

On the Conflict Between the Vices and the Virtues



by Ambrose Autpert

Benedictine Abbot

(730 – 784)

Ambrose Autpert *his life and works*

from the Wednesday Catecheses of Benedict XVI

The Church lives in people and those who want to know the Church better, to understand her mystery, must consider the people who have seen and lived her message, her mystery. In the Wednesday Catechesis I have therefore been speaking for some time of people from whom we can learn what the Church is. We began with the Apostles and Fathers of the Church and we have gradually reached the eighth century, Charlemagne's period. Today I want to talk about Ambrose Autpert, a lesser known author; in fact, the majority of his works were attributed to other, better known people, from St Ambrose of Milan to St Ildefonsus, not to mention those that the monks of Monte Cassino claimed came from the pen of an abbot of theirs of the same name who lived almost a century later. Apart from a few brief autobiographical notes in his important commentary on the *Apocalypse*, we have little information about his life. Yet, an attentive reading of the works whose authorship the critic recognizes makes it possible, little by little, to discover in his teaching a precious theological and spiritual treasure for our time too.

Born into a noble family in Provence according to his late biographer, Giovanni Ambrose Autpert was at the court of the Frankish King Pepin the Short where, in addition to his function as official, he somehow also played the role of tutor to the future Emperor Charlemagne. Autpert, probably in the retinue of Pope Stephen ii, who in 753-54 went to the Frankish court, came to Italy and had the opportunity of visiting the famous Benedictine Abbey of St Vincent, located near the sources of the River Volturno in the Duchy of Benevento. Founded at the beginning of the century by three brothers from Benevento Paldone, Tatone and Tasone the abbey was known as an oasis of classical and Christian culture. Shortly after his visit, Ambrose Autpert decided to embrace the religious life and entered that monastery where he acquired an appropriate education, especially in the fields of theology and spirituality, in accordance with the tradition of the Fathers. In about the year 761, he was ordained a priest and on 4 October 777 he was elected abbot with the support of the Frankish monks despite the opposition of the Lombards, who

favoured Potone the Lombard. The nationalistic tension in the background did not diminish in the subsequent months. As a result, in the following year, 778, Autpert decided to resign and to seek shelter, together with several Frankish monks, in Spoleto where he could count on Charlemagne's protection. This, however, did not solve the dissension at St Vincent's Monastery. A few years later, when on the death of the abbot who had succeeded Autpert, Potone himself was elected as his successor (a. 782), the dispute flared up again and even led to the denunciation of the new abbot to Charlemagne. The latter sent the contenders to the tribunal of the Pontiff who summoned them to Rome. Autpert was also called as a witness. However, he died suddenly on the journey, perhaps murdered, on 30 January 784.

Ambrose Autpert was a monk and abbot in an epoch marked by strong political tensions which also had repercussions on life within the monasteries. We have frequent and disturbing echoes of them in his writings. He reports, for example, the contradiction between the splendid external appearance of monasteries and the tepidity of the monks: this criticism was also certainly directed at his own abbey. He wrote for his monastery the *Life* of the three founders with the clear intention of offering the new generation of monks a term of reference to measure up to. He also pursued a similar aim in a small ascetic treatise *Conflictus vitiorum atque virtutum* ("Combat between the vices and the virtues"), which met with great acclaim in the Middle Ages and was published in 1473 in Utrecht, under Gregory the Great's name and, a year later, in Strasbourg under that of St Augustine. In it Ambrose Autpert intends to give the monks a practical training in how to face spiritual combat day after day. Significantly he applies the affirmation in 2 Tim 3: 12: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted", no longer by external forces but by the assault that the Christian must face within him on the part of the forces of evil. Twenty-four pairs of fighters are presented in a sort of disputation: every vice seeks to lure the soul by subtle reasoning, whereas the respective virtue rebuffs these insinuations, preferably by using words of Scripture.

In this treatise on the combat between the vices and the virtues, Autpert sets *contemptus mundi* (contempt for the world) against *cupiditas* (greed) which becomes an important figure in the spirituality of monks. This contempt for the world is not a contempt for Creation, for the beauty and goodness of Creation and

of the Creator, but a contempt for the false vision of the world that is presented to us and suggested to us precisely by covetousness. It insinuates that "having" is the supreme value of our being, of our life in the world, and seems important. And thus it falsifies the creation of the world and destroys the world. Autpert then remarks that the acquisitive greed of the rich and powerful in the society of his time also exists within the souls of monks and thus he writes a treatise entitled *De cupiditate*, in which, together with the Apostle Paul, he denounces greed from the outset as the root of all evil. He writes: "In the earth's soil various sharp thorns spring from different roots; in the human heart, on the other hand, the stings of all the vices sprout from a single root, greed" (*De cupiditate* 1: CCCM 27b, p. 963). In the light of the present global financial crisis, this report reveals its full timeliness. We see that it was precisely from this root of covetousness that the crisis sprang. Ambrose imagines the objection that the rich and powerful might raise, saying: but we are not monks, certain ascetic requirements do not apply to us. And he answers: "What you say is true, but for you, in the manner of your class and in accordance with your strength, the straight and narrow way applies because the Lord has proposed only two doors and two ways (that is, the narrow door and the wide door, the steep road and the easy one); he has not pointed to a third door or a third way" (loc. cit., p. 978). He sees clearly that life-styles differ widely. Nonetheless the duty to combat greed, to fight the desire to possess, to appear, and the false concept of freedom as the faculty to dispose of all things as one pleases applies to the man in this world too and also to the rich. The rich person must also find the authentic road of truth, of love, and thus of an upright life. As a prudent pastor of souls, Autpert was thus able to speak a word of comfort at the end of his penitential homily: "I have not spoken against the greedy, but against greed, not against nature but against vice" (loc. cit., p. 981).

