Jean Gerson

ON PREPARATION FOR MASS, WITH ON POLLUTION BY DAY

De praeparatione ad Missam; De pollutione diurna

From the Latin of Dupin's edition of his works (Antwerp, 1706)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from two treatises in *Joannis Gersonii Doctoris Theologi et Cancellarii Parisiensis Opera omnia*, edited by Louis Ellies Du Pin, tome III (Antwerp, 1706): *De praeparatione ad Missam et pollutione nocturna*, cols. 323–334, entitled in one Saint-Victor manuscript *De dignitate celebrationis*; and its sequel *De pollutione diurna*, cols. 335–345, entitled in the same manuscript *De cognitione castitatis*. Gerson wrote the first, he says, after long doubting whether a priest troubled in sleep should keep from the altar: ten Considerations on what makes a celebrant worthy, on scruples and moral certainty, on obedience to a confessor's counsel, and on the trust in God's mercy that is the true preparation for Mass. The second answers questions put to him about the like troubles of those awake, from the physicians' account of the body to the Church's teaching on consent, closing with twelve propositions for confessors and the scrupulous.

The columns of Du Pin's edition are given in the text as (col. N).

On Preparation for Mass

Title and Preface

(col. 323) **JOANNIS GERSONII Doctor and Chancellor of Paris**

TRACTATUS DE PRAEPARATIONE AD MISSAM and nocturnal pollution.

Collated with MSS Vict. 277, 180, 774, and two Navarre manuscripts.

In MS Victorinus 774 this treatise is entitled: DE DIGNITATE CELEBRATIONIS.

I have often and long doubted — especially after receiving the priesthood — whether someone polluted by a nocturnal dream ought to abstain from celebrating Mass. I have likewise found many people, especially religious, and most recently one above the rest, not a little troubled by the scruple of this doubt: on one side devotion draws them to celebrate; on the other, fear of offense holds them back. At last, made more certain about this matter — from the reading of the sacred Doctors, from the counsel and example of experienced and virtuous persons, and finally from the attestation of reason and experimental knowledge — *(col. 324)* I was led to compose some brief Considerations, not wholly useless, on this matter of celebration, submitting them to the judgment of those who know more wisely and sincerely.

Of these Considerations some will be accessory, some directly responsive. I ask pardon if speech must sometimes be less pure: the disease is such that it can scarcely be uncovered otherwise, and scarcely healed by more elegant remedies.

Consideration I

No one has evident certainty, apart from a special revelation of God, that he is sufficiently disposed and worthy to celebrate the Mysteries of the Mass.

This is clear: otherwise someone could evidently know that he is in justifying grace; that he has sufficiently done whatever is required for God to have infused this grace in him; that moreover he places no obstacle from any side to the reception of such grace; and finally that he is duly constituted a priest, in no way hindered as to power — and many like things, which are purely contingent and cannot be known infallibly without a special revelation of God.

Besides, who does not know that it can happen that a man, by preceding demerits, be given over to a reprobate sense, so that he does not see his sins, and thus is conscious of nothing for himself — and yet is not thereby justified, as the Apostle testifies with fear (1 Cor 4:4)? Perhaps such a one is like proud Haman, who came to Esther’s banquet, counting as a special honor what was to be his hanging. Who knows whether he will hear: Friend, how did you enter here without a wedding garment? (Matt 22:12)? Or perhaps he is numbered among those of whom the Prophet spoke not so much as imprecation as prediction (Ps 68[69]:23ff.): Let their table become a snare before them… Let their eyes be darkened that they see not… You see how fearful a sentence is indicated, if we take the mystical sense, against certain who approach the sacred table of the Eucharist — especially when it is said, Let their eyes be darkened that they see not. And in like manner the Apostle thunders and threatens: He who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself (1 Cor 11:29); and again, For this reason many among you are weak and infirm… This weakness and this sleep, I think, are to be referred more to the soul than to the body. It is plain that all these things take away from anyone the certainty of evidence concerning his own worthiness to celebrate.

Consideration II

In order to celebrate worthily, and without rash presumption or liability to a new sin, such certainty of evidence concerning the celebrant's dignity is not required.

This is clear: otherwise no one, however just and pure, ought to celebrate — nor could he do so without peril — unless a special revelation were made to him. Therefore that certainty suffices which we are accustomed to seek and take in moral matters. This certainty may be called moral or civil certainty, as the Philosopher wisely said in Ethics III: It is the mark of an educated person to seek as much certainty in each kind of thing as the nature of the subject admits.

For this moral certainty it is ordinarily enough that a person approaching Mass has examined his conscience as he would for gaining a great good or avoiding a serious harm, and that after this examination he is not conscious of mortal sin, *(col. 325)* or of a purpose of sinning mortally; and further that he does not know himself to have any other lawful impediment by excommunication or irregularity.

I therefore agree here with Durandus on IV Sentences, dist. 9, q. 4: that even if such a person were unknowingly in mortal sin and did not make an express confession of it, he would obtain one of two things. Either such a sin would be remitted to him by the virtue of the Sacrament, because he seems to do what in him lies toward loving it — for God does not require beyond one's power; or there would be granted him divinely an illumination and recognition of his sin, so that by penance he might wash it away — as it is very well attested to happen to many who, at the beginning of their priesthood, while they continue celebrating, return to the recollection of many and most hidden sins. Those who newly prepare themselves with their whole heart for the fruit of a better life find a similar grace. Yet such sins coming into recollection by the irradiation of a higher light into the deep abyss of the soul do not for that reason bind them to confess them as if they could not already have been deleted in the manner aforesaid; rather this is done in obedience to the precept of confessing once each of our sins when we distinctly know them.

