

ON CONVERSION

Bernard's sermon *On Conversion* was given in 1140 in Paris, as a public discourse. It is unique among his sermons in the audience to which it is addressed, and also in its point of departure. Bernard is not for once preaching to the converted, to those who are trying with all their might to make progress on the road to the presence of God. He is speaking to those who have not yet set out, or at least not purposefully. The term *conversio* at this date had, most commonly, the sense of "deciding to enter a religious order"; but for Bernard it is also conversion of the heart.¹

He spoke perhaps in the cloister of Notre Dame, to an audience of scholars and students from the schools of Paris: Notre Dame, St. Geneviève, and perhaps St. Victor. His biographer Geoffrey and Peter Lombard were in the audience (both were at one time pupils of Hugh of St. Victor). More than twenty of those who heard him were converted. They declared their intention of following him to Clairvaux. He took them to the abbey of St. Denis for the night, and when the next morning they returned to Paris three more joined them. Their conversions were to prove lasting. They were all professed at Clairvaux a year later.²

1. See my article "A Change of Mind in Some Scholars of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978):27-39.

2. VP III, Preface, IV.ii.10.

I. THAT NO ONE CAN BE CONVERTED TO THE LORD
UNLESS THE LORD WILLS IT FIRST,
AND CALLS HIM WITH AN INNER VOICE

1. You have come, I believe, to hear the Word of God (Acts 3:44, 19:10). I can see no other reason why you should rush here like this! I approve of this desire with all my heart, and I rejoice with you in your praiseworthy zeal. For blessed are those who hear the Word of God—if, that is, they keep it (Lk 11:28). Blessed are those who are mindful of his laws, provided that they obey them (Ps 102:18). Such a one has the words of eternal life indeed (Jn 6:69), and the hour comes—would it were here now!—when the dead shall hear his voice and they who hear it shall live (Jn 5:25). For, “To do his will is to live” (Ps 29:6).

And if you would like to know what his will is: It is that we should be converted. Hear what he himself says, “It is not my will that the wicked should perish” (Ez 18:23), says the Lord, “but rather that they should turn from their wickedness and live” (Mt. 11:14).

From these words we see clearly that our true life is to be found only through conversion, and there is no other way to enter upon it (1 Tm 6:19). As the same Lord says, “Unless you are converted and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). Truly, only little children will enter, for it is a little child who leads them (Is 9:6), he who was born and given to us for this very end. I seek then the voice the dead will hear and when they hear it, live (Jn 5:25). Perhaps it is even necessary to preach the Gospel to the dead (1 Pt 4:6).

And meanwhile a word comes to mind, brief, ¹ but full of meaning, which the mouth of the Lord has spoken, as the prophet bears witness. “You have said,” he cries undoubtedly speaking to the Lord his God, “be converted, sons of men” (Is 1:20, 40:5; Ps 89:3).

It seems wholly fitting that it is conversion that is required of the sons of men; it is absolutely necessary for sinners. The heavenly spirits are told to give praise, as the same prophet says in the Psalm, “Praise your God, O Sion” (Ps 147:12); that is more appropriate for the righteous (Ps 32:1).

¹ *Verbum Abbreviatum*; this pun is also used by Peter the Chanter later in the century as the title of his manual for preachers, PL 205.

2. As to the remainder of what he says: “You have said” (Ps 89:3), I do not think that is to be passed over carelessly or heard unreflectively. For who dare compare the sayings of men with what God is said to have said? The Word of God is living and effective (Heb 4:12). His voice is a voice of magnificence and power (Ps 28:4). “He spoke and they were made” (Ps 148:5). He said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gn 1:3). He said, “Be converted” (Ps 89:3), and the sons of men have been converted. So the conversion of souls is clearly the work of the divine voice, not of any human voice. Even Simon son of John (Jn 21:15), called and appointed by the Lord to be a fisher of men, will toil in vain all night and catch nothing until he casts his net at the Lord’s word. Then he can catch a vast multitude (Jn 21:15ff; Mt 4:19).

Would that we, too, might cast our net at this word today and experience what is written, “Behold he will give his voice the sound of power” (Ps 67:34). If I lie (Jn 8:44), that is my own fault. It will perhaps be judged to be my own voice and not the voice of the Lord if I seek what is my own and not what is Jesus Christ’s (Phil 2:21). For the rest, even if I speak of the righteousness of God (Ps 57:2) and seek God’s glory (Jn 8:50, 5:44), I can hope that what I say will be effective only if he makes it so. I must ask him to make this voice of mine a voice of power.

I admonish you, therefore, to lift up the ears of your heart to hear this inner voice, so that you may strive to hear inwardly what is said to the outward man. For this is the voice of magnificence and power (Ps 28:4), rolling through the desert (Ps 28:8), revealing secrets, shaking souls free of sluggishness.

II. THAT THE VOICE OF THE LORD SPEAKS AND
MAKES ITSELF HEARD TO ALL,
AND PRESENTS ITSELF EVEN TO THE SOUL
WHICH DOES NOT WANT TO HEAR

35. There is no need to make an effort to hear this voice. The difficulty is to shut your ears to it (Is 33:15). The voice speaks up; it makes itself heard; it does not cease to knock on everyone’s door (Rv 3:20). “Forty years long” he says, “I was with this generation, and I said, ‘They err constantly in their hearts’” (Ps 94:10). He is still with us. He still

speaks, even if no one listens. He still says, "They err in their hearts"; Wisdom still cries in the streets (Prv 1:20-21). "Come to your senses, evildoers"² (Is 46:8).

This is the beginning of God's speaking (Hos 1:2). And this word which is addressed to all those who are converted in heart (Ps 84:9) seems to have run on ahead; it is a word which not only calls them back but leads them back, and brings them face to face with themselves³ (Ps 49:21). For it is not so much a voice of power (Ps 67:34) as a ray of light, telling men about their sins (Is 58:1) and at the same time revealing the things hidden in darkness (1 Cor 4:5). There is no difference between this inner voice and light, for they are one and the same Son of God and Word of the Father and brightness of glory (Heb 1:3).

So, too, the substance of the soul would seem to be spiritual and simple in its way, without any distinction of senses; the whole soul seems to see and hear at once, if we can speak of it in that way. For what is the purpose of the ray of light or the Word but to bring man to know himself? Indeed, the book of conscience⁴ is opened, the wretched passage of life up to now recalled to mind; the sad story is told again; reason is enlightened and what is in the memory is unfolded as though set out before each man's eyes. But reason and memory are not so much "of" the soul, as themselves the soul,⁵ so that it is both gazer and that which is gazed upon, brought face to face with itself (Ps 49:21) and overcome by the force of its realization of what it is seeing (Rom 2:15). It judges itself in its own court. Who can bear this judgment without pain? "My soul is troubled within me" (Ps 41:7), says the prophet of the Lord, and do you wonder that you cannot be brought to face yourself without being aware of sin, without disturbance, without confusion?

2. Literally "return to the heart." In Vulgate and early Christian Latin usage the heart (*cor*) is the seat of thought.

3. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII. 7. 16-18, ed. M. Skutella and L. Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnholt, 1981).

4. The *topos* of the book of conscience is used by Alan of Lille in his manual on preaching later in the century, and widely elsewhere.

5. On these powers of the soul, see Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, ed. W. J. Mountain and Fr. Glorie, CCSL 50 (Turnholt, 1968).

III. HOW BY THIS MEANS THE SOUL'S REASON CAN JUDGE AND DISCERN HOW TO POINT TO ALL ITS OWN EVILS AND CRITICIZE THEM, AS IF THEY WERE WRITTEN IN A BOOK

4. Do not hope to hear from me what reason seizes on in your memory to blame, what it judges, what it discerns. Listen to the inner voice; use the eyes of your heart, and you will learn by experience. "For no one knows what is in a man except the spirit which is within him" (1 Cor 2:11). If pride or envy or greed or ambition or any other vice is hidden, it can scarcely escape (Tb 2:8) this examination. If there is fornication, rape, cruelty, deception, or any fault at all, it will not be hidden from this judge who is himself the guilty party; nor will it be denied in his presence.