Ambrose Autpert's most important work is without a doubt his commentary on the *Apocalypse* [*Expositio in Apocalypsim*] in 10 volumes: this constitutes, centuries later, the first broad commentary in the Latin world on the last book of Sacred Scripture. This work was the fruit of many years' work, carried out in two phases between 758 and 767, hence prior to his election as abbot. In the preface he is careful to indicate his sources, something that was not usual in the Middle Ages. Through what was perhaps his most significant source, the commentary of Bishop Primasius of Hadrumetum, written in about the middle of the sixth century,

Autpert came into contact with the interpretation of the *Apocalypse* bequeathed to us by Ticonius, an African who lived a generation before St Augustine. He was not a Catholic; he belonged to the schismatic Donatist Church, yet he was a great theologian. In his commentary he sees the *Apocalypse* above all as a reflection of the mystery of the Church. Ticonius had reached the conviction that the Church was a bipartite body: on the one hand, he says, she belongs to Christ, but there is another part of the Church that belongs to the devil. Augustine read this commentary and profited from it but strongly emphasized that the Church is in Christ's hands, that she remains his Body, forming one with him, sharing in the mediation of grace. He therefore stresses that the Church can never be separated from Jesus Christ. In his interpretation of the *Apocalypse*, similar to that of Ticonius, Autpert is not so much concerned with the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time as rather with the consequences that derive for the Church of the present from his First Coming, his Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And he speaks very important words to us: in reality Christ "must be born, die and be raised daily in us, who are his Body" (*In Apoc.*, III: CCCM, 27, p. 205). In the context of the mystic dimension that invests every Christian he looks to Mary as a model of the Church, a model for all of us because Christ must also be born in and among us. Under the guidance of the Fathers, who saw the "woman clothed with the sun" of Rv 12: 1 as an image of the Church, Autpert argues: "the Blessed and devout Virgin... daily gives birth to new peoples from which the general Body of the Mediator is formed. It is therefore not surprising if she, in whose blessed womb the Church herself deserved to be united with her Head, represents the type of the Church". In this sense Autpert considers the Virgin Mary's role decisive in the work of the Redemption (cf. also his homilies *In purificatione S. Mariae* and *In adsumptione S. Mariae*). His great veneration and profound love for the Mother of God sometimes inspired in him formulations that in a certain way anticipated those of St Bernard and of Franciscan mysticism, yet without ever deviating to disputable forms of sentimentalism because he never separates Mary from the mystery of the Church. Therefore, with good reason, Ambrose Autpert is considered the first great Mariologist in the West. He considers that the profound study of the sacred sciences, especially meditation on the Sacred Scriptures, which he describes as "the ineffable sky, the unfathomable abyss" should be combined with the devotion that he believed must free the soul from attachment to earthly

and transient pleasures (*In Apoc. IX*). In the beautiful prayer with which his commentary on the *Apocalypse* ends, underlining the priority that must be given to love in all theological research, he addresses God with these words: "When you are intellectually examined by us, you are not revealed as you truly are: when you are loved, you are attained".

Today we can see in Ambrose Autpert a personality who lived in a time of powerful political exploitation of the Church, in which nationalism and tribalism had disfigured the face of the Church. But he, in the midst of all these difficulties with which we too are familiar, was able to discover the true face of the Church in Mary, in the Saints, and he was thus able to understand what it means to be a Catholic, to be a Christian, to live on the word of God, to enter into this abyss and thus to live the mystery of the Mother of God: to give new life to the Word of God, to offer to the Word of God one's own flesh in the present time. And with all his theological knowledge, the depth of his knowledge, Autpert was able to understand that with merely theological research God cannot truly be known as he is. Love alone reaches him. Let us hear this message and pray the Lord to help us to live the mystery of the Church today in our time.

Translator's Note

An inspiration to read and translate *De Vitiis et Virtutibus* came to me after reading Pope Benedict XVI's biography of Ambrose Autpert. The first version at hand was from Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 17, pp. 1057-1074. Later I made some use of the critical edition in the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*. Though this was helpful now and then to clarify ambiguities in the PL text, I relied mostly on the PL, which in fact contains some phrases and sentences which are missing from the CCSL edition. Presumably, the older edition is based on some manuscripts which were not available to the newer one, since the differences in reading are not noted in the critical apparatus of the CCSL.

Citations of Scripture have been for the most part translated directly from the *Conflictu* of Ambrose. It seems that the *Vetus Latina* was still widely in use in southern Italy at the time of Ambrose, and the arguments of the virtues draw from the waters of this translation. At the same time, it is clear Ambrose's primary concern was to receive the Word of God in faith and put it into practice. Concerns over translation, in the case of ambiguities, were for the sake of this end. Therefore we have kept close to Ambrose's citations as he gave them to us, while making references to the book and chapter from which it is taken.

Maximus Spoeth, O.S.B.

Conflict Between the Vices and Virtues
'De Vitiorum Virtutumque Conflictu'

A Little Book by Ambrose Autpert
Benedictine Abbot

Chapter 1

The apostolic voice cries out through the world, beloved, and lest those who are girded for the battle of the faith be lethargic in their security, it says: “*All who want to live devotedly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*” (2 Tim. 3) On the other hand, since the Christian society, even in its leaders, is now religious, the faithful living devotedly in Christ Jesus have no fetters, beatings, whippings, prisons, racks, crosses, and whatever other kinds of torments there may be. So someone might object: how can this resounding message of the Apostle be true, namely that all those who are living devotedly will suffer persecution? Can it perhaps be, that in time of peace, no one wants to live devotedly in Christ Jesus, and that is why those things are lacking?

Who in their right mind would say this? Therefore in this saying of the Apostle, we should understand not a particular persecution of some, but rather the general persecution of all.

Now since there are actually many people within the bosom of mother Church who live devotedly in Christ, and are afflicted with rough treatments, and attacked with very bitter disgraces, injustices and mockeries, could this be the general persecution which the Apostle described, namely, the one which would be suffered by all those living devotedly in Christ?

Yet I would not have jumped to that conclusion either, since there are some truly devout people in the Church, whom no vicious person would dare to detract to their face. Therefore we must understand another persecution to be hinted at in these words of the Apostle, one more brutal and harmful, which no mere mortal viciousness hurls at us; rather the adversity of the vices is what brings it forth.

Against humility, pride; against fear of the Lord, vainglory; against true reverence, pretense; against lowering, exaltation; against fraternal love, envy; against charity, hate; against the frankness of just correction, slander; against patience, anger; against meekness, harshness; against humble love, being puffed up; against spiritual joy, the sorrow of the world; against the exercise of virtue, torpor or faintheartedness; against sturdy stability, restless wandering; against the confidence of hope, despair; against the contempt of the world, ambition; against the love of God, love of oneself; against simplicity, deception and trickery; against truth, misleading information and lies; against pure economy and frugality, the gluttony of the stomach; against moderate sorrow, empty joyfulness; against discreet silence, excessive talking; against intact chastity, impurity and indulgence of the flesh; against purity of heart, spiritual fornication; against love of the heavenly homeland, the desire of this world – all these emerge against us in opposition.

