim is not good. These are not the things to seek with such noble means, but the Lord alone is to be sought. You must be a generation of men seeking the Lord, so that from your heart you may be able to say to your God: My portion is you, O Lord (cf. Ps 118:57). ... For you will find the Lord whom you seek, since he himself, who is infallible truth, has promised it: *seek, and you shall find* (Mt 7:7)”
- “Meditate therefore on how great a thing it is to be called into the Lord’s portion, to be distinguished as a minister of the Lord. Consider, I ask of you, how much the Lord required the ministers of the old covenant ..., when he said to them: *...be holy because I am holy* (Lv 11:44). Those ministers only handled sheep, oxen and lambs as victims. Is it not therefore proper that you, who are to be priests of the new covenant and to handle the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, should be more outstanding than them, and in sum superior to them in holiness of life? Get with it then, most beloved brothers in God; recognize the sublimity of your future office and ministry, the excellence of your order, and approach with the sole aim which we have mentioned, with this pure intention to not offend your God and Lord