For however quickly all the prurience of delighting in iniquity passed, and however briefly the enticements of pleasure were attractive, the memory is left with a bitter impression, and dirty footprints remain.⁶ Into that repository as if into some cesspit runs all abomination and uncleanness. It is a big book in which everything is written with the pen of truth (Jb 19:23). The stomach endures that bitterness now (Rv 10:9-10). Although as it was swallowed it gave a passing pleasure to the taste, that was soon forgotten. I grieve for my stomach; I grieve for it (Jer 4:19). Why should I not grieve for the stomach of my memory which is congested with such foulness?

My brothers, which of us, if he suddenly noticed that the clothing which covers him was spattered all over with filth and the foulest mud, would not be violently disgusted and quickly take it off and cast it from him indignantly? But the soul which finds itself contaminated in this way cannot cast itself away as a man can cast away his clothes (Sg 5:3). Which of us is so patient and so brave that if he were to see his own flesh suddenly shining white with leprosy (as we read happened to Moses' sister Mary), he could stand calmly and thank his Creator (Nm 12:10)? But what is that flesh but the corruptible garment in which we are clothed?

And how should we think of this leprosy of the body in all the elect but as a rod of fatherly correction (Prv 29:15) and a purgation of the heart (Ps 44:7)? It is a great tribulation and a most just cause of sorrow

6. Virgil, *Aeneid*, III. 244, ed. J. Mackail (Oxford, 1930).

when a man who has been woken from the sleep (Jn 11:11) of wretched pleasure begins to perceive his inward leprosy, which he has brought upon himself with much zeal and effort. No one hates his own flesh (Eph 5:29). Much less can the soul hate itself (Jn 12:25).

IV. THAT HE WHO LOVES WICKEDNESS IS SHOWN
TO HATE NOT ONLY HIS SOUL BUT ALSO HIS FLESH

5. Perhaps this text in the Psalm strikes one of you, "He who loves wickedness hates his own soul" (Ps 10:6). But I say he hates his body, what by his hardness and impotence of heart (Rom 2:5) he is treating up for the day of wrath? For this hatred of body and soul is not so much found in the form of a feeling; rather it is revealed by its effects. Thus the madman hates his body when he lays hands on himself when his powers of rational thought are asleep. But is any madness worse than impotence of heart and an obstinate will to sin? If a man lays wicked hands on himself it is not his flesh but his mind that he tears and damages (Jb 13:14). If you have seen a man tearing at his hands and rubbing them together until they bleed, you have a clear image in him of the sinner's soul. Pleasure turns to pain and agony follows itching. While the man was scratching he ignored the consequences although he knew what would happen. In the same way we have lacerated ourselves and given ourselves ulcers on our unhappy souls with our own hands—except that in a spiritual creature it is more serious because its nature is finer and so more difficult to mend. We have not done it in a spirit of enmity, but in a stupor of inner insensibility. The absent mind does not notice the internal damage, for it is not looking inward, but perhaps concentrating on its stomach—or beneath the stomach. The minds of some men are on their plates,⁷ of others in their pockets. "Where your treasure is," he says, "there is your heart" (Mt 6:21). Is it surprising if a soul does not feel its wound when it is not noticing what is happening to it, and is somewhere else far away (Lk 15:13, 17)? The time will come when it will return to itself and realize how cruelly it has eviscerated itself in its wretched pursuit. For it could not feel that while it was like a filthy spider weaving a web out of its own body with insatiable greed to catch its vile booty of flies.

7. Terence, *Eunuch*, IV, vii, 46, ed. J. Sargeant (London, 1953).

V. OF THE PUNISHMENT OF SOUL AND BODY AFTER DEATH
AND OF THE FRUITLESSNESS OF REPENTANCE

6. But this return will undoubtedly be after death, when all the gates (Dn 13:17) of the body by which the soul has been used to wandering off to busy itself in useless pursuits and to go out to seek the passing things of this world (1 Cor 7:31) will be shut (Ez 44:2), and it will be forced to remain within itself; for it will have no means of escaping from itself.

Truly that will be a most dreadful return and eternal wretchedness, when it can no longer repent or do penance. For where there is no body there is no possibility of action (Mt 24:28). Where there is no action, no satisfaction can be made. Thus to repent is to grieve; to do penance is a remedy for sorrow. He who has no hands cannot lift his heart in his hands to heaven (Lam 3:41). He who has not come to himself before the death of the flesh must remain trapped in himself for eternity.

But in what a self? Whatever he has made himself in this life, such he will be found when he leaves this life, or perhaps even worse, for he will never be better.⁸ For he has himself. Now he lays down his body; now he receives it back again, yet not to penance but to punishment, where the state of sin and flesh will be seen to be so much alike that however our body is punished its sin can never be expiated and the body's torment can never be ended nor the body killed by torture. Truly indeed vengeance rages forever, for it can never wipe out sin. Nor can the body's substance be worn away, for then the affliction of the flesh (Eccl 12:12) would come to an end. He who fears this, let him beware, brothers; for he who does not take care will fall into it.

In the present we must feel and throttle the worm of conscience, rather than nurturing it and thus nourishing it for eternity.

7. To come back to that voice we were speaking of. It is good that we should come to our senses (Is 46:8) while "the way is open by which he shows us his salvation" (Ps 49:23), he who with such zealous love calls back those who have strayed.

Let us not meanwhile resent the gnawing of that worm within. Nor let a dangerous tenderness of mind or pernicious softness persuade

8. The doctrine of purgatory was not fully developed until the late twelfth century.

us that we want to hide our present trouble. It is far better for it to gnaw now, when it can be destroyed by gnawing itself to death. For now, let it gnaw at the putrid stuff, so that it may consume it by its gnawing, and be itself consumed, and in that way it will not begin to be cherished into immortality. "Their worm," it says, "does not die and its fire is not extinguished" (Is 66:24). Who will endure the gnawing (Ps 147:17)?

For now a manifold consolation eases the torture of the accusing conscience. God is kind and does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13), or let the worm do us too much harm. Especially at the beginning of our conversion, he anoints our ulcers with the oil of mercy, so that we may not be too much aware of the seriousness of our illness or the difficulty of curing it. In fact the ease of his healing seems to smile on the penitent. But after a time, that vanishes, when his senses have been trained and the battle is given into his own hands (Heb 5:14), for him to win and learn that Wisdom is stronger than all things (Wis 10:12). In the meanwhile, he who has heard the voice of the Lord, "Come to your senses, wildoers" (Is 46:8), and who has discovered the wickednesses in the depth of his heart, is eager to root them out one by one, and curious to find out how each of them got there. The entrance—or, rather, the entrances—are not hard to find if you look. But no little grief comes from his examination for he finds that death came in through his own windows (Jer 9:21).⁹ It becomes clear that the roving eyes, the itching ears, the pleasures of smelling, tasting, and touching, have let in many of them. For the spiritual vices we were speaking of are still difficult for the fleshly man to see (1 Cor 2:13–14). That is why he perceives less clearly or not at all those which are the more serious, and his conscience is not troubled as much by the memory of pride or envy as by the recollection of shameful or wicked deeds.

VI. HOW IT SEEMS TO SOME THAT THE HUMAN WILL CAN EASILY OBEY THE DIVINE WORD

8. And behold, a voice from heaven saying (Mt 17:5), "Be still, you have sinned." And this is what it says. An overflowing sewer now con-

9. Anselm of Canterbury was fond of this image of windows. See *Memorials of St. Anselm*, ed. R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt (London, 1969).

taminates the whole house with intolerable filth. It is vain for you (Ps 126:2) to empty it when the filth is still flooding in, to repent while you do not cease to sin. For who approves of the fasting of those who fast for strife and contention (Is 58:4), and smite with the fist of wickedness, but indulge themselves and do as they please (Is 58:3). "This is not the fast that I have chosen," says the Lord (Is 58:6). Close the windows, fasten the doors, block all entry carefully, and when at last you are not contending with the entry of fresh filth you will be able to clean up what is already there (1 Cor 5:7). If a man thinks (Jas 1:7) that what he is asked to do is easy, it is as though he did not know about spiritual warfare. For who can say that I do not know how to govern my own members? So fasting puts an end to gluttony, and forbids drunkenness; the ears are stopped up to prevent them hearing of blood, the eyes turned from vanity (Is 33:15); the hand is directed not to acquisitiveness but to almsgiving, and put to work to stop it thieving (Ps 118:36–37), as it is written, "He who was a thief is a thief no more; instead he works with his hands to do good, so that he may have something to give to the needy" (Eph 4:28). If you do not know, it is she to whom at first you told us to be obedient, and to give in fully to her wishes" (Rom 6:12).