For while these things strive to make a stand against the virtues, what else do they tell us, but that a cruel persecution rages against the pressed together battle lines of the virtues of those who are living devotedly? O how harsh, how severe is the assembly of pride, which threw the angels out from heaven, and eliminated man from paradise (Gen. 3), whose army and clashing of weapons are the vices, which we briefly touched upon by bringing them together. But let us see in what way the fortresses of heaven and of hell contend, in what way the weapons of Christ and those of the devil fight to the end.

Chapter 2

First, pride says to you:

Certainly, you are better than many others. Actually, you are better than all. You are better in word, in knowledge, in distinctions, and in riches, and all bodily and spiritual gifts are in your hands. Therefore look down on all. Show yourself to be above all.

Humility from the opposite side responds:

Remember that you are earth (Gen. 3), that you are rottenness and a worm (Job 25), that even if you *are* something, unless your humility matches your greatness, you totally lose what you actually are. (Eccl. 3) Are you higher than the first angel? (Ez. 28) Are you more splendid on the earth than Lucifer was in heaven? (Is. 14) But if he fell from such a greatness through his pride, how can you ascend from the depths to the heavenly height by priding yourself? As long as you live here, you are held within that state of which it is said through Wisdom: “*a perishable body weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling burdens the thoughtful mind*” (Wis. 9: 15). How much our clay on earth must be wrapped in the thickest darkness of pride! (Is. 64) For even the star in heaven, which was rising in the morning, was able to lose the spheres of its light (Is. 14).

Therefore, listen instead to the light of truth saying, “*He who follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (Jn. 8: 12) And in what aspect he was to be followed, this is something he has already admonished us about, saying, “*Learn from me, for I am gentle, and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” (Mt. 11: 29) Listen, O tumor of pride, hear the master of humility still speaking: “*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself, will be exalted.*” (Lk. 14: 11); and again, “*This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*” (Is. 66: 2) Hear too what the Apostle says about that light of truth, while he invites you to pursue it. For he says, “*since He was in the form of God, He did not judge it robbery for himself to be equal to God – but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men, and in form he was discovered as a man. He humbled himself all the way to death, death on a cross.*” (Ph. 2: 6) If therefore the divine majesty suppresses itself with such humility, the human weakness in us should not pride itself.

Chapter 3

Empty glory says:

Do the good that you have the ability for. Show everyone the good that you do, so that you may be called good by all, so that you may be proclaimed to be holy and venerable by all, so that you may be recognised as God's chosen one, so that no one will look down on you and no one will disdain you, but all will pay you due honor.

Fear of the Lord responds:

If you do some good, do it not for transitory honors, but for eternal honors. Hide what you do as far as you can. But if you can't totally hide it, let the intention of hiding it be in your soul, and then no iniquity will be imputed to you from showing off. It isn't your fault if something which you always want to remain in secret is sometimes openly manifested. Then, at last, it will be seen that you have fulfilled the two seemingly contrary sayings of the Redeemer, in which it is said, "*When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; but let your alms be in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you*" (Mt. 6: 3) and, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" (Mt. 5: 16)

By all means beware, lest that saying apply to you in which it is said of hypocrites, "*they do all their deeds to be seen by men.*" (Mt. 23: 5) "*Truly I say to you, they have received their reward*" (Mt. 6: 5) which is praises from men alone, which is what they actually loved. Pay close attention to yourself, therefore, in all the things you do, lest, stirred by the lifting up of vainglory, you hear along with those who were boasting about the signs of miracles: "*I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven.*" (Lk. 10: 18) Have fear instead, for it is written: "*The fear of the Lord is glory and exaltation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life. With him who fears the Lord it will go well at the end; on the day of his death he will be blessed.*" (Sir. 1: 9) And further: "*To fear the Lord is the root of wisdom, and her branches are long life.*" (Sir. 1: 18)

Chapter 4

Pretense suggests:

Since in secret you do nothing good, and if you were recognized for what you are you would be detested, then fashion yourself outwardly into what you do not eagerly strive for inwardly.

Religion from the opposite side responds:

By any means do not do that, but rather bustle about to really become the good man which you are currently not. For to make yourself appear honest to men, when you are not, what else is that but condemnation? By all means be mindful of what is said: “*Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inwardly are filled with booty and filth. Blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and dish, that what is outside may become clean.*” (Mt. 23) And remember that the point is pressed further: “*Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear splendid to men, but inwardly are filled with the bones of the dead, and with every filthiness. Thus too, you appear to men as just, but inwardly you are filled with hypocrisy and iniquity.*” (Mt. 23) We can read something else that is written concerning such people: “*They come to you in sheep’s clothes, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*” (Mt. 7)

Chapter 5

Exaltation objects:

What kind of person are you, that you would be submissive to superiors, and show service to inferiors? To command is more fitting for you than for them. For they can’t match up to you in natural ability, in diligence, or in strength. Be submissive therefore to the command of God, and let yourself have no further concern about another person.

Blessed lowering responds:

If one is to rightly submit to the authority of God, it is necessary to be placed under human governance. In fact, Christ the Lord said, *“He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me; but he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me.”* (Lk. 10)

“Yes”, you will say, “it is necessary that this be done, but as long as he who commands is a fitting instrument of God’s commands. But since he is not, therefore one does not owe him obedience.” But the Apostle says to the contrary: *“There is no ruling power except from God; moreover, those which exist have been appointed by God. And so he who resists ruling power resists the appointment of God.”* (Rom. 13) Wherefore since this appointment is established by divine law, it should not be obscured by human contrivances. Therefore, the character which those who command ought to have, is not a case for the subjects to plead. For the same Apostle says right after: *“but those who resist, obtain condemnation for themselves.”* (Rom. 13)

And to the first pastors of the Church the Lord Himself says, *“You know that the kings of the nations domineer over them, and those who exercise ruling power among them are called benefactors: let it not be so among you, but he who among you is greater, shall be the servant of all, just as the Son of man has not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Lk. 22) Finally, because He did not raise up all to become such pastors, He included the persons of all subjects in His disciples, and forewarned them, saying, *“the Scribes and Pharisees sit upon the seat of Moses. Whatever they say to you, keep it and do it. But what they do, do not do yourselves. For they impose heavy burdens on the shoulders of men, impossible to carry, but they will not bend their fingers to move them.”* (Mt. 23)

Chapter 6

Likewise, envy says:

In what respect are you less than this person here, or that one there? Therefore, why aren’t you equal or superior to them? How great are the things you can do,

which they cannot do? Therefore they should not be superior to you, or even equal to you.