Consideration III

Not every scruple or doubt about mortal sin, nor every lack of devotion or disorder or inattention, of necessity impedes the dignity of the one celebrating.

This is clear: because the moral certainty we said suffices is compatible with a certain wavering of mind, or hesitation, or suspicion, or scruples that one is not sufficiently disposed, or is bound by some impediment. It is also compatible with some disorder — especially of the lower powers and of the "law of the members," which is often not subject to our power — from which arises a certain lack of devotion, which is not always followed by full and actual attention; and yet one need not be stained by sin, nor does one sin.

If someone objects that one who doubts whether something is illicit, and while the doubt stands does it, sins because he knowingly casts himself into danger: understand this magisterial rule (with Master William and those who teach carefully) to hold of that kind of doubt which is vehement and more, or at least equally, inclines the mind to believe the thing mortally illicit as to believe it licit. It is otherwise where the mind leans more and judges that the thing is licit rather than illicit, even if it does not have everywhere an evident or fixed certainty — for that itself is not required.

There are not a few — and many — who are of a lively imagination, who moreover often tremble with fear where they themselves judge there is nothing to fear. Such persons ought to lean on the counsel of superiors and prudent people, and act boldly against such wavering of their own: for so it is commonly overcome and departs. But those who refuse to trust the counsel of superiors and the prudent for laying aside such scruples and acting against them err in many ways. First by pride and arrogance, preferring their own judgment and prudence to the judgment of others. Again, such a one will scarcely or never have solid devotion, nor peace of conscience from such things, and so the place of his soul will lack that Guest of whom the Prophet says that in peace is his place (cf. Ps 76:3). Some Doctors say — and I agree — that sometimes it is not so

meritorious to believe as to will to believe, nor to sorrow sensibly for sins as to will to sorrow and not be able. The Lord has heard the desire of the poor; your ear has heard the preparation of their heart (Ps 10:17). God therefore judges us and our acts according to the free choice, will, and judgment of the superior reason — not according to what the lower portion of sensuality brings and produces in us against our will and contrary to us: *(col. 326)* the mobility of imaginations and phantasms, the enticing and revengeful goad of the flesh, timid and uncertain waverings about what is to be done or believed concerning things our senses never reach, and the like.

Many simple people are deceived here, not knowing how to distinguish between what the superior portion of the soul does by consent, and what the inferior portion suffers without the assent of the superior. They would often give wholesome counsel to others which they do not know how to give themselves — and why? Because of this turbulent, quarreling crowd of passions rushing in together.

Here the counsel of blessed Bernard on this matter is worth remembering. One of his disciples was so disturbed by scruples that he dared by no means to approach celebrating. After learning this, the devout and most circumspect Bernard said to him: Go, brother; celebrate in my faith. The disciple obeyed, and that whole scruple departed forever. Wholly praiseworthy and to be imitated is both that Father's industrious confidence and that brother's faithful obedience. Someone among the simpler may say: Would that I had an abbot or prior such as blessed Bernard was; I would easily believe him when he commands; but as it is, when I look at the little wisdom of my superior, I dare not commit my conscience and salvation to his faith in that way. Whoever speaks and thinks thus errs and is foolish. For you have not committed yourself and your salvation into a man's hands because he is prudent and very learned or devout, but because he is set over you and prelate according to regular institution. Therefore you obey him not as a man but as God commanding — if he does not command against God. And often your obedience will be the more pleasing to God and the more fruitful for you, the less worthy is he to whom you do not refuse to be subject for God's sake. Finally beware lest, while you seek security and do not obtain it, you fall into the serious pit of rash judgment and presumption.

Consideration IV

It can happen that someone at the same time may celebrate Mass without conscience of mortal sin, and yet praiseworthily abstain from the same. In which case the first is of itself more praiseworthy than the second.

The first part is clear when someone is without conscience of mortal sin or other impediment, and is not bound by office or otherwise to celebrate: then he has both in his power to do licitly and praiseworthily — either to say with the centurion, Lord, I am not worthy (Matt 8:8), or with Zacchaeus confidently to invite the Lord.

I prove the second part with Durandus on IV Sentences. Celebration is of itself a good work; to abstain from it, if that is good, is more in order to the lack of devotion of the recipient than of itself. Again, celebration has so great a good from the power of the opus operatum that the bare will of celebrating does not avail as much as the will actually celebrating. This exterior work therefore adds something of goodness to the goodness of the will, because of the merit of Christ's Passion: it is commonly called a privileged work. Further, the one who celebrates, in carrying out the work, often gains a great richness of devotion and is wont to be occupied more divinely; and in so acting he is led by a nobler virtue — namely by charity and love of this Sacrament — than the one who does not celebrate, who rather contracts himself by fear. If someone says that abstaining from celebration is done so that afterward it may be fulfilled more reverently and devoutly the more rarely: we grant that this can happen.