At this speech the wretch grows pale and is struck dumb with confusion. For his spirit is troubled within him (Ps 142:4).

But the members come to their unhappy mistress without delay to complain bitterly against their master and bewail his hard commands. The greedy sense of taste complains at the meanness of the limit set to it, and the forbidding of the pleasure of gluttony. The eye complains that it is told to weep and not wander. While these complaints are going on, the will, stirred up and fiercely angry, says, "Are you telling me a dream (Gn 37:9) or a story?" Now the tongue, which has discovered its own cause for complaint, says, "It is all as you have heard. For I, too, have been ordered not to tell stories (1 Tm 1:4, Ti 1:14) or lies and speak from henceforth nothing but what is serious and necessary."

9. While he promulgates laws and makes decrees in this way for his own members, they suddenly interrupt the voice that is giving them orders and cry with a single impulse, "Where does this new religion come from (Acts 17:19)? It is easy for you to give orders as you like. But someone will be found who will oppose them, who will make new laws to contradict them." "Who is she?" he asks. They answer, "It is someone who is lying at home paralyzed (Mt 8:6) and deeply tormented."

VI. HOW THE WILL OF MAN RESISTS THE DIVINE VOICE BY
GLUTTONY, CURIOSITY, AND PRIDE,
AND BY ALL THE FLESHLY SENSES

10. Then the little old woman jumps up furiously, forgetting all her weariness. With hair standing on end, her clothes torn, her breast bared, scratching at her ulcers, grinding her teeth, dry-mouthed, infesting the air with her foul breath (Ps 34:16; Mk 9:17), she asks why reason (if any reason remains) is not ashamed to attack and invade the wretched will. "Is this your conjugal faithfulness?" she demands. "Is the way you feel compassion for me in my suffering? Up to now you have spared me, and not added to the pain of my wounds (Ps 68:27). Perhaps it seemed to you that something ought to be subtracted from my large dowry? But when you have taken this away, what is left? You have merely added to the wretchedness of this weary creature; and you know how once you respected all my wishes.

"But now, would that the threefold malignity of this dreadful sickness under which I labor had fallen on you not me. I am voluptuous. I am curious. I am ambitious. There is no part of me which is free from this threefold ulcer, from the soles of my feet to the top of my head (Is 1:6). My gullet and the shameful parts of my body are given up to pleasure; we must name them afresh, one by one. The wandering foot and the undisciplined eye are slaves to curiosity. Ear and tongue serve vanity, while the sinner's oil pours in to make my head greasy (Ps 140:5). With my tongue I myself supply whatever others seem to have omitted in my praise. I am greatly pleased both to receive praise from others and, when I conveniently can, to praise myself to others, for I always like to be talked about, whether by myself or by others.

"To this sickness your great skill is also in the habit of applying many dressings. Then my very hands, straying everywhere, have no particular task, but now they show themselves to be wholly enslaved to vanity, now to curiosity, now to pleasure. Even so, not all, nor even one of these has ever been able to satisfy me, for the eye is not satisfied by what it sees, nor the ear by what it hears (Eccl 1:8). But would that sometimes the body were all eye or the members all turned into a gullet to eat with (1 Cor 12:17). Then indeed I might have that little consolation which, despite my begging, you are trying to take away from me." So she spoke, and backing away in

indignation and fury, she said, "I shall hang on; I shall hang on for a long time."¹⁰

VI. REASON, NOW AT LAST STIRRED TO ANGER,
ANSWERS BACK AND IS NOT EASILY CONFOUNDED

11. Now the reason understands its vexation. Now it realizes something of the difficulty of what it has undertaken, and the ease with which it thought to proceed seems an illusion. It sees that the memory is full of filth. It sees more and more filth freely pouring into it. It sees the windows open to death and cannot close them (Jer 9:21), because the will is still weak, although she is yet in command; and from her ulcers a mass of bloody pus is flowing everywhere. Worst of all, the soul sees itself contaminated, not by someone else, but by its own body, which is no other than itself. For the soul is so constituted that just as it is the memory which is befouled so it is the will which destroys. For the soul itself is nothing but reason, memory, and will.¹¹ But now reason is found to be blind, for it did not see all this until now; weak, for it cannot repair what it recognizes; and the memory is found to be foul and fetid; and the will weak and covered in itching sores (2 Mc 9:9). And, to omit nothing which belongs to the man, his very body rebels and every single member is a window (Jer 9:21) through which death enters the soul and ceaselessly makes the confusion worse.

VII. THE BREATH OF CONSOLATION WHEN THE SOUL HEARS
OF THE PROMISED HAPPINESS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

12. When it is in this state, let the soul hear the divine voice; in wonder and amazement let it hear him saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). Who is poorer in spirit than he who in the whole of his own spirit finds no rest (Lk 11:24), nowhere to lay his head (Mt 8:20)? Here, too, is holy advice, that he who displeases himself pleases God (1 Cor 7:32; 1 Thes 2:4), and he who

¹⁰ Cf. Statius, *Thebaid*, II, 429, ed. H. J. Mozley (London, 1928).

¹¹ See note 5.

hates his own house, a house full of filth and unhappiness, is invited into the house of glory, a house not made with hands, which will be everlasting in the heavens (2 Cor 5:1). It is not surprising if he trembles (Gn 27:33) at the greatness of his condescension, if he finds it hard to believe what he has heard (Rom 10:16), if, struck with astonishment, he cries, "Does wretchedness then make a man happy?"

If you are in that state, have faith. It is not wretchedness but mercy which makes a man happy, so that humiliation turns to humility and need to strength. "You shall set aside for your inheritance a generous rain, O God; it was failing, but you have made it perfect" (Ps 67:10). That weakness is a benefit which seeks the help of a physician and he who faints does so to his salvation when God perfects him.

THAT HE IN WHOSE FLESH SIN STILL REIGNS
CANNOT HOPE FOR THIS KINGDOM,
AND SO WE MUST NOTE WHAT FOLLOWS:
"BLESSED ARE THE MEEK," AND SO ON.

But because there is no way to the kingdom of God without the firstfruits of the kingdom, and he to whom it is not given to rule his own members cannot hope for the kingdom of heaven, there follows, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Mt 5:4). To put it more plainly, "Check the wild motions of the will and take care to tame the wild beast. You are in bonds. Strive to untie what you can never break. The will is your Eye. You will not prevail against her by using force."

VIII. 13. There is no delay. The man, breathing again at these words, and thinking again that his task is not impossible, shamefacedly approaches the angry viper and tries to quell it. He speaks of the temporal and worthless, short-lived and most dangerous to all who love them.

HOW TO MAKE AN END OF THE GOINGS IN AND OUT OF
LUST AND GLUTTONY, AND THE VANITY OF CURIOSITY
AND THE LOVE OF RICHES

"For this reason," he says, "call yourself a wicked and unprofitable servant" (Mt 25:30; Lk 19:22). You cannot deny that you have never been

able to satisfy all these demands, even moderately. The pleasures of the throat, which are so highly regarded today, take up scarcely two fingers' breadth; and the small enjoyment of that little fragment is compared with such trouble and gives rise to such anxiety! By this the upper and lower parts of the body are enlarged, and the swelling stomach is not so much fattened as made pregnant with destruction; and when the bones cannot bear the weight of the flesh, various diseases follow.

With what labor and expense (sometimes of good reputation and honor), even at what danger to life, is the seductive whirlpool of lust stirred, so that the sulfurous vapor, though it glows very little, may drive its maddened victims with goads, and treat their intoxicated hearts like bees which first pour out honey and then sting.¹² This is the man whose heart is torn, whose desires full of anxiety and regret, whose acts of abomination and ignominy, whose fate of remorse and shame, are fully recognized at last for what they are.