But brotherly love responds:

If, O man, you judge that you excel the rest in virtues, you will keep yourself more safely in the lowest place than in the highest. For a more terrible collapse always happens from a height. But if, as you claim, certain people are superior to you, and others are equal, how does it hurt you? How does it harm you? To sum up, beware, lest while you begrudge others the place of eminence, you imitate him of whom it is written: *“By the envy of the devil death entered into the world.”* (Wis. 2) Moreover, the ones who imitate him are on his side.

Chapter 7

Hatred says:

Far be it for you to love that man, who is your opponent in all things, who degrades you, who insults you, who provokes you with wrongs, who reproaches you with your sins, who always rushes to get ahead of you in words, works, and even honors. For he would definitely not be putting himself before you in this way, unless he were envious of you.

But sincere charity responds:

Just because these things which you speak of are something to be hatred in a man, does that mean that the image of God is not to be loved in a man? On the contrary, Christ, having been placed on the cross, loved His own enemies and prayed for them. And before the torment of the cross He admonished His disciples, saying, *“Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you and accuse you falsely, that you may be sons of your Father, who is in heaven.”* (Lk. 3, Mt. 5) This had also been said before, through Solomon, for it is written: *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him to drink. For doing this, you will heap up coals of fire upon his head, but the Lord will pay*

you back with good things.” (Prov. 25) To this sentence, the Apostle, speaking from the spirit of Christ whose way of thinking he had, added, *“Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.”* (1 Cor. 1) On the other hand, about those who are known to have hated their brothers, it is said through John: *“He who hates his own brother is a murderer.”* (1 Jn. 3) *“And you know that every murderer does not have eternal life dwelling in him.”* And again, *“He who hates his brother is in darkness, and he walks in darkness, and he doesn’t know where he goes, for the darkness has blinded his eyes.”* (1 Jn. 2) But you ask: *“Isn’t it enough for me that I love those who love me?”* The Lord, to the contrary, says: *“If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do this?”* (Mt. 5) What, O man, can you still object to this? Certainly, *“he who hates his brother remains in death, and he who loves remains in God, and God in him.”* (1 Jn. 4) Therefore, vomit forth all bitterness of gall, and in whatever way you can, put on the sweetness of charity. For nothing is sweeter, nothing in life is more blessed than charity, as it is written: *“Hatred will stir up strife, but friendship will cover all those who are not striving with each other.”* (Prov. 10) Indeed, it will actually strive to conform us to God. For that reason John the Evangelist, confirming this, says: *“God is charity.”* (1 Jn. 4) And the extraordinary preacher Paul says: *“The charity of God has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”* (Rom. 5) And so, not without good reason, charity is said to cover the bad deeds of criminals, as it is written, *“Charity covers all crimes.”* (1 Pt. 4)

Chapter 8

Slander says:

Who can keep back, who can cover with silence, all the depraved things this or that person does, unless perhaps he goes along with them?

But just correction responds:

The evils of your neighbour are not to be passed over in silence, nor consented to, but with fraternal charity your neighbor is to be refuted to his face, and not

disparaged in secret. But if someone objects that he doesn't want to reprove his brother before his eyes, because, becoming irritated, he won't improve but rather he'll find cause for offence from the rebuke - if someone says this, the divine Scripture runs to meet him, and turning the exchange around, it instead denounces detraction as an offense, saying: "*Sitting in judgement against your brother you were disparaging him, and you were placing a stumbling block against the son of your mother.*" (Ps. 49) For it offends someone more when he understands that he's being disparaged, than when he perceives that he's being rebuked. And since at times, the lapses of those who fail should be covered by silence, in order that they may be corrected at a more suitable time, it adds, "*These things you did, and I was silent.*" (Ibid.) Finally, lest the slanderers applaud themselves for this kind of discreet silence when, always preferring to detract secretly, they never come forward to openly correct, it adds further, "*You have supposed evil, that I will be similar to you.*" (Ibid.), as if it were saying, "It is evil to think that I appear similar to a detractor; rather, keeping silent for a time, I wait for a suitable opportunity for correction." And so it immediately adds the following: "*I will convict you, and place your sins against your face,*" (Ibid.) as if it were saying, "Not in secret, as is your custom, but in the open, as is my concern, awaiting a suitable time for correcting, I will convict the sinner and place his crimes against his face." But you say, "I don't hate him; I love him whom I censure by discriminating in this way in secret." But he responds, "No, rather you hate this man and do not love him, and so you slander and don't rebuke." Moreover, the divine sayings bear witness in many places how much slander of our neighbour should be abhorred. So it is said: "*The one who detracts against his neighbour secretly, this one I will overtake.*" (Ps. 100), and again, "*He who slanders a brother, slanders also the law.*" (Jm. 4), as well as the saying of the Apostle Paul: "*But if you bite and devour each other, watch that you are not consumed by each other.*" (Gal. 5)

Chapter 9

Anger says:

The things which are done against you are so bad that they absolutely cannot be endured calmly; rather, to tolerate these things patiently is a sin. And if you do not

oppose them with great harshness, they will be heaped up against you one after another, without measure.

Patience responds:

If the passion of the Redeemer be brought back to memory, nothing would be so hard that it could not be tolerated with a calm soul. For Christ, as Peter says, suffered for us leaving us an example, that we might follow in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2). The Lord Himself also said to us: *“If they called the father of the family Beelzebub, how much more those of His household?”* (Matt. 10) And in another place: *“If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”* (Jn. 15) But how much are the things we suffer, in comparison to His sufferings? For He endured reproaches, mockeries, insults, slaps, spittings, whips, a crown of thorns, and the cross (Jn. 18, 19); and we pitiful men (I say it to our shame), we are wearied by one expression, cast down by one word. Nor do we carefully weigh what is said: *“If we have died with Him we will also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”* (2 Tim. 2) For this reason, the spikes of anger are to be dulled, and the condemnation that it deserves is to be feared. And so we read what is written, that *“everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement, whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and he who says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”* (Matt. 5) Nevertheless, the remedy is pointed to in the same place, when it is added, *“If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* (Ibid.) It’s as if it were being openly said, “Do not even pour forth silent prayer in the heart, unless you first lead your offended neighbour to the mildness of tenderness, by making satisfaction.” For our gift is our prayer, and the altar is in fact our heart. But he who has tried to do this (as often as anger has been aroused between the two without just cause), will by no means incur the aforementioned condemnation. But there are many who do not forgive the faults of someone who is seeking pardon. Against these, that sentence of the Lord comes, by which it is said, *“If each one of you has not forgiven his brother from his heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your sins.”* (Matt. 18) “There are more things,” you say, “which he has committed against me.