But on the other side it can happen that such a withdrawal will take away the habit of the good, whose effect, according to the Philosopher, is delightful: The sign of an acquired habit, he says, is *(col. 327)* delight in the

work. Besides, that saying of Naso commonly comes true: He who is not ready today will be less ready tomorrow. You are distracted today, you are little devout, little recollected, much tempted by the flesh, the world or the demon. I believe it indeed. But you should know that those who pursue you do not sleep, and tomorrow the same enemies will be there, opposing you and lying in wait for your devotion, as they are today. Therefore the Wise Man not unreasonably advised: Whatever your hand is able to do, he says, do it earnestly (Eccles. 9:10). For you do not know when such a time will be granted you for celebrating praiseworthily as you have now; and if you have both times, both are better. Grant that you are defective in this or that thing: why do you add a new defect by not celebrating? But I am cold, you say, or lukewarm. Often the beginning of the celebration receives a man little devout and cold, whom at the end it sends away warm and fervent. The Body of Christ is a spiritual fire; approach this fire with confidence, and you will grow warm the more easily. Let us hear Ambrose praying and speaking to God: It is a grave thing that we do not come to your table with a clean heart and innocent hands; but it is graver if, because we fear our sins, we do not offer the sacrifice.

The account of the Holy Fathers tells of a certain Evagrius, who held that one ought to communicate only once a year. The holy Fathers withstood him, arguing that either he thought himself worthy and disposed, he who communicated once a year, and so was presumptuous; or he confessed himself then unworthy, and nevertheless approached. Why then could not another in the same way confect these Sacraments more often, even though he knew himself unworthy? If therefore it is lawful to celebrate once a year with the fear of God, with the same fear the like leave may be had to celebrate more often. There were (I am not ignorant of it) some of the Saints whom a certain reason restrained from celebrating ever. But these particular deeds of certain men are rather to be venerated with a pious interpretation than drawn into an example for action. Lastly, I am not unaware that gifts and callings differ in different persons, as the Holy Spirit has willed: one is made less disposed by interrupting celebration, and scarcely recollects himself afterwards; another by the same frequency is made less devout, and by such familiarity readier for contempt. Therefore let each question his own conscience, and then, by experience and by the counsel of someone more prudent, carry out what will be more fitting. Hence the excellent Doctor Augustine said: To celebrate daily I neither praise nor blame. Yet he and others counsel us so to live that we may be worthy to approach daily.

Consideration V

No pollution begun and completed in sleep is a mortal sin.

This is clear from Augustine’s famous rule: Sin is so voluntary that if it were not voluntary it would not be sin — and this is understood of mortal sin. The same is his express determination in City of God I.25, speaking of the violent corruption of a virgin: How much less is there fault in the body of one not consenting, if there is no fault in the body of one sleeping? Those who say the opposite contradict not only theological but also philosophical determination; and they have nothing to answer if the argument is pressed from the furious, from infants, and from others not using reason — whom, for that time, all the wise rightly agree do not sin by a new transgression.

We say carefully: if the pollution is begun and completed in sleep — because someone waking could have an impure desire of polluting himself, and while that desire was vigorous fall into sleep in which his pollution is completed. Likewise he could begin pollution in sleep *(col. 328)* and, waking, complete it badly. In these cases it is plain that the root of the pollution is free and blameworthy, and for that reason the unclean work is imputed to fault. But if on both sides — in beginning and end — there was lack of the use of reason and of free consent of the will, then such an act (even if it were completed while waking) will certainly be without mortal fault. The reason is plain: it will lack freedom. Someone may perhaps sin afterward by taking complacency in that shameful pleasure which he had; yet the prior act of pollution is not thereby rendered culpably vicious. According to Saint Thomas it can even please in some way — not as pleasure, but because

it brings health and nature's relief without the sufferer's procuring or assent. Finally the saints do not counsel that the flux, when already flowing while one wakes and feels it, should be violently forced back — for that effort would be either vain or unduly burdensome to nature.

The confirmation of all this is that an exterior act is no sin except by extrinsic denomination — more than urine, which is not properly called a deed. If therefore there is no properly so-called sin in the soul while it does not use freedom, there will for that time be no vicious exterior act. Yet we do not deny that through drunkenness or a damnable allurement while waking someone may slip into this uncleanness; but then the fault belongs to waking, not to sleep — although drunkenness and voluptuous thought often lack deadly crime and can be washed away by penance before sleep.

Consideration VI

Bodily pollution in sleep can happen not only without mortal sin, but even from merit.

This is clear from the well-known distinction given by Gregory and others, both theologians and natural philosophers. Sometimes this uncleanness comes from infirmity or weakness of nature wishing to relieve itself or unable to retain. Besides, there is in some men a flux almost such as women suffer in menstruation, and it occurs with none, or the slightest, pleasure — even while waking. Sometimes again a flux happens with such slipperiness and ease in certain men or women that it is provoked by a mere look, or greeting, or light thought. Who then will say that among such persons, unwilling and resisting, or in no way consenting from beginning to end, mortal sin is committed? Not everyone's harmony of complexion is the same. We see some with a slight or no occasion bleed from the nose; we know others do not suffer this even with much violence. I knew a seventy-year-old secular man, and a heavy drinker, who testified that he had never been polluted while sleeping, and wondered at it in others. I saw another, a religious and sober man, who for ten years and more was vexed by this passion almost daily. Some scarcely dream while sleeping; others dreams continually harass. But let us leave these and the like, whose determination belongs more to physicians, and likewise the remedies — although one of the most famous physicians told me that he had formerly studied diligently to heal such a nocturnal flux in others, but had labored in vain.

We, speaking morally or theologically, declare how nocturnal pollution can happen from a preceding merit.