14. What do these vain spectacles benefit the body or seem to confer on the soul? For you will find no third part of man which might benefit from curiosity. Frivolous and vain and empty is that consolation, and I do not know what harder lot I could solicit for him than that he should always have what he wants; he who when fleeing sweet peace delights in restless curiosity. It is quite clear that only the passing of all these "delights" is a joy. Besides, it is obvious from its very name that the "vanity of vanities" is nothing (Sir 1:2). Vain indeed is the labor which is carried out from zeal for vanity (Ps 126:1). "O glory, glory," says the wise man, "among the thousands of mortals, you are nothing but a vain puffing up of the ears!"¹³ And yet how much unhappiness do you think this (which is not so much happy vanity as vain happiness) produces? For it causes blindness of heart (Mc 3:5; Eph 4:18), as it is written, "My people, those who call you blessed deceive you" (Is 3:12). It produces the stiff-necked fury of animosity, the anxious labor of suspicion, the cruel torment of frustration, and the wretchedness of envy, which receives more misery than pity. Thus the insatiable love of riches is a desire which brings far more torment to the soul than their enjoyment brings refreshment. For the acquisition of riches is found to be all labor, their possession

12. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, III, metr. 7, ed. Bieler, CCL 94 (1957), p. 47.

13. *Ibid.*, III, pr. 6, p. 45.

all fear, and their loss all sorrow. Then, "Where there are many riches, there are many who consume them" (Eccl 5:10), and indeed other people's use of their riches leaves the rich only the reputation or not even that—for nothing. And in all this for so slight a thing, the eye has not seen nor the ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man, that glory which God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9), seems to be not so much lack of sense as lack of faith.

ON UNWORTHY SLAVERY TO THE VICES,
THE UNCERTAINTY WHEN DEATH WILL COME,
AND THE UNHAPPINESS OF AMASSING RICHES

15. Surely it is their own fault that this world which lies in the Evil One's grip (1 Jn 5:19) deludes with vain promises souls which forget their creation and their dignity, souls who are not ashamed to feed to be satisfied with their disgusting food (Lk 15:15–16)? From this creature is not ashamed to live in slavery to this foulness of the body's senses, although he is capable of enjoying eternal blessedness and the glory of God's greatness (Ti 2:13). God created him by his own breath, distinguished him by making him in his own likeness, redeemed him by his blood, gave him faith, adopted him by the Spirit (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5). When the soul deserts such a Bridegroom and pursues such lovers (Hos 2:7), it is not surprising that it cannot grasp the glory that is prepared for it. It is fitting that it should hunger for husks and not be given them, when it preferred to feed pigs rather than feast at the Father's table (Lk 15:16). It is the work of madness to feed what is barren and brings forth nothing; and to be unwilling to give anything to the widow (Jb 24:21), to care nothing for the heart and to give the flesh everything it wants (Rom 13:14), to fatten and caress a putrid body which is destined before long to be the food of worms (Is 14:1). For who is unaware that to worship mammon (Mt 6:24) and to serve avarice (which means serving idols) (Eph 5:5; Col. 3:5), or to chase eagerly after vanity, is clear evidence of a degenerate soul?

THAT WORKS DONE IN THIS LIFE ARE LIKE THE
SEEDS OF EVERLASTING REWARD

16. Granted that the world seems for now to give those who love it great and honorable things; everyone knows that it is faithless. Certainly these things do not last and it is uncertain even when they will end.¹⁴ Often they are lost to a man while he is still alive. He is sure to lose them when he dies.

And what in human life is more certain than death and more uncertain than the hour of death? Death is not merciful to poverty. It is no respecter of riches. It spares no one for the sake of his noble birth, his behavior, even his age; it waits at the door for the old and ambushes the young. Unhappy is he who in the dark and slippery places (Ps 34:6) of this life gives his energies to work which cannot last and does not recognize that it is vapor which appears for a moment (Jas 4:15) and vanity of vanities (Eccl 1:2). Ambitious man, have you obtained some dignity you have long desired? Hold on to what you have. Miser, have you filled your coffers? Be careful not to lose it all. Has your land been very fruitful? Pull down your barns and build greater (Lk 12:16). Make square buildings round.¹⁵ Say to your soul, "You must have goods laid up for many years." There will be someone to say, "Fool, this night your soul will be required of you. To whom will all that you have stored up belong?" (Lk 12:18 ff).

17. And would that only this collection perished and not their collector too! He will perish more terribly. It would be better to sweat over work which has no purpose than at work which has a deadly result. But here the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) and he who sows in the flesh will reap corruption from the flesh (Gal 6:8). For our deeds do not pass away as they seem to. On the contrary, every deed done in this life is the seed of a harvest to be reaped in eternity. The fool will be amazed when he sees the huge yield of the few seeds he has sown; good or bad, according to the quality of the seed. He who bears this in mind will never think sin a trifle, because he will look to the future harvest rather than that which he sows. Men sow unknowingly; they sow, hiding the mysteries of iniquity (2 Thes 2:7), and disguise the notes of vanity (Ps 25:4); the business of darkness is done in the dark (Ps 90:6).

14. Cicero, *De Senectute*, XX, 74, ed. W. A. Falconer (London, 1923).

15. Horace, *Ep.*, I, i, 100, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (London, 1923).

IX. THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE SINNER TO HIDE

18. "I am surrounded by walls," says the man. "Who can see me?" (Sir 23:25)? Even if no man sees you, you are seen. The wicked angel sees you. The good angel sees you. God who is greater than good or wicked angels sees you. The accuser (Rv 12:10) sees you. The multitude of witnesses (Heb 12:1) see you. The Judge himself sees you, before whom you must stand trial (Rm 14:10), on whose gaze it is madness to turn your back (Sir 38:15). It is terrible to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31).

Do not be in a hurry to think yourself safe. Ambushes are concealed from you, but you cannot hide from them. Ambushes are concealed, I say, and just as you cannot find them, so you cannot fail to fall into them. He who made the ear hears and he who put the eyes in your head sees (Ps 93:9). No wall of stones cuts off the Sun's rays. Not even the wall of the body is impenetrable to the gaze of truth. He sees those he has made. All things lie bare to his eyes, which penetrate more easily than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). He not only sees; he distinguishes the paths of our thoughts and the sources of our feelings. If he did not see into the uttermost depths of the human heart (Sir 42:18) and perceive what lies in it better than it does itself, man would not fear the sentence of the Lord his judge so much, even when he is not aware of anything which can be held against him. The apostle says, "I know of nothing against myself. But I am not therefore justified. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor 4:3ff.).

19. If you boast that you can frustrate human judgment by pretense, be sure that he whose eye is on men even for sins they have not committed will not overlook the sins they do commit. If you stand in such fear of your neighbor's knowledge of what you are, how much less should you shrug off the opinion of those to whom iniquity is the more hateful and corruption far more execrable? If you do not fear God but only the eyes of men (Lk 18:2, 4), remember what you cannot fail to know, that the man Christ knows all the deeds of men (1 Tm 2:5). So, then, what you would scarcely dare before men, you should be the more reluctant to dare before him. What you would not, I do not say, be allowed to do, but like to do, while your fellow-servant is watching, you should be horrified even to think of doing in the presence of your Lord. Otherwise, if you live in fear of the eye of the flesh rather than the sword which has power to destroy the flesh (Dt 32:42), that fear you fear will come upon you, and what you dread will happen (Jb 3:25).

There is nothing hidden which is not to be revealed; nothing secret which will not be known (Lk 12:2; Mt 10:26). When the works of darkness (Rom 13:12) are brought to light they will be accused by the light (Jn 3:20), and not only abominable hidden obscenities, but also the wicked business of men who sell mysteries for money, and the fraudulent whisperings of men who invent deceits and pervert judgment (Jb 34:12; Ecccl 5:7). All these will he who knows everything, who sees into the heart and bowels (Ps 7:10; Rv 2:23), reveal, when he begins to bring lamps to Jerusalem (Wis 1:12).

X.20. What therefore will they do, or rather, what will they suffer, those who have committed sins, when they hear, "Go into everlasting fire," you who have not done good works (Mt 7:23, 25:41, 45; Lk 13:27). When will he be admitted to the wedding-feast, he who has neither girded his loins to abstain from evil, nor kept his light burning to do good (Lk 12:35)? Then neither the integrity of virginity nor the brightness of the lamp will be able to excuse the lack of one thing: the oil (Mt 25:1). Or what tortures must be believed to lie in wait for those who in this life have done not merely wrong, but perhaps the worst of evils (Ecccl 8:11), if those who have received good things here are to be so tormented that in the midst of the flames their burning tongues are not cooled by even one tiny drop of water (Lk 16:24)?