He has offended me more often, and because he, a junior, is provoking me with very many unjust things, and for no reason, it is not fitting for me to forgive him so many faults.” To these things, not I, but the Lord responds. For when Peter was saying to Him, *“How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”* And the Lord said to him: *“I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy seven times.”* (Matt. 18) How many there are, however, who forgive their own injuries slowly, yet more quickly pass over those of God? And it sometimes happens, that on pretense of vindicating the injuries of the Lord, those who are angry rather avenge their own. Finally, what is to be said of those who are so blinded by the fervor of wrath, that they go so far as to burst forth in words of cursing? What indeed is to be said, unless what the Apostle says: *“Neither cursers nor those who seize another’s possessions will possess the kingdom of God.”* (1 Cor. 6) The Apostle James also denounces this with extreme language: *“No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless God and the Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image and likeness of God. From the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. It is not right, my brothers, for these things to happen so. Does a fountain from the same cleft pour out what is sweet and bitter?”* (Jm. 3) For this reason it is also said elsewhere, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”* (Prov. 18)

Chapter 10

Harshness says:

Should you offer gentle words to those stupid men who are as senseless as brute animals? Shouldn’t you rather throw the most harsh words in their face while they are committing their crimes, so that they may learn to revere your dignity?

But meekness responds:

Rather than follow this conviction of yours, one should follow the injunction of the apostle Paul, who admonished his beloved disciple about this when he said: *“Do not rebuke a senior, but exhort him as a father, exhort your juniors as brothers, old women as mothers, young women as sisters in all charity.”* (1 Tim.

5) And again: “*Reprove, urge, rebuke, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*” (2 Tim. 4) The evil of harshness, on the other hand, is clearly destructive, it harms those placed under you, and it doesn’t profit them at all. Rather, it very regularly happens that when they feel provoked they even scorn a rebuke that proceeds from charity, and they throw spears of contempt against wholesome words. Wisdom cautions against this, saying: “*He who rebukes a scorner does injury to himself.*” (Prov. 9) On the other hand, regarding the man who profits someone by scolding him, it says: “*Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.*” (Ibid.) For that reason it is written: “*My son, adorn your soul by your meekness.*” (Eccl. 10). And the Apostle says: “*If a man has been overtaken in some sin, you who are spiritual, instruct him in a spirit of tenderness.*” (Gal. 6) And the same Apostle, teaching bishops, says: “*Let them show themselves as meek towards all.*” (2 Tim. 2)

Chapter 11

Being puffed up says:

You have as your witness God in heaven; let it be of no concern to you what men on earth suspect about you.

But humble lowering responds:

One should not give an occasion for slandering, nor cause suspicion that could lead to whispering. But if such suspicions are present, let your deeds be manifested to your slanderers, that they may be corrected. But if such things are absent, your deeds should be concealed with humble insistence. For the Apostle admonishes us to give no occasion to an adversary to revile us. (1 Tim. 5) He has also detested this very thing in those who, while bearing the name of Christian, used to recline to eat in an idol temple, and even though they were eating the sacrificed things as harmless food, since they considered the idol to be nothing, nevertheless through this deed they were drawing the weak consciences of the brethren toward the impious ceremonies of idols. (1 Cor. 8) Therefore he says: “*Be without offense to the Jews and Gentiles, and to the Church of God.*” (1 Cor. 10)

Chapter 12

Sadness says:

How can you rejoice, when you undergo such evils from your neighbour? Ponder repeatedly, with what sadness of heart all those people should be looked at, who are turned against you with such gall of bitterness.

But spiritual joy responds:

I have learned that sadness is a twin; indeed, I have experienced two sadnesses of heart – one which works salvation (2 Cor. 7), and the other which devises destruction; one which draws to penitence, the other which conducts one to despair. You seem to discern one of them, but it's the one which only brings about death. One should not be saddened in the things which you propose; on the contrary, you should rather rejoice in the things which you still do not understand. And so the Lord, the unfailing giver of joy, has said: "*When men persecute you, and say all evil against you, falsely, on my account, rejoice on that day and leap for joy; for behold, your reward is great in heaven.*" (Matt. 5) Remember that the Apostles, who personified the peaks of our religion, were going from the presence of the council rejoicing because they were considered worthy to suffer insult for the name of Jesus (Acts 5). Therefore there should be no room in afflictions for grief, since such an overflowing abundance of joy succeeds them.

Chapter 13

Dullness or laziness says:

Are you always pursuing continual reading and daily study of the Scriptures? You'll get cataracts or inflammation of the eyes. If you keep pouring out tears, you'll lose the very light of your eyes. If you stay up late to pay off the day's task of psalms, you'll go mad. If you exhaust yourself with daily labour, when will you rise for spiritual work?

But diligence and unwearied virtue responds:

Why, O man, do you propose for yourself such a long stretch of time to accomplish good things? Do you really know if you will be living tomorrow? Or rather, do you know if you will pass even one hour in this life? (Jam. 4) Or has it perhaps slipped from your mind that the Saviour says in the gospel: “*Keep watch, because you do not know either the day or the hour*”? (Matt. 25) Therefore, shake off the slothfulness of dullness, and always remember that it is not the lukewarm, nor the soft, nor the lazy, but the violent, and those using force, as the Saviour says, who will storm and pillage the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 11)

Chapter 14

Restless wandering says:

If you believe that God is everywhere, why do you stay in one single place, a place where such bad things are done? Why don't you instead move to other places?

But stability responds:

If it is as you say, and you admit that God is everywhere, then there is no reason to desert this place, seeing that even here, God is present. “But,” you will say, “I see a better place, I'm going to find a better place.” But I answer, *will* you find a better place, or perhaps even a place like that which the devil and his angel and man lost? Be mindful that the first angel fell from heaven (for so it is written: “*I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven*” (Luke 10)), and the first man, having been expelled from paradise, arrived at the hardship of this life (Gen. 3). Notice that Lot, a man tested by the deeds of evil men, was holy in the midst of Sodomites (Gen. 19), but on the mountain, sluggish in his security, and having been made drunk, he sinned with his daughters. This weariness that leads to wandering has yet another manifestation when it draws those who are still persevering in their exercise to abandon spiritual things, or it entangles them in earthly business, or it takes care to occupy them with the most worthless things – acting against the dictum of the Apostle who said, “*No one doing military service*

for God entangles himself with worldly affairs, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him.” (2 Tim. 2), and again, “Pray without ceasing, giving thanks in all things.” (1 Thess. 5)

Chapter 15

Despair says:

Think of what you have committed against God and against your own soul, how many times you have done so, how grave the sins, how numberless the offences – yet you still haven’t changed your life for the better, nor have you profitably corrected your manner of life to this day. For look, as you can see, you are always held bound by evil custom. You strive to rise, but you fall again, weighed down by the weight of sins. So what can be done for you when, concerning the past, certain damnation hangs over you, and concerning the present, no conversion is helping your situation, since you are not giving up the pleasures of temporal things and you’re kept back from pursuing the promises of the future age?