First, from strict abstinence on bread and water: experience has made this plain. Further, if someone wills to detest this vice of the flesh by preaching, could he not think upon it — or likewise in hearing confessions? He could, and with great merit. Nonetheless there will sometimes occur in sleep the images of the impurities thought of beforehand, and from them he may be stirred to pollution as in other cases: who will deny it?

(col. 329) The holy Fathers, whose mind's eye was open and practiced in seeing the devil's lying snares, add that sometimes these uncleannesses are made by his illusion — either to terrify and unsettle the purity of a fearful conscience; or for the impediment of a good work (as of celebration); or that what the sleeper suffered may please the one awake; or that he may persuade dangerous abstinence and indiscreet rigor of life and cast one into madness; or that, God propitious and permitting, he may so exercise a devout mind and, stung by such foulness, keep it in humility.

Here two sayings of Gregory are to be remembered. First: that often such illusions or pollutions the soul is more to be pitied for having suffered unknowingly than for having done. Second: that it belongs to good minds to acknowledge fault even where there is no fault. Yet let fault be so acknowledged that just action is not indiscreetly hindered, nor due sustaining of the body abandoned; and lest someone fabricate and nourish an erroneous conscience for himself, and fall into Scylla while wishing to avoid Charybdis. Someone will perhaps suffer various hesitations when he comes to eat or sleep, and will say: You will be polluted if you do not omit this and that, if you do not take precautions. He must despise such things who sees a greater danger imminent if he does not prudently follow a form of living equal with others. For the scrupulous, therefore,

one must act against scruples, and fight with a fixed purpose of work.

That art was prudently used by one who, to a man continually troubled about repeating his Hours if he did not continually and actually attend to them, enjoined this penance for a time: that he should in no way repeat Hours once said. For actual attention is not always required; habitual and virtual attention suffices, not knowingly and on purpose interrupted by deliberate attention to something wholly incompatible. A thousand such scruples rise in some, after the manner of dogs barking and threatening to tear those who walk in the way of God's commandments — which we cannot better overcome and restrain than by contempt. Only let that contempt be God-fearing, and as a rule not without the prior counsel of another — especially of a superior; otherwise immoderate fear causes a fall, or unadvised presumption casts one headlong.

Consideration VII

No bodily uncleanness is of itself an impediment to celebration, but it may well be so by accident, by reason of something that accompanies it, or follows from it, in the soul.

Bonaventure draws out this Consideration on IV Sentences, dist. 12, q. 3. The first part is clear enough from the words of Christ, if the reason for his saying is well weighed (Matt. 15:20): To eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. And the reason is that no such passion, or exterior uncleanness, is of itself sin, or of necessity joined to sin, or leading to sin. Moreover, a bodily uncleanness fouler and more abominable, so far as it is bodily, is the corruption of lepers; and yet that does not impede celebration, especially if it is hidden. The Doctors think the same of the menstrual flow of women, and of the continual flux of certain men.

The second part is shown by distinguishing. One bodily uncleanness is joined to a spiritual uncleanness in truth, as with fornicators when awake. Another is joined to such spiritual uncleanness only by a certain likeness or conformity, as in foul and impure dreams, when there is not sin but a likeness of sin. We see another uncleanness which, seen or thought of, breeds a certain horror and loathing, as in a leper and very many other things, though we know of no truth or image of sin in it. Lastly, another is indifferent, *(col. 330)* as in muddy feet, or a face dusty and sweating.

The first and the second commonly breed in the soul a certain dullness, a coarsening, a disorder and an indevotion; for as, when the spirit has been tasted, all flesh loses its savor, so conversely, and still more, when the flesh has been tasted the spirit loses its savor, and a man becomes carnal for a longer or shorter time, according to differences of habit and complexion. Of these it was said in figure to the Ancients that those unclean in this way should be separated from the others until evening and the washing of their garments. Gregory expounds this thus: that unless the fire of temptation has first withdrawn, a man should know himself guilty as it were until evening. For it is certain that no such institutions, which were ceremonial and figurative, are to be drawn in any way into obligations of ours, unless we wish to judaize. Therefore the evening in this place, and the material washing, are not to be taken according to the letter; but a man should count himself unclean, so as to withdraw from the camp of the Holy Mysteries, so long as such remnants of sin are strong in him: dullness of mind, namely, carnality, disorder and indevotion. Some are purged more slowly; others, humbled, mourn at once, because with ready tears they wash away and drive out whatever of carnality had thickened in them, and with a short lament blot out and abolish every trace of it.

The filth of the third kind, by reason of scandal or horror—each of which can by accident harm the devotion of the soul—can by accident impede celebration: namely when scandal or horror, and in consequence the indevotion of the celebrant or of those present, is strongly presumed likely to follow. It is otherwise where all are practised and perfect, among whom nothing of the kind is to be feared.

Consideration VIII

It is possible for someone polluted in sleep to touch and celebrate the Sacred Mysteries without any blame, and with merit.

The Consideration is clear from what has been drawn out before. For a worthy celebration, then, such a preparation suffices as leaves no consciousness of mortal sin or of a lawful impediment, and does not wholly shut out devotion and reverence toward the Sacrament. But it is possible for one polluted in the manner described to feel these things in himself not long after such a passion; indeed, that he will come to the Sacrament the more humble, the more devout, the more ordered and the more reverent. For it is certain that the foulness of this humor, with its remnants, does not last for ever, nor impede for ever from celebration; and if a space of twenty-four hours is allowed, as Albert seems to determine, one man may be made cleaner in one hour than another in a hundred. Why should he not in the same way be made fitter to celebrate? Further, if the return of such allurements and passions at the time of celebration is feared, they can certainly happen in anyone at all, either from earlier sights alone, or from the corruption of nature, or by the working of the devil.