Let us therefore beware of wrongdoing and let us not commit sins freely within the Church, trusting that it casts a wide net, knowing that fishermen do not keep everything the net brings in, but when the boat comes to shore they choose the good fish and throw away the bad (Mt 13:47). Let us not be content to gird our loins. Let us also light our lamps (Mt 5:15) and be conscientious in doing good works (Gal 6:10), bearing it in mind that every tree, not only that which bears bad fruit but also that which does not bear good fruit, will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt 3:10, 7:19; Lk 3:9), that "eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

21. For the rest, let us so turn our backs on evil and do good (Ps 36:27; Ps 33:15) that we may seek peace (1 Pt 3:11) and not glory. For glory is God's and he will not yield it to anyone else. "My glory," he says, "I will not give to another" (Is 42:8, 48:11). And it was a man after God's heart who said, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory" (Ps 113:9). Let us remember, too, what Scripture says, "If you offer aright and do not divide rightly, you have sinned" (Gn 4:7). This "division" of ours is right, brothers; let no man question it. If there is anyone who is displeased by it, let him know that it is not

we who make it but the angels. It was the angels who first sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will" (Lk 2:14).

Let us therefore keep oil in our vessels (Mt 25:4), lest (perish the are already closed, and hear the dread word of the wedding-feast when they swearing us from within, "I do not know you" (Mt 25:12). Death stands beside the entrance still, not only of unrighteousness, unfruitfulness, vanity, but also of pleasure itself.¹⁶ That is why we need fortitude against the temptation to sin, so that, strong in the faith, we may resist manfully repel his fiery arrows (Eph 6:16). We need justice to do good. We need prudence, so that we may not be reproved with the foolish virgins. Lastly, we need temperance, so that we do not, in the midst of our pleasures, one day hear what that wretched man heard, "In the midst of feasts and fine garments set aside, he prayed for mercy and heard, "Reverend son, that you have received good things in your life and Lazarus bad things; now he is comforted and you are tormented" (Lk 16:25). How terrible is God in his counsels concerning the sons of men (Ps 65:5)! But if he is terrible, he is also merciful, when he does not hide the nature of the judgment which is to come. "The soul which has sinned will die" (Ez 18:4). The branch which has not borne fruit has been cut off (Jn 15:2; Mt 3:10). The virgin who has no oil shall be shut out of the wedding-feast (Mt 25:12); and he who has received good things in this life will be tormented in the life to come (Lk 16:25). If perhaps all these four are to be found in anyone, his state is clearly very desperate.

**THAT THE FLESH RESISTS THE SPIRIT
WHICH IS BEGINNING TO FEAR GOD AND TRY TO DO GOOD**

22. The reason suggests these things inwardly to the will, the more abundantly as it is taught the more fully by the illumination of the Spirit. Happy indeed is he whose will has given itself up and taken the advice of reason, so that although at first it is fearful, afterwards it is cherished by heavenly promises and brings forth the spirit of salvation.

¹⁶ RB 7.24.

But perchance the will is found rebellious and obstinate, and not merely impatient, but, worse, after warnings, impervious to threats and prickly when flattered. Perhaps it will be found that the will is not moved at all by the suggestions of reason, and replies with a flash of anger, "How long am I to endure you (Mt 17:16; Lk 4:41)? Your preaching does not move me (Jn 8:37). I know that you are clever, but your cleverness does not fool me." Perhaps, then, the will, calling upon the members of the body one by one, urges them harder than ever to give in to their desires (Rom 6:12) and act wickedly (Rom 6:19). That is an only too familiar daily experience to all of us, that those who are giving their minds to conversion are tempted the more strongly by the desires of the flesh (1 Jn 2:16), and those who seek to leave Egypt and escape from Pharaoh are driven harder to make bricks out of clay (Ex 1:14, 5:19-21).

23. Would that such a one might turn aside from ungodliness and be careful not to fall into that terrible abyss of which it is written, "The ungodly man thinks nothing of it when he comes to the depths of wickedness" (Prv 18:3). He can be cured only by the most powerful remedy, and he will easily fail, unless he takes care to follow the physician's advice and do what he tells him. The temptation is fierce. It brings a man close to desperation (Heb 6:8) unless he gathers all his forces to take pity on his soul, which he sees to be so wretched and pitiable, changes his attitude, and listens to the voice of him (Rv 10:4, 10:8) who says, "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:5). Let him mourn abundantly, for the time for mourning has come and his state is greatly to be wept over. Let him mourn, but not without holy love and in hope of consolation. Let him bear in mind that he can find no rest in himself, but all is full of misery and desolation. Let him bear it in mind that there is no good in his own flesh (Rom 7:18), and that this wicked world offers nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit (Eccl 1:14, 2:11, 17, 4:16). Let him consider, I say, that neither within nor beneath nor around him is any consolation to be found, so that at last he may learn to seek what is to be sought above (Col 3:1) and to hope for what comes from above. Yet let him mourn meanwhile, bewailing his sorrow (Jb 10:20). Let his eyes pour out water (Ps 118:136). Let his eyelids not close in sleep (Prv 6:4). Truly, the eye which was in darkness before is cleansed by tears and its sight sharpened, so that it is able to gaze into the brightness of that most serene light (Acts 22:11).

XII. AFTER GRIEF COMES COMFORT AND THE KINDLING OF
THE DESIRE TO CONTEMPLATE HEAVENLY THINGS

24. From now onward, let him gaze upward through the window, look out through the lattice (Sg 2:9), and follow the guiding star (Mt 2:1) with all his attention and, zealously imitating the Magi, let him seek the Light in the light (Ps 35:10). He will find a wonderful place to pitch his tent (Ps 41:5), where a man may eat the bread of angels (Ps 77:25). He will find a paradise of pleasure planted by the Lord (Gn 2:8). He will find a garden of sweet flowers. He will find a cool resting-place, and he will say, "O that that wretched will would listen to my voice, so that it might enter in and see these good things and visit that place! Here indeed will it find further rest, and it will disturb me less when it is itself less disturbed." For he speaks the truth who says, "Take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:29).

Trusting in this promise, she addresses the angry will more soothingly and with a cheerful expression, and in the spirit of gentleness (1 Cor 4:21) which befits her, says, "Do not be indignant. I am not able to cause you to stumble. I am your body; your own self. There is nothing to fear or to dread."

Do not be surprised if the will's reply is more bitter than ever. It says, "Too much thinking has made you mad" (Acts 26:24). For the moment, let the reason wait quietly and hide its doings, until, talking of this and that, it can bring the subject up opportunely, saying, "Today I discovered a most beautiful garden, a very pleasant place. It would be good for us to be there (Mt 17:4). For it does you harm to be tossed on this bed of sickness, to be turning over your sorrow on your bed, to be grieving heavy-hearted in your chamber (Ps 4:5). The Lord will be near to him who seeks him, to the soul which hopes in him (Lam 3:25). He will attend to the vows of his supplicants, and he will minister to them in the power of his word" (Heb 4:12). The will's desire will be moved, and not only to see the place (Mt 28:6); it will also long to enter it (Jn 20:4-8), little by little, and make its dwelling there (Jn 14:23).

XIII. HOW RESTING IN THIS CONTEMPLATION THE
SOUL DELIGHTS IN THE TASTE OF HIM AND LEARNS FROM HIM

25. Do not think that this inward paradise of pleasure (Gn 2:8) is corporeal. It is not with the feet but with the affections that a man enters

it. Nor is it the plentifulness of earthly trees that makes it desirable to you, but the joyous and lovely (Ps 146:1) plantation of spiritual virtues which grows there. It is an enclosed garden (Sg 4:12), where a sealed fountain gives forth four springs (Sg 4:12) and a fourfold virtue comes from a single source of wisdom. There, too, the whitest lilies spring, and when the flowers appear the voice of the turtle-dove is heard (Sg 2:12). There the perfume of the Bride gives off a most sweet fragrance, and other scents abound. There the north wind is still and the south wind softly blows (Sg 1:11; 4:16). There in the midst is the tree of life (Gn 2:9), the apple tree of the Song of Songs, more precious than all the trees of the wood, in whose shade the Bride finds coolness and whose fruit is sweet to her taste (Sg 2:3).

There continence shines and the vision of pure truth illuminates the eye of the heart (Eph 1:18). The most sweet voice of the inner Comforter brings joy and gladness to the ears (Ps 50:10). There the most lovely odor of a fruitful field which the Lord has blessed (Gn 27:27) is carried to the nostrils of hope (Sg 2:14). There a foretaste of the incomparable delights of love is enjoyed, and the mind, anointed with mercy and freed from the sharp thorns and briars by which it was once pricked (Is 10:17), rests happily with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1; 1 Tm 1:5).