But the confidence of hope responds:

If we’re discussing capital crimes, look at David, who was guilty at the same time of adultery and murder. He is described as freed from the jaws of hell by the mercy of the Lord (1 Kg. 2). Look at the most shameless Manasses, the most impure and defiled of all sinners, who through penance returned from death to life. (2 Chr. 33) Look at a woman in the city who was a sinner, defiled with innumerable filthy sins, running anxiously to the font of piety and watering the feet of the Lord with tears, wiping them with her hair, and kissing them devotedly and richly anointing them with ointment. She merited to be totally washed clean. (Lk. 7) She finally heard, “*Your sins are forgiven you,*” and “*your faith has saved you, go in peace.*” (Ibid.) Look at Peter, bound by the chains of his triple denial, who loosened the knots of his fall through the most bitter tears (Lk. 22). Look at the thief, condemned to death due to sedition and shedding fraternal blood; in one moment of time, and by one utterance of a confession, he went from the cross over to paradise. In short, it was said to him: “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*”

(Lk. 23) Truly, this is a most beautiful example of aspiring for conversion. For this thief is so quickly freed on the way, so that grace may show itself to be more abundant than his prayer. Look at Saul, persecuting the Church, killing many for the name of Christ, and practically wet with the blood of the holy martyrs, and finally converted by the voice of the Lord; he was made an apostle and named a vessel of election. (Acts 9) Therefore, where so many and such great examples precede us, do not let evil conversations give room for desperation, since it has also already been written: *“When a sinner turns from his wickedness and does judgement and justice, he himself shall live in them.”* (Ez. 33) And in another place: *“Do I will the death of the wicked, says the Lord, as much as that he turn from his evil way, and live?”* (Ez. 18) But concerning one’s manner of life being not at all changed for the better, what else may I answer but this: what someone has not done yesterday, he may do today. Nor let him put off correction from day to day, while he doesn’t know if he has even one day of correction left, and let him ever say in the morning and evening, for the gifts he has received from above, while at the same time resisting base habits: *“Behold, now I have begun, this is the exchange of the right hand of the Most High.”* (Ps. 16)

Chapter 16

Desire for possessions says:

It is certainly no fault on your part that you desire to possess certain things, because it’s not that you desire to multiply possessions; it’s that you fear to be in need. And what someone else wrongly holds on to, you yourself actually value in a more worthy way.

But contempt of the world responds:

Those things are not procured without danger or stumbling, even among men of the world. For the more a man begins to have, the more he desires to have. And it actually happens that in his desires he still can’t find any way of having, while at the same time he rushes to be a slave to the innumerable cares of this age. For as Scripture says: *“The one who desires silver will not be filled with silver.”* (Eccl. 5)

Of course, this desire of having, always drinking and always thirsty, never fulfilling one's desire, how much this is to be despised, the Apostle Paul shows, saying, "*And avarice, which is the service of idols.*" (Col. 3) And the same Apostle explains how harmful to the soul and opposed to salvation this is, when he says, "*Those who want to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and many useless and harmful desires, which submerge men into death and destruction.*" (1 Tim. 6) The wise man himself says how the covetous man is to be despised, when he says, "*Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man.*" (Eccl. 10) Likewise, St. James reveals how harmful the accumulation and heaping up of riches is, saying, "*Come now, you rich, weep, wailing in your miseries which will come upon you. Your riches are rotten, and your clothing is consumed by moths. Your gold and your silver take on rust, and their rust will be as a testimony to you, and it shall eat your flesh like fire.*" (Jam. 5) But neither did our Redeemer want to pass over the evil of this despicable desire for possessions, and He explains how fatal it is when He says, "*How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven!*" (Mark 10) And in another place: "*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 19) Therefore, if the desire of worldly things is to such an extent explained as dangerous for all, how much more fatal is it for those who are of the portion of the Lord, who have renounced the world, who in habit and way of life have already ceased to be secular? To this point the words of the Redeemer especially aim, namely that the pernicious sickness of avarice may be destroyed, when He says: "*Do not be solicitous for your lives, what you may eat, nor for your body, what you would wear. For the nations of the world seek all these things.*" (Lk. 12) And in another place He adds: "*But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*" (Matt. 6) Oh how blessed, how secure, how worthy of being embraced is this word. For no one in this life is as secure as he who desires nothing beyond Christ, and truly possesses Him. For he is shown to have all the things which are considered necessary for a man, under this one possession, as Paul the most rich poor man said: "*Having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*" (2 Cor. 6) All things, he says, which doesn't mean superfluous things, but things which are necessary to human life. And he confirms and explains this in another place, when he says: "*Having food and clothing, with these let us be content.*" (1 Tim. 6) But perhaps you will say,

“The reason more things should be possessed by those who are called to the portion of the Lord, is so that they may bequeath them to the poor of Christ in a better way than regular people do.” And I agree, but this is for prelates, not for subjects who have been especially taught by the example of the wife of Lot, who, while departing from Sodom looked back, and having been turned into a pillar of salt, breathed out her spirit. (Gen. 19) And so Christ also announces that such a thing is to be guarded against, saying, “*No one, putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*” (Lk. 9) To this point, Peter says: “*It was better for them not to know the way of justice, than after knowledge, to turn backwards from that which has been handed down to them by the holy commandment.*” (2 Pet. 2) For the true saying applies to them: “*The dog having returned to his vomit, and the washed pig to the mire.*” (Prov. 26) This sickness of avarice is restrained best when a man continually meditates upon the day of death, when a man considers how after a little while he will be in the tomb. This certainly remained fixed in the memory of that man who said, “*Man is rotteness, and the son of man a worm.*” (Job 25) These things did not recede from the heart of him who taught, “*In all your speech remember your last end, and you will not sin forever.*” (Eccl. 7) What do I ask for at that time? What can stored up riches do for me at that time? (Ibid. 5) Hear what holy Job says of these things: “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there.*” (Job 1) Hear what the Apostle also says, “*We brought nothing into this world, but neither can we take anything out.*” (1 Tim. 6)

Chapter 17

Love of self says:

If you give what you possess to the needy, how will you be able to properly nourish yourself and those who are subject to you?