This Consideration of ours has its place above all among religious and contemplative men, whose turning to God is easy because of a strong habit, and also because of the subjection of the flesh while they are awake. Rarely, however, among those who live in the world, or who are beginning a new form of good living, is such a sudden or easy recollection of devotion found; it is fitting therefore that they should abstain, or come later, to this Sacrament, which is to be handled with the greatest reverence. Our Consideration has its place, moreover, where the illusion of the demon wishing to hinder our devotion is perceived by certain signs; and we ought not to yield to him, but rather to strive against him. Again, where a Priest fears scandal if he does not celebrate. Again, where someone is bound to celebrate, either by an office he has taken up, or by a commission, or by a mutual *(col. 331)* turn, and in conformity with the others with whom he lives, as are almost all Religious.

It is to be noted here that no one is bound to reveal openly his own hidden defect or infirmity; for the most part it is more cautious and more discreet to cover it. But one who does not celebrate betrays himself, and often gives scandal, and makes various thoughts rise in the hearts of others.

I do not wish, however—as I neither can nor ought—to prejudge by these words of mine any Institutions of Religious, if there are any to the contrary. For that saying of the Apostle is true: Let every man abound in his own sense (Rom. 14:5). But I have said meanwhile what it seems to me can be said, if the bare truth is considered among those who have the liberty of the Law of Christ.

Someone will perhaps object concerning fornicators, that they likewise could recollect themselves in a short time and wipe the soul clean of all the remnants of sin; they could therefore celebrate at once. Another would object concerning married persons, among whom it is possible that no sin is committed in their union, who yet seem to be kept from communion. To these we can say:

First, to the last, that it is the opinion of famous Doctors that such married persons, if they come from devotion, especially on solemn days, do not sin, when they have come together either from desire of begetting offspring, or of rendering the debt, or to avoid incontinence, and there is no other obstacle. To the first we say nothing else for now, except that this would be very rare; and of things which scarcely or never happen the Doctors treat little. If, however, grave scandal threatened from the omission; if, besides, great contrition concurred; if, finally, he had committed such a crime more from the surprise of the devil, or under vehement temptation, and rarely—let him who is wiser dare to forbid such a one; I confess I do not dare. In this case and in others (as is clear from what has been premised) many are to be left to their own conscience and judgment, when all the circumstances which prudence looks about at have been searched out.

Consideration IX

It is chiefly by the divine gift, and not by our own industry or preparation, that we are made worthy to share in the Mysteries of the Sacraments.

This Consideration, if it is chewed with inward savor, will humble us greatly. And indeed it is humility alone that disposes us to be made worthy, and to the due preparation for receiving so great a Guest, and such a one, into the upper room of the soul.

I know a man who, finding this so in truth, could never reach a quiet and serene disposition for celebrating until, distrusting all his own industry and labor and care, and his preparation by Confession or otherwise, he sacrificed on the altar of his heart the ox of pride, and said in a contrite and humbled spirit with Daniel: O Lord, not in my justifications do I lay my prayers before you, but in your many and great mercies (Dan. 9:18); and again with the Prophet: But I, in the multitude of your mercy, will enter into your house; I will worship toward your holy temple, in your fear (Ps. 5:8); and some like things, of which he has set some down in writing. Plainly our industry and preparation, such as we can fittingly make, are required; yet if we lean on them we are deceived and fall, or, as if someone were propped on a staff of reed, we waver, and do not dwell in the help of the Most High, while we trust in our merits, or are tormented by the mere remembrance of our sins. No wonder, if then we do not abide in the protection of the God of heaven: that protection failing, who will stand?

(col. 332) Such a vision was shown to someone in a dream. He had been hurled into a cesspit, and was struggling to hold himself up by a certain stick fixed in the filth, so as not to be sunk. But that stick kept being let down continually towards the bottom, with an unbearable stench. Feeling the danger, he turned with his whole mind to the Lord, let go of the stick, and was at once snatched out. Truly our conscience, however clean, is a kind of cesspit, full of the foul filth of daily defects. That stick is our industry, by which we seek to rise out of it; but without doubt, until we lift our eyes to heaven, whence help may come to us, until we cast our whole trust upon God, the more we lean on the stick of our industry alone, the deeper we are sunk into the abyss of our depravity, and we bring back nothing but a foul and horrid stench.

What then? (someone would say). Shall we tempt God, or, full of the consciousness of sins, indevout, filthy, distracted and out of tune, come to this saving Sacrament in the hope of mercy alone? I have said already that our industry should do what it can, that there may be no consciousness of mortal sin; but in that let us in no way hope; otherwise we grow proud, otherwise we incur the curse, we who put our trust in man and make flesh our arm (Jer. 17:5); otherwise we are always wavering and always going headlong. Let us acknowledge that all our justices are as a menstruous rag (Isa. 64:6), or like a leper's bandages, upon which we daily drip the corruption of our sins. With what face, then, or with what boldness shall we dare to display our infection in order to appease God? Let us beware rather lest he be provoked. Plainly it is so. If a man could dispose himself for a thousand years to the dignity of celebrating, not even so would he attain it of himself. What then, do you suppose, could you do in a brief moment? He of whom I spoke above often asks himself whether he is worthy to approach, whether he is sufficiently prepared. He hesitates at first, he trembles and shrinks back. At last he answers himself thus: Meanwhile, so far as in me lies, by God's favor I am conscious of nothing certain concerning mortal sin, or a purpose of sinning; and venial sins, even if not confessed, are no hindrance. I know too, on the other side, that the Lord is just; and if he wished to search out my debts strictly, to mark my iniquities, to contend with me in judgment, I shall not endure it, nor be able to answer him one for a thousand, however washed I may be, contrite, confessed, tearful. What are these things? Woe to me if he does not judge with very great mercy! What can I know, if perhaps my vices lie hidden from me? I have deserved indeed to be blinded, I who at first abused my spiritual sight beyond measure, when, seeing the good, I scorned to fulfil it. This one thing I know: that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plentiful redemption (Ps. 129:7); that no iniquity of ours can overcome or dry up the fountain of his goodness; that if he has decreed to save, there is no one to condemn. He commands me to hope in him and to cast myself wholly into his hands; I obey as I can. He is not cruel or a liar; him that comes to him he will not