These are not among the rewards of eternal life. They should be thought of as wages of the soldiering of this life (1 Cor 9:7). They do not belong to what is promised to the Church in the future, but rather to what she is promised now (Gal 4:23-25; 1 Tm 4:8). For this is the hundredfold reward which is set before those who despise the world (Mt 19:29).

You do not need any speech of mine to commend this to you. The Spirit reveals it himself (1 Cor 2:10). You do not need to look it up in the pages of a book. Look to experience instead. Man does not know the price of wisdom. It comes from hidden places and it has a sweetness with which no sweetness known to living men (Jb 28:12, 13; Ps 26:13, 51:7) can compare. It is the sweetness of the Lord, and you will not recognize it unless you taste it. "Taste and see," he says, "how sweet the Lord is" (Ps 33:9).

The new name which a man knows only if he receives it is hidden manna (Rv 2:7). Not learning but anointing teaches it: it is not grasped by knowledge but by conscience (1 Jn 2:27). It is holy. It is a pearl (Mt 7:6). He who began both to do and to teach (Acts 1:1) will not himself do what he forbids. For he does not think of those who have renounced their former sins and wickednesses as dogs or swine. They are even

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comforted by the Apostle, who says, "Some of you were like this, but you have been washed and you are sanctified" (1 Cor 6:11). But let the dog be careful not to return to his vomit and the sow not to go back to wallowing in the mire (2 Pt 2:22).

XIV. HAVING TASTED SUCH FOOD THE SOUL UNDERSTANDS
THAT THEY ARE BLESSED
WHO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

26. Therefore in this gate of paradise the voice of the divine whisper is heard (Gn 3:8), a most holy and secret counsel, which is hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to little children (Mt 11:25). When it hears this voice reason not only grasps what it says but communicates readily to the will. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Mt 5:6). It is the supreme advice, and a mystery beyond thinking of. It is "a faithful saying and worthy to be received by everyone" (1 Tm 1:15, 4:9), that he who came to us from heaven came from a royal throne (Wis 18:15). For there was a great famine on earth, and we did not only all come to be in need (Lk 15:14); we are brought to an extremity of need. That is, we are compared with brute beasts and become like them (Ps 48:13, 21). We even hunger with satirably for the husks the pigs eat (Lk 15:16). He who loves hunger is not satisfied (Mt 5:6); he who loves luxury is not satisfied; he who loves money is glory is not satisfied; in short, he who loves the world is never satisfied. I myself have known men sated with this world, and sickened by every memory of it. I have known men sated with money, sated with honors, sated with the pleasures and curiosities of this world, and more than a little: to the point of nausea. And by the grace of God it is easy for every one of us to be sated in this way! For it is a satiety produced not by abundance but by contempt. So, foolish sons of Adam, devouring the husks intended for the pigs, you are feeding not your hungry souls but the hunger itself. Indeed, we continue to lack food when we sit at this banquet; unnatural food only sustains hunger. And, to take a plainer example, that of one of the many things human vanity desires, I tell you that man's heart is not satisfied with gold any more than his body is satisfied with wind. Let the miser not be indignant. The same thing is true of the ambitious and the luxurious and the criminal. If perhaps there is anyone who does not believe me, let him believe experience: his own or that of many others.

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27. Which of you, brothers, desires to be satisfied and to have his desire fulfilled? Let him begin to hunger after righteousness (Mt 5:6) and he cannot fail to be satisfied. Let him desire that bread of which there is plenty in his Father's house (Lk 15:17), and he will find that the husks of the pigs disgust him. Let him try to taste righteousness even a little, for the more he desires it the more will he deserve it; it is written, "He who eats me will hunger for more and he who drinks me will thirst for more" (Eccl 24:29). For this desire is more in keeping with the spirit of man. It takes possession of the human heart with a more natural and more powerful desire, and energetically casts out all other desires. So the strong armed man is driven out by a stronger (Lk 11:21ff.), as a nail can often be driven out by a nail. "Blessed therefore are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied" (Mt 5:6). Not yet indeed with that which a man shall be filled with and live tiably before, so that from now on the will shall cease to sell the body into slavery and its former lusts (Rom 6:12, 1 Pt 1:14), and expose it to the influence of reason. Instead, it will urge it to continue in righteousness so as to grow with no less zeal than it showed before when it served infirmity unto iniquity (Rm 6:19).

XV. THAT OUR SINS, ONCE PUNISHED, ARE FORGIVEN,
AND IF THEY ARE NOT REPEATED, CANNOT BE A STUMBLING-
BLOCK, BUT RATHER WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

28. And now the will has been changed and the body brought into subjection to it (1 Cor 9:27), as though the fountain of evil had been dried up in part and the opening covered over. The third task remains and that is the hardest: to purify the memory and pump out the cesspit. How can I forget my own life? Take a thin piece of poor-quality parchment which has soaked up the ink with which the scribe has written on it. Can any skill erase it? It is not merely superficially colored; the ink is ingrained. It would be pointless for me to try to clean it. The parchment would tear before the marks of wretchedness were removed. Forgetting would perhaps destroy the memory itself, so that, in a mental convulsion, I should cease to remember what I had done.

We must ask, then, what keen edge can both clean my memory and keep it intact? Only the living and effective Word which is sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12), which "takes away your sins" (Mk

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2.5). The Pharisee may mutmur and say, "Who can take away sins except God?" (Mk 2:7; Lk 5:21). He who says this to me is God and no one else is to be compared with him. He set out the whole way of discipline; he gave it to his servant Jacob and to his beloved Israel; and after that he was seen on earth and talked with men (Bar 3:36-38). His pardon wipes out sin, not from the memory, but in such a way that what before was both present in the memory and rendered it unclean is now, although it is still in the memory, no longer a defilement to it. For now many sins come to mind which we know to have been committed by ourselves or by others. But it is our own sins which defile the memory; those of others do not hurt it. Why is this, if not because it is our own sins which cause us shame? These are what we fear to have charged against us. Take away condemnation, take away fear, take away confusion, and there is full remission of sins. Then our sins will not be against us but will work together for good (Rom 8:28), so that we may give devout thanks to him who has remitted them.

XVI. ON THE MERCY WHICH IS PROMISED TO THE PENITENT AND WRETCHED,
"BLESSED," HE SAYS, "ARE THE MERCIFUL," AND SO ON

29. For him who prays for mercy, there is a fitting reply. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7). Have mercy on your own soul (Sir 30:24) if you want God to have mercy on you. Drench your bed in tears night after night, and remember to water your couch with weeping (Ps 6:7). If you take compassion on yourself, if you labor with groans of repentance (Ps 6:7)—for this is your first step in mercy—you will indeed find mercy. If you are perhaps a great sinner with many sins, and you ask a great mercy and many acts of pity (Ps 50:3), you, too, must strive to show great mercy. Be reconciled to yourself, for you did yourself grave injury (Jb 7:20) in setting yourself up against God. Now that peace has been restored in your own house, it is necessary first to extend it to your neighbor, and that he may give you a new kiss with the kiss of his mouth (Sg 1:1); as it is written, you must be reconciled and at peace with God (Rom 5:1). Forgive those who have sinned against you, and your own sins will be forgiven you (Lk 6:37); and you will pray to the Father with a quiet conscience, and say, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Mt 6:12). If perhaps you have cheated anyone, make good what you owe,

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and give what is left over to the poor (Lk 19:8, 18:22, 11:41), and you will be shown mercy (Rom 9:25). "If your sins were as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, and if they were red as vermilion, they shall be white as wool" (Is 1:18). So that you may not be put to shame for all the devices of your wrongdoing (Wis 3:11), for which you blush now (Rom 6:21), give alms, and if you cannot do so from your earthly substance (Jb 4:7; Lk 11:41), do it from your good will, and they will all be clean. Not only will the reason be enlightened and the will put right but the memory itself will be purged, and henceforth you will cry to the Lord and hear a voice saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8).

XVII. THAT THE HEART MUST BE CLEANSSED
IF THE SOUL IS TO SEE GOD,
FOR, "BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART," AND SO ON

30. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8) This is a great promise, my brothers, and something to be desired with all one's heart. For to see in this way is to be like God, as John the Apostle says, "Now we are all sons of God, but it has not yet been made clear what we shall be: For we know that when it is made clear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2). This vision is eternal life (Jn 12:50), as Truth himself says in the Gospel, "This is eternal life, that they should know that you alone are the true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ" (Jn 17:3).