But love of God responds:

If you keep to the way of the Apostle in this matter, you will be able to accomplish both. For with this way in mind, he says to the Corinthians: “*If the will is prompt,*

from that which it has it is accepted, not according to what it does not have. For it is not so that others may have relief and you have tribulation, but out of equality. In the present time, let your abundance supply their need, that there may be equality, (2 Cor. 8) as it is written: He who has much has not had too much, and he who has a little has not had too little.” (Ex. 16) From this also, the just Tobias admonishes his beloved offspring, saying: “If you have little, do not fear to give alms according to your means.” (Tob. 4) From this also, the incarnate Truth teaches: “But give what is left as alms, and behold, all things are clean for you.” (Lk. 2) Hear also what is written: “Judgement will be without mercy to him who has not shown mercy.” (Jam. 2) The prophet warns against this, saying, “Break your bread for the hungry and bring the poor without shelter into your own home. If you see a naked man, cover him, and do not look away from the household members of your own seed.” (Is. 58) Remember what happened to the rich man dressed in purple, who was condemned not because he took what belonged to another, but because he did not give his own things to a poor needy man; and when he was placed in hell, he got to the point of asking for the least things, this man who had refused to give little things here. (Lk. 16) Notice also what the judge of heaven will say to those placed at his left: “Go, you cursed, into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you did not give me to eat, etc.” (Matt. 25). In that place, these things are enumerated in a terrible way.

Chapter 18

*Theft and fraud, however diverse be their degree of speech,
nevertheless say one thing:*

For theft says:

If you do not take what is another's, you will not be able to be either rich or even have enough, just out of your own possessions.

And fraud says:

If you record all that has been entrusted to you, without diminishing anything, and decide that not even a bit should be left aside for you, how will you ever think of your own profits, or how will you please your friends and those of your own household?

But simplicity responds to both:

It is better to be poor and in need, and to please noone with a gift, than to injure or defraud someone by theft. For he who unjustly takes what belongs to others, in whatever way, closes the entrance of the kingdom of heaven to himself. And so Paul, the eminent preacher, reproved certain people, saying, “*But you injure and defraud; and you even do it to brethren. Or do you not know that the wicked will not possess the kingdom of God?*” (1 Cor. 6) And so, among the rest, he adds: “*Neither thieves, nor avaricious, nor drunkards, nor blasphemers, nor snatchers shall possess the kingdom of God.*” (Ibid.) Therefore, theft and fraud exclude a man from the kingdom of God, and for that reason they are to be absolutely avoided.

Chapter 19

Misleading information and lying also say one thing. For misleading information is brought about by cleverness, but a lie is brought about by a simple word.

Therefore, misleading information says:

To bring forth one example out of many, when in not giving you seek to fool somebody, hinder the request by saying, “Here you go, this is what I’m able to give you,” at the same time concealing in your heart what you really have, either so that you may keep it for yourself, or, if you want, give it to another.

Lying says:

What you ask for, I don’t have at all (though he in fact has it). This is how lying tricks the one who is requesting something: not with skillful cleverness, as misleading information does, but with a simple word of denial.

But truth responds to both:

It is not necessary to deceive anyone, neither with skillful cleverness, nor with a simple word, because no matter what method of skill someone uses to lie, he sins if he does so. For it is written: *“The mouth which lies slays the soul.”* (Wis. 1) Plus, it is said: *“And for all liars, their lot will be in the lake of burning fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”* (Rev. 21)

Chapter 20

Gluttony of the stomach says:

God made all things clean to eat, and he who refuses to be satisfied with food – isn't he rejecting a gift which has been granted?

But pure frugality and simple economy responds:

One of these things you say is true. For, lest man perish from hunger, God created all things clean. But lest he exceed the measure of eating, He commanded abstinence. (Gen. 1) For among its other evils, Sodom perished by its satiety, as the Lord says, who speaks about Jerusalem through the prophet, saying, *“This is the iniquity of Sodom your sister; pride in her satiety of bread.”* (Ez. 16) For this reason, just as a sick man goes to a doctor, so too should someone draw near to eat at banquets, not desiring pleasure in them, but satisfying necessity. That is why the Truth warns us in the Gospel: *“Watch yourselves, that your hearts not be weighed down in dissipation and drunkenness.”* (Lk. 21) On the other hand, regarding the insatiable appetite of some people, the Apostle says: *“For many walk, about whom I was often talking to you but now I say it with tears, as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is the stomach, and whose glory is in things to be ashamed of, who have their taste for earthly things.”* (Phil. 3) And in another place he says: *“Food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both the one and the other.”* (1 Cor. 6) To sum up, you will fully evade this cause of ruin and gluttony of the stomach, when, while taking from feasts, you not only maintain frugality, that is, getting your refreshment while

remaining a little hungry, but if you also reject more dainty and pleasant banquets except out corporal necessity and the reception of guests.

Chapter 21

Silly jolly says:

Why do you hide the joy of your soul within? Go out in public with glee. Say something outside that will make you or your neighbour laugh. Make them joyful with your jolly.

But wise joy and moderate sorrow responds:

Where does such jolly come to you from? You haven't conquered the devil, have you? You haven't arrived from exile to the homeland, have you? You haven't received some security concerning your election, have you? Or perhaps has the Lord's saying passed out of your memory: "*The world will rejoice and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.*" (Jn. 16) Or perchance has it fallen out of your mind what He says in another place: "*Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.*" (Lk. 6) And what is said through holy Solomon: "*Laughter is mixed with sorrow, and the limits of joy go into mourning.*" (Prov. 14) And on the other hand what is taught through the Gospel: "*Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" (Matt. 5) And again what is said through Solomon: "*For the just and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; and a man does not know if he is worthy of love or hate, but all things are kept for the future, since they are uncertain.*" (Eccl. 9) Therefore, suppress foolish joyousness, because you have not yet escaped penal hardship. Don't people consider that man insane who endeavors to rejoice when he is enclosed in the darkness of prison?

Chapter 22

Excessive talking says:

The man who speaks many things will not be held guilty of sin, if what he says is good; rather, there are people who only say a few things, but those few things are bad.