cast out; one fallen at his feet he will not thrust away in indignation; he goes before me at last with blessings of sweetness, when I am displeasing to myself. I hope indeed that he who has begun will perfect, and will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, that I may never sleep in death.

You have been unfaithful, O my soul, with your lovers. The loving Spouse commands by the Prophet's mouth that you return; even now He will receive you (Jer 3:1). And if a thousand times you have gone away, despised, mocked, He will not cast you off when you come; He will not despise the penitent. If a human being said such things, you would believe and aspire and approach: God says this, God promises this, indeed God commands this — and you, distrusting, will not come? That is not counsel, O my soul! Therefore in His truth, not in your vanity, sacrifice yourself willingly to Him.

(col. 333) You are unclean: approach to be cleansed at the fountain of purity that cannot be stained. You hunger: approach to be fed at the life-giving and unfailing bread. You are sick: this will be a most effective medicine for your weakness. You suffer a flux and cannot be healed by physicians — that is, by your own exercises: touch with full faith, with the woman with the flow of blood (and Martha, according to Ambrose), the hem of Jesus' garment — namely the most holy Host — that you may be cleansed. If you feel yourself struck by the serpents of perverse temptations, what remains but that you look upon Christ the serpent lifted up? If you say with the Prophet, For I am needy and poor (Ps 24[25]:16), share in this most holy mystery: you will have Christ as a faithful companion and a most rich guest. Perhaps you complain that you are blind, weak, and lame: remember that such are invited to the banquet of the great King and compelled to enter. "I am slippery and unstable," you will say; but this bread strengthens the heart. You are sad and anxious; but this wine gladdens. Many things disturb and trouble you: cling to Him who calms the troubled waves, who is our peace, who says (John 16:33), In the world you will have distress; in me you will have peace. You are a pilgrim away from the Lord; but in the strength of this food you will walk as far as the mountain of God. Why then do you fear at last? Why do you tremble, O my soul? Why and how long do you trouble me? Hope in God, and He will free you, and nourish you, and will not confound you.

Perhaps you ask, sighing, where is your God? In this banquet certainly, in which Christ is received, the memory of the Passion is recalled, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. Believe this with a good and simple faith, and do not curiously discuss the manner of existence; let it suffice you that it is not here after the manner of other bodies measured by their places. Therefore some vainly (not to say foolishly) ask where the head, where the feet, what the position, how the parts are ordered to the Host, where Christ is said to be, why and how — since there has been made a transubstantiation of the bread into His body by the almighty power of the divinity. If you do not comprehend this, neither do you comprehend any other least thing as to its infinite relations and properties: give place to Faith, that you may have merit; and the faith which without merit you give to nature, give with praise to the Revealer, and willingly captive yourself in His service.

Consideration X

We do not urge that Christ's Body be handled with bodily cleanliness out of fear of contaminating it, but in order to avoid irreverence or scandal in ourselves or others.

This Consideration is plain even to the little instructed; yet it helps not a little among the scrupulous: so that if some bodily uncleanness has come upon them unwillingly, they may recall that this touches nothing of Christ's Body, while cleanliness and reverence of holiness are kept in the soul.

There were those who taught that the consecrated Host is by no means sent down into our stomach by eating, but is at once caught up into heaven — against daily experience and Catholic truth, which holds that Christ's Body is truly eaten. Forgetfulness of this Consideration deceived them, while they think it unworthy to feel that Christ's Body or the sacred Host should come into our foul stomach, as if it were polluted or defiled

more than a sunbeam or any of the spiritual substances. Let them say then, if they judge after the manner of carnal Jews or pagans, why Christ's Body was kept and wrapped nine months in a mother's womb and the membrane of afterbirth? Reason ought to correct sensual judgment, *(col. 334)* lest we count as impious blasphemy the most sincere truth of the thing.

Let us beware of calling such filth to mind by frequent fear, since this remembrance infects more than it cleanses. Let a man accustom himself to judge and to feel spiritual things spiritually; for so he will free himself from many and various indecencies of disquieting phantasms; so he will care less for the things which in truth are less to be cared for—I mean bodily filth; so, finally, he will trust more in purity of conscience than of body.