Hateful is the blemish which deprives us of this blessed vision. Delectable is the neglectfulness which causes us to put off the cleansing of the eye. For just as our bodily vision is impeded either by a humor within, or by dust from outside entering the eye, so too is our spiritual vision disturbed by the desires of our own flesh or by worldly curiosity and ambition. Our own experience teaches us this, no less than the Sacred Page, where it is written, "The body which is corruptible weighs down the soul and the earthly habitation oppresses its thoughts" (Wis 9:15). But in both it is sin alone which dulls and confuses the vision; nothing else seems to stand between the eye and the light, between God and man. For while we are in this body we are in exile from the Lord (2 Cor 5:6).

That is not the body's fault, except in that it is yet mortal (Rom 7:24); rather it is the flesh which is a sinful body (Rom 6:6), the flesh in

which is no good thing but rather the law of sin reigns (Rom 7:23, 25). Meanwhile the bodily eye (Gn 27:1), when the mote is no longer in it as he who walks in the spirit and sees deeply often experiences (2 Cor 12:18; Gal 5:16). For you will cure a wounded limb quickly by withdrawing the sword, but only if you apply poultices to heal it. For one should think himself cleansed because he has come out of the cesspits. No, rather let him realize that he stands in need of a thorough washing first. Nor must he be washed only with water; he needs to be purged and refined by fire so as to say, "We have passed through fire and water, and you have brought us to a resting place" (Ps 65:12). "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). "Now we see through a glass darkly, but hereafter face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). Then truly our faces will be completely clean, so that he may present them to himself shining, without stain or wrinkle (Eph 5:27).

XVIII. OF THE PEACEMAKER AT PEACE AND MAKING PEACE,
"BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS," AND SO ON

31. Here there follows immediately and appropriately, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt 5:9). A man is in a state of peace when he renders good for good (Rom 12:17ff.; 1 Thes 5:15), as far as it lies in him to do, and wishes harm to no one. There is another kind of man who is patient; he does not render evil for evil (Rom 12:17), and he is able to bear injury. Then there is the peacemaker, who returns good for evil and is ready to do good even to someone who harms him. The first is a little child and easily tripped up (Mt 18:6). In this evil world (Gal 1:4) he will not readily be saved. The second, as it is written, possesses his own soul in patience (Lk 21:19). The third not only possesses his own soul, but also wins the souls of many others. The first possesses peace, as far as it lies in him to do so. The second holds fast to peace. The third makes peace. He, then, is deservedly blessed with the name "son" (1 Jn 3:1), because he does the work of a son, for, grateful for his own reconciliation, he reconciles others to his Father too (2 Cor 5:18). So he who has served well in the Father's house than that of his son. "For if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17), so that, as he himself says, where he is, there may his servant be too (Jn 12:26).

We have wearied you by talking for so long, and we have kept you longer than we should have done. Now time puts an end to our loquacity, as shame has not.

But remember what the Apostle said; we read that he once went on preaching (Ti 1:3) until midnight (Acts 20:7). "Would to God," to use his words, "that you could bear with a little of my folly. For I care jealously for your good as God himself does" (2 Cor 11:1).

XIX. AN ATTACK UPON THE AMBITIOUS WHO PRESUME TO
BRING GOD'S PEACE TO OTHERS
BEFORE THEIR OWN HEARTS ARE PURE

32. Little children, "Who made it clear to you that you should flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7). For no one deserves anger more than the enemy who pretends friendship: "Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Lk 22:48). You, a man of one mind with him (Ps 54:14-15), who used to take pleasant meals with him, whose hand dipped into the same dish (Mt 26:23), you have no part in the prayer with which he prays to the Father and says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). Woe to you who take away the key not only of knowledge but also of authority; you do not enter in yourself and in many ways you prevent those you ought to introduce from entering in (Lk 11:52). You steal the keys rather than receiving them. The Lord asks about such through the prophet. "They have reigned but not by me. They have chosen princes but I did not call them to the thrones they occupy" (Hos 8:4).

Whence comes such zeal for preferment, such shameless ambition, such folly of human presumption? Surely none of us would dare to take over the ministry of any earthly king, even the most minor, without his instructions (especially when he actually prohibits it) or to seize his benefices or conduct his affairs? Do not suppose then that God will approve of what he endures from those in his great house who are vessels fit for destruction (Rom 9:22).

Many come, but consider who is called. Listen to the Lord's words in their order. "Blessed," he says, "are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" and then, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt 5:8). The heavenly Father calls the pure in heart (Mt 5:9) who do not seek for themselves but for Christ, and not what will profit them but what will profit many. "Peter," he says, "do

you love me?" "Lord, you know that I love you." "Feed my sheep," he replies (Mt 5:48ff.). For when would he commit such beloved sheep to someone who did not love them? This question of who is found to be a faithful servant is much debated among clerks.

Woe to unfaithful stewards who, themselves not yet reconciled, take on themselves the responsibility for recognizing righteousness in others, as if they were themselves righteous men (Is 68:2). Woe to the sons of wrath (Eph 2:3) who profess that they are ministers of grace. Woe to the sons of wrath who are not afraid to usurp to themselves the rank and name of "peacemaker." Woe to the sons of wrath who pretend to be mediators of peace, and who feed on the sins of the people. Woe to those who, walking in the flesh, cannot please God (Rm 8:8) and presume to wish to please him.

**THE STARTLING USURPATION OF THE HIGHEST RANK OF
PEACEMAKER BY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT REACHED
THE LOWER RANKS, NOT EVEN THE FIRST**

33. We do not wonder, my brothers, we who take pity on the present state of the Church; we do not wonder at the basilisk which arises from the serpent-root (Is 14:29). We do not wonder if he who wanders from the way the Lord has laid down steals the grapes from the Lord's vineyard (Is 5:7; Ps 79:13). For the man who has not yet heard in his heart the voice of the Lord calling him (Is 46:8), or if perhaps he begins to hear it, he takes flight back into the undergrowth to hide (Gn 3:9-10), impudently appropriates the rank of peacemaker (Mt 5:9) and takes the place which belongs to a son of God. As a result he has not yet stopped sinning, but is still dragging a long rope. He has not yet become a man who perceives his own poverty (Lam 3:1). He says, "I am rich, and in need of nothing," although he is poor and naked and wretched and pitiable (Rv 3:17). He has nothing of the spirit of gentleness (1 Cor 4:21) with which he could instruct those who are caught in sin (Gal 6:1), bearing in mind his own susceptibility to temptation. He knows nothing of tears of compunction. Rather, he rejoices when he has done wrong, and exults in his worst deeds (Prv 2:14). He is one of those to whom the Lord says, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will weep" (Lk 6:25). He desires money, not justice (Lk 1:78). His eyes are caught by anything which is showy (Jb 41:25). He hungers insatiably for honor and thirsts for human glory. He has no bowels of mercy (Col 3:12). Rather,

he rejoices in his anger and behaves like a tyrant. He seeks to make a profit from piety (1 Tim 6:5). What am I to say about the purity of his heart? Would that he had not given it over to forgetfulness like a dead man who has no thoughts (Ps 30:13). Would that he were not a "dove gone astray and having no heart" (Hos 7:11). The bodily garment is found to be stained; would that even the outside were clean, so that he could obey at least in part him who says, "Be clean, you who bear the vessels of God" (Is 52:1).

**XX. THAT THE INCONTINENT DO NOT FEAR
BOLDLY TO TAKE HOLY ORDERS**

34. While we do not accuse everyone, yet we cannot excuse everyone. The Lord has left himself many thousands (Rom 11:4). Otherwise, if their righteousness did not excuse us and the Lord of Sabaoth had not left us a holy seed (Rom 9:29), we should have been overwhelmed long ago like Sodom and punished like Gomorrah (Jer 50:40).