Discreet silence responds to him:

What you say is true. But while it may seem that many good things are being expressed, it often happens that speech which began with good things is diverted into something not so good. Holy Scripture says this very thing: “*For from much speaking you will not escape sin; but sparing in your lips, you will be intelligent.*” (Prov. 10) And even if among all these words, somehow, offences are avoided, is it possible to avoid useless and idle words, of which an account will certainly be given in the future? (Matt. 12) Therefore, one must keep to measure in speaking, and even useful words should sometimes be spared, as we read that the holy Psalmist has done. For he says: “*I was mute and humbled, and I was silent from good things.*” (Ps. 38)

Chapter 23

Dissoluteness says:

Why don't you extend yourself a little in pleasure, since you don't know what will come after your life? You shouldn't lose the time you have to fulfill your desires, because you don't know how quickly it will pass away. For if God had not wanted man to be joined in the pleasure of the flesh, He would certainly not have made male and female at the very beginning of the human race.

But unimpaired chastity responds:

I don't want you to ignore what you will receive after this life, for a reward or a punishment await you. For if you have lived devotedly and chastely, you will rejoice in another life without limit. But if you have lived this life impiously and dissolutely, you will be tortured with eternal fires in another. In other words, you should live more chastely and purely the more your time passes away, the speed of

which you say that you do not know. But as to your statement that God created male and female from the very beginning of the human race for this purpose (Gen. 1), that they ought to join themselves in mutual embraces, you speak altogether truly – as far as some persons are concerned. But after the human race has been propagated so far and wide, permission to marry is left for some, that is, for those who have certainly not professed virginity and the chastity of widowhood. But for some it is forbidden, that is, to those who have decided to be virgins or celibate. But fornication is granted to no one without punishment. Do you fail to notice, or do you think that the Apostle's words to the impure should be shrugged off: "*Flee fornication; for every sin that a man commits is outside his body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body.*" (1 Cor. 6) But if you think this is a matter of little weight, then hear from where you would afterwards mourn over it and groan: "*Neither fornicators*", says the same Apostle, "*nor adulterers, nor the soft, nor homosexuals, will possess the kingdom of heaven.*" (Ibid.) O how momentary is delight of the flesh, how fleeting is the hour of lying together, a time in which eternal life is lost. I ask you, what profit does something bring to the body, or what benefit does something bestow which so quickly leads the soul to the pit of hell?

Chapter 24

Spiritual fornication says:

Is it really something condemnable to consent to lust in the heart, but not cross over to the deed of the desired lust? Certainly not, because as the Apostle writes, it is the sin which is carried out that generates death. (Jam. 1)

But cleanness of heart responds:

He who does not keep purity of heart and chastity of mind, utterly sins. For that reason also, the author of all cleanness says in the Gospel: "*He who looks at a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (Matt. 5) Therefore it is also said through blessed Job: "*I have made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not understand concerning a virgin.*" (Job 31) And how

has God discerned these matters from above, and what is the inheritance of the one who appoints from the heights? For if consenting to perverse thoughts were not displeasing to God our maker, it would not be said through Isaiah: “*Remove the wickedness from your souls from before my eyes.*” (Is. 1) and in the Gospel it would not be said against the Pharisees: “*Why do you think evil in your hearts?*” (Matt. 9) But neither would the apostle Paul write to the Romans: “*And among themselves their thoughts in turn accusing, or even defending, on the day in which God will judge the hidden things of men, according to my Gospel through Jesus Christ.*” (Rom. 2)

Chapter 25

Love of the world says:

What is more beautiful, what is more glorious, what is more charming, and what can be more delightful than what we daily perceive in the present life? O how wonderful is the vault of heaven in the sweet air and in the light of the sun, in the waxing of the moon and its waning, in the variety and course of the stars. How attractive is the earth in the flowers of the woods, in the sweetness of fruits, in the pleasantness of meadows and of rivers, in the luxuriant stalks of the fields, in the leaves of the vines and the branches full of clusters, in the shadows of forests and fresh dates, in the running of horses and of dogs, in the leaping of deer and of goats, in the flying of hawks, of peacocks, of doves, in the wings and necks of pigeons, in the painted walls and panelled ceilings of houses, in the tambourines and songs of all musical instruments, and in the charming appearances of women, and their eyebrows and hair, eyes and cheeks, neck, lips, and hands, and other ornaments externally applied, yes, necklaces adorned with gold and gems, and other such things. Our senses cannot even go over them all right now.

But love of the heavenly fatherland responds:

If those things which are under heaven please you so much, why don't those which are in heaven attract you more? If a prison is reckoned by you as worth so much, how much more is a fatherland, a city? If the things which pilgrims concern

themselves with are so great, then what about the things which the sons possess? If mortal and miserable men are so enriched in this life, how will the immortal and blessed be repayed in another life? For this reason, love of the present age, in which no one is born in such a way that he will not die, is something that is meant to quickly depart, so that love of the future age may take its place, in which all are made alive in such a way that they will not die – where no adversity troubles us, no necessity constrains us, no trouble disturbs us, but eternal joy reigns. But you will ask what exists there, where so great and such a kind of happiness endures. No one can say anything else, but that whatever is good, it is there; and whatever is evil is not there. “What,” you say, “*is that good thing?*” Why do you ask me? It is explained by the Prophet and the Apostle: “*Eye*”, they say, “*has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it arisen into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him.*” (Is. 64, 1 Cor. 2) David, although he was crowded in with many riches of the world, was nevertheless eagerly panting after this happiness when he said, “*For what is there for me in heaven, and apart from you, what have I wanted upon the earth?*” (Ps. 72) For he was abounding with many royal things, with banquets and pleasures, and yet he was crying out: “*I will be satisfied when your glory has appeared to me,*” (Ps. 16), and again, “*My soul has thirsted for the strong living God. When shall I come and stand before the face of God?*” (Ps. 41), and again: “*Woe to me because my sojourning has been prolonged.*” (Ps. 119) Along these lines Paul the Apostle also says: “*Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ is much better.*” (Phil. 1)

And so, we have traversed through all these confrontations between vices and virtues. Even though I may have missed some, it nevertheless seems to me that I have shown, however briefly, the strong camps of our enemy, with which he does not cease to fight against those who are devoutly living in Christ. Look, most dearly beloved brother: among my other occupations, I have repeated to myself orally and written down this discourse for you during the night hours, though with an uncultivated gracefulness. And since I understand that it is longer than a letter, I have preferred to call it a little book on the conflict of the vices and the virtues. And if you find in it something edifying, you will care to pass it on to be read by others.