Let us conclude at last, summing up: let no one about to celebrate seek for himself an evident certainty concerning his own worthiness: he would be vexed in vain. Let him have that preparation which has been described, and it is enough. Let him not trust in the multitude of his virtue, nor in the repetition of Confession, or of devotion, or in the serenity of recollection: for it can happen that frequent confession over venials harms by accident — how? By making the soul more anxious than is just, and fearful, and afraid even of the least things, so that it trembles even over the imperfection of Confession itself and is driven to confess again. I will give a rule by which no multiplication of Confession will be a cause of disquiet: namely, if it is done not as if then necessary for salvation or required for the disposition of that celebration, but because it is a good and privileged work, not a little profitable also for indulgence or the increase of grace.

Yet the soul must at some time love God and cast itself into His hands; otherwise, by continually fearing to be cast out from the Lord's face and holding God suspect for severity, it will always be bent back upon its own advantage and never lift itself to high things. Therefore let the soul go up the mountain and sacrifice its joy with Abraham; let it leave below its ass with its boys. Let the ass bray there, let the boys make noise, let all things there be rude: nothing will pertain to it that stands on the mountain — that is, in the summit of reason.

Not unfittingly we insert here a vision which blessed Peter Celestine is said to have been shown — he who teaches people knowledge even by dreams (Ps 93:10). The same Father, while sleeping, seemed invited to ascend a most excellent royal hall with his ass. This ass paid the tribute of the belly along the way; the most pure man shuddered and abhorred this — not iniquity, but soiling — and fearing to go forward, he tried to turn back, until he was kindly admonished by a voice fallen from the throne that what his corpulent and irrational little ass had expelled, without his awareness, of natural necessities, pertained nothing to the contamination of himself or of the spiritual royal Hall.

Clearly so it is — and I will say more. It sometimes happens that disturbances, fights, disorders, and uncleannesses stirred below in the senses make our merit above increase; just as, on the contrary, a great serenity on both sides sometimes suddenly brings on a wind of pride that overturns everything from the foundation. Only let the soul empty itself as much as it can; and let it insist on contemplation or study or any quiet for no other reason than that God may be exalted in it, and that accordingly it may be more and more humbled, and rebound into its own littleness — indeed its nothingness — and rebound and fall, and God will receive it. This way is safe, royal, and secure.

Finally let us all alike hear the end of speaking: Fear God, despairing of yourself, trusting in Him, and keep His commandments, not omitting what is in you: this is every man (Eccl 12:13).

FINIS.

On Pollution by Day

Title and Preface

(col. 335) **JOANNIS GERSONII Doctor and Chancellor of Paris**

TRACTATUS DE POLLUTIONE DIURNA

Ad MSS Vict. 180 & 774.

In MS Victorinus 774 this treatise is entitled: DE COGNITIONE CASTITATIS.

I formerly wrote some things on preparation for Mass under ten Considerations, taking occasion principally from the matter of nocturnal pollution. Now, however, concerning pollutions that seem to happen while one is awake, certain things have been asked of me which are wont greatly to trouble timorous consciences — as I have often been able to gather from various persons of both sexes, both in Confession and outside it. Therefore I consulted not only the Doctors in their writings on this matter, but also held conversation with those exercised and discreet in the matter of Confession, and indeed inquired of physicians the cause of this manifold and varied pollution. Finally, let the reader prepare himself to hear chastely what necessity compels us to open for the knowledge of chastity.

Notable I

It must be presupposed first that from the human body a manifold humor flows through the passages of the members appointed for generation. One is truly seminal; another truly urinary; another somehow intermediate, which may be called salivary or sputum-like; another (especially in women) is called menstrual, and something similar sometimes happens to a male from illness.

It is easy enough for those who suffer them to recognize the second and last fluxes — when it is truly urinary or truly menstrual: for each has its distinction in color, liquidity, and the like; and they commonly go out without much delight in the genital members, unless other causes of delight are joined, as will be taught below.

But the properly seminal humor and that intermediate humor are not so easily separated, because of likeness in whiteness and viscosity or tenacity and a certain thickness. They have nonetheless distinct properties and different origins and passages from which they flow — which it belongs to physicians to know more articulatly.

The seminal humor is a superfluity of the last digestion — superfluity not in quality but in quantity. For when nature has sufficient food for the body’s nourishment, it sends from all the members *(col. 336)* what is left over to the genital vessels, now more, now less. And when it superabounds for nature itself, nature tries at last to expel that superfluity — which happens either in the act of generation or intercourse, or by evaporations like sweats, or by certain unclean distillations, sometimes in sleep with dreams, sometimes without dreams, sometimes with delight, sometimes imperceptibly; and not rarely it happens likewise in waking to some, both voluntarily and involuntarily, in very many ways — now from a defect of nature, now from a defect of fault.

Again, that intermediate humor arises from a certain superfluity of nourishment, not only in quantity but in quality — namely because it is unfit for nutrition and likewise unfit for generation, as we see in saliva and other superfluities flowing from the brain, both by mouth and by nostrils, in some little and more rarely, in others more abundantly and more often. This intermediate humor sometimes mixes with urination; sometimes it flows by itself without thought and sensation; sometimes it occurs with a certain delight and itching more than in urine (which urine itself sometimes goes out with a certain disorder). I think nonetheless

that this flux of intermediate humor scarcely or never causes such a motion of delight and concussion of almost the whole body, especially in the pudenda, nor so binds or clouds the judgment of reason in its going out, as happens in the truly seminal humor — for that seminal humor is more digested and, unless corrupted by chilling or otherwise, is found more proportionate to causing libidinous delight. Moreover this intermediate humor is moved to exit from lighter causes and with greater ease than the seminal, especially in women — so much so that from a very light motion of the body from place to place or from bending, without any thought and without sensation, it may come. From the effect it is perceived by a certain viscous soiling on the flesh or on cloths. It happens more easily, and not without some accompanying or previous sensation, when they look at or touch or smile at or converse or jest with a beloved person — whether beautiful or plain, young or old, secular or religious, and sometimes devout — even where they will or think nothing of the carnal work, still less do it or even think it.