The Church seems to have grown. Even the most holy order of the clergy is multiplied beyond counting (Ps 39:6). But even if you have multiplied the people, Lord, you have not made joy greater (Is 9:3), and merit seems to have decreased as much as numbers have increased. Everywhere people are rushing to join sacred orders, and they seize with neither reverence nor consideration upon ministries which the angels themselves regard with veneration. For the ungodly do not fear to take up the banner of the heavenly kingdom or to wear the crown of its jurisdiction, men in whom greed rules, ambition gives the orders, pride holds sway, iniquity is enthroned, lust is the principal ruler. If, following the prophecy of Ezekiel, we were to dig under the wall to see something horrible in God's house, in these men the worst abomination would perhaps appear within the walls (Ez 8:8). Truly, having committed fornication and adultery and incest (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Cor 5:1), some do not fail to go on to ignominious passions and nameless deeds (Rom 1:26). Would that these things (which are still the same breach of proper behavior) were not still being committed today. Would that the Apostle did not need to write these things, nor we to speak of them. Would that when we speak of such abominable things ever crossing any man's mind, no one would believe us.

Is it not true that those cities which gave rise to this filth were once foredoomed by divine judgment and destroyed by fire (Gn 19:24

ff.)? Did not the flame of hell, unable to wait (2 Pt 2:3), come to destroy that accursed nation because its sins were an outstranding eye-sore and went before it to judgment (2 Tm 5:24)? Did not that fire and sulfur and that stormy wind (Ps 10:7) wipe out the land as if aware of such confusion? Was it not all reduced to nothing more than a dreadful lake? The five heads of the hydra were cut off, but alas, countless more sprang up. Who has rebuilt the cities of vice? Who has widened their walls of shame? Who has spread their poisonous offspring over the earth? Woe, woe, the enemy of men has strewn the wretched remnants of that sulfurous burning all around; with its disgusting ashes he has sprinkled the body of the Church (Col 1:18), and even some of her ministers, too, with its most fetid and foul matter! Alas, "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession" (1 Pt 2:9), who at first were flowing with the divine and spiritual graces of the Christian religion, is it to be believed that such things could ever be found in you?

36. Marked with this strain they enter the tabernacle (Ex 28:43; Nm 8:15) of the living God (Dt 5:26). With this mark on them they dwell in his temple, polluting the Lord's holy place (Lev 19:8); they will receive a multiple condemnation, because they carry such burdened consciences and nevertheless enter God's sanctuary (Ps 72:17, 82:13). Such not only do not please God; they anger him, when they seem to be saying in their hearts, "He will require it" (Ps 9:34). They anger him a good deal, and set him against themselves, and I fear that they do so in the very acts which ought to bring them closer to him.

Would that when they were about to begin to build the tower they would sit down and count the cost in case they do not have enough to finish it (Lk 14:28). Would that those who cannot contain themselves stood in fear of rashly professing a state of perfection or taking the name of celibates. It is a costly tower indeed, and a great word, which not all can accept (Mt 19:11). But it would undoubtedly be better to marry than to burn (1 Cor 7:9), and to remain in the lower rank of the faithful people and be saved than to live a worse life in the high rank of the clergy and be judged the more severely. For many—not all, but still many, so many that they certainly cannot be hidden, nor in their impudence do they want to be—many seem to have bestowed the freedom in which they were called upon the flesh (Gal 5:13), abstaining from the remedy of marriage and then wallowing in wickedness.

XXI. EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE, AND TO SEEK A HUMBLE PLACE FIRST AND ONLY AFTER BECOMING WORTHY TO LOOK TO HIGHER HONOR

37. Spare your souls, I beg you brothers, spare them, spare the blood which was shed for you (Mt 26:28). Beware of the fearful danger; turn from the fire which is prepared (Mt 25:41). Do not let the profession of perfection turn out to be a mockery. Let virtue take a straightforward form in holiness (2 Tm 3:5). Do not let the form of the celibate life be vain and empty of truth. Does chastity not stand in danger from pleasure, humility from riches, piety from worldly business, truth from chattering, love from this wicked world (Gal 1:4)? Flee from the midst of Babylon, flee and save your souls (Jer 48:6; 51:6). Fly to the cities of refuge¹⁷ (Jos 21:36) where you can do penance for past sins and also obtain grace in the present and confidently await future glory. Let not consciousness of sins hold you back, for where sins abound, grace abounds the more (Rom 5:20). Let not the severity of penance deter you, for the sufferings of this present time are nothing in comparison with past sin, which is forgiven, nor with the glory to come which is promised to us (Rom 8:18). And there is no bitterness that the prophet's meal cannot sweeten or wisdom, the tree of life (Gn 2:9), make delicious.

38. If you do not believe words, believe deeds (Jn 10:38). Accept the evidence of many men's example. Sinners rush from all sides to repent and those delicate by habit and nature alike think nothing of outward discomfort if it eases the gnawing of their conscience. Nothing is impossible to those who believe (Mt 17:19). Nothing is difficult for those who love. Nothing is harsh to the meek. Nothing is hard to the humble, who are assisted by grace (Jas 4:6) and whose obedience is under the tender command of devotion.

Why do you walk in great and wonderful things which are beyond you? It is a great and wonderful thing to be a minister of Christ and a steward of God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1). The order of peacemakers is far above you, unless perhaps you prefer to leap rather than climb, and leave out the stages which come first. Would that he who enters in that way could administer as faithfully as he confidently pushed his way in. But it is difficult, perhaps impossible, for the sweet fruit of love to ripen

17. I.e., monasteries.

from the bitter root of ambition. I say to you, yet not I but the Lord (1 Cor 7:10), "When you are called to the wedding-feast sit down in the lowest place, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:8-10).

XIII.

ON THE ENDURANCE OF PERSECUTION ACCORDING TO THE LAST BEATITUDE,

"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO SUFFER PERSECUTION, . . .

BLESSED ARE YOU . . ." AND SO ON

39. "Blessed," he says, "are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt 5:9). Consider carefully that it is not the people who call for peace but those who make peace who are commended. For there are those who talk but do nothing (Mt 23:3). For just as it is so it is not those who preach peace but the authors of peace who are blessed. Would that today's Pharisees—for perhaps there are some—would at least say what they ought, even if they do not do it. Would that those who do not wish to preach the Gospel unless they are paid (1 Cor 9:18) might at least preach it for money. Would that they preached the Gospel if only so that they could eat!

"The hireling," the Bible says, "sees the wolf coming and flees" (Jn 10:12). Oh, that those who are not shepherds today would show themselves to be hirelings in charge of the sheep and not wolves. Would that they did not themselves injure the sheep and flee when no one is pursuing (Prv 28:1). Would that they might not expose the flock to danger when they see the wolf coming. They had to be endured when they were found, especially in time of peace, receiving their pay and, if only for the money (Mt 6:2, 6:5), working to guard the sheep: as long as they themselves did not disturb the sheep and drive them away from the pastures of righteousness and truth for nothing. But persecution separates and distinguishes the hirelings from the shepherds beyond question (Mt 25:32). For when did he who seeks worldly reward not fear passing losses? When did he who wants money more than righteousness endure worldly persecution for righteousness' sake? "The blessed," he says, "are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). This happiness belongs to shepherds, not hirelings. Far less is it the reward of robbers or wolves. They do not suffer persecution for righteousness' sake so

much as preferring to endure persecution rather than maintain righteousness. Truly, it is contrary to their way of working; it troubles them even to hear of it (Wis 2:12ff.).

40. For the rest, you can see men ready to stir up trouble, to bear hatred, to pretend to be ashamed, to ignore curses, to undergo all risks for the sake of avarice and ambition; no less ruinous is the animosity of men like that than the feebleness of hirelings. Their own good shepherd who was ready to lay down his life for the sheep says to the shepherds (Jn 10:10-15), "Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Be glad and rejoice when that happens, for your reward is great in heaven" (Lk 6:22).

Those whose treasure is in heaven have no reason to fear (Mt 6:19-20). There is no reason for them to complain about many tribulations when they are confident of a manifold reward. No, let them rather rejoice, as is fitting, that it is not so much persecution which is increased as reward, and let them rejoice the more that they bear many things for Christ, so that with him henceforth a more abundant reward may wait for them (Mt 5:12). "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith" (Mt 8:26)? The faithful word stands firm on the changeless truth, for no adversity can hurt you if no wickedness has you in its control. But it is a small thing that it will not hurt you; it will even profit you, and abundantly, as long as righteousness is your purpose and Christ is your cause, with whom "the patience of the poor will never perish" (Ps 9:19). To him be glory now and forever, world without end (1 Pt 5:11; 2 Pt 3:18).