Notable II

@@N2_OPEN It is to be noted, secondly and principally, concerning this matter, that libidinous delight or stirring, itching or tickling, often arises in the members of which we speak without any flux at all. For there are certain fumes, which the physicians call spirits, which overheat, swell and distend the veins and nerves in those members; and there comes a certain stimulation and itching, or tickling, which is felt the more while one seeks to extinguish or allay it by handling. And sometimes libidinous delight is completed without any flux: this is clear in tender age, which is not yet fit for seminal emission, because of the lack of seed or the narrowness of the veins. Such itching is aroused by such fumes or spirits, both from within—through strong wine and spices, but above all through libidinous and foul imaginations—and from without, through wicked speech, or wanton looks, or unchaste touches, provoked by oneself or from elsewhere. But if, according to the opinion of certain Masters, virginity itself were truly corrupted by the completion of delight from such things without any seminal emission—alas, for shame!—it is a stupor to think in how few virginity would remain, unless perhaps in boys and girls the lack of a sufficient judgment of reason excuses it.

(col. 337) It must be said besides that not every itching around the pudenda ought to be judged properly libidinous, nor even its calming or extinction by friction or otherwise ought to be called luxurious delight. We see how in other members we often feel an itch which we soothe or extinguish by scratching with the nails (to speak in the common way). This passion is sometimes so vehement that even with wounding of the flesh by the nails and outflow of blood it scarcely departs: and if that passion invades those generative members, the one forced to suffer it falls into great anguish, lest while seeking a remedy against such itching (such as would be done in other members) he slip into unclean and truly libidinous and culpable pollutions.

Physicians also teach that in those members there sometimes arises a passion from certain fumes distending the veins and nerves of those members, so that it cannot be calmed even by carnal use or other handling — as Juvenal narrates of a certain noble Roman matron. In this case or the like, therefore, one must have recourse to physicians as for a true illness.

From the foregoing it is clear how carefully the young of both sexes are to be guarded in food and drink and company, lest from an inward or outward cause they grow accustomed to having such libidinous motions of sin in their flesh. Otherwise from custom they will rush as into a kind of necessity of doing this, especially when older age arrives and the delight is felt more strongly, more shamelessly, and more vehemently. In this matter confessors or parents ought to give some warning to boys and girls, that they abstain from such things and not allow themselves to be handled basely by themselves or by others.

Let every discreet person attend from the foregoing what is to be done, and see that while too great a purity of speech is kept, a greater disorder of deeds does not follow, and confession of such things is made none. Attend on the other side lest, while the prohibition is express, it itself increase the urge — for the poet’s word is true: We strive toward what is forbidden. If parents forbid their daughters the kisses of men and youths,

and likewise their sons the handling of girls: why can they not restrain sons and daughters by words or corrections from handling themselves or one another badly — since this is certainly more shameful than the other, and has the more danger the less shame and the greater license there is in it? I am silent here about foolish, indeed nefarious parents conniving at excessive familiarity toward their own. I am silent about the rest — servants or maids or others — who do not fear to introduce this most contagious ruin under a certain appearance of play. Woe, woe to the world from this corruption of the way of all flesh!

Notable III

Let us note, thirdly and principally, that in a theological or moral matter, when inquiry is made about certain effects or works — whether they are sins, or of what kind — the principal and final resolution is to be made to the freedom of consent or dissent in such things. And thence Augustine: So far is sin voluntary that if it were not voluntary it would not be sin. And according to common teaching, the exterior act adds nothing of malice or mortal fault over the interior. Therefore concerning pollutions or unclean distillations from the genital members it is more fitting to look to the moral origin than to the natural — although consideration of natural things helps toward a fuller knowledge of moral things, as is clear enough concerning anger, envy, gluttony and the other vices, especially the carnal ones, which draw their matter or tinder from the body.

Notable IV

(col. 338) Let us therefore presuppose fourth, for deciding the present matter and the like, conforming to the teaching of Augustine and Gregory on the process of temptation in us, as Scripture recounts it to have been in Adam. And let us say that a libidinous motion arises for the state of corrupt nature even against our will. And very often it even precedes every judgment of reason, and consequently is not under free choice or consent — according to Augustine: It is not in our power of what sort of visions we are touched, but it is in our power to reject or accept. Understand likewise of hearing and smell, of touch and taste.

This involuntary prevention comes from the corruption of nature by original sin for the state of fallen nature; for the state of nature first instituted and whole, such a vicious prevention would not have happened: for man's rule would have been so ordered that reason would have kept its dominion over sensuality without any prevention or rebellion.

Therefore every such libidinous motion preventing the judgment of reason is reputed to be a sin, at least venial, because it arises beside or against the judgment of its mistress Reason. Hence is verified that saying of the Wise Man: There is none without sin (Eccl 7:21) — even an infant of one day. For in every child of Adam not privileged, motions of this kind arise beside or against the judgment of reason. And so, taking venial sin largely, we cannot live long without such.

Yet such a motion is called voluntary more from the sinning will of the first man than from one's own; therefore if it is to be called properly a sin, even venial, one's own will must somehow be in the cause.

Notable V

Now, fifthly, I come to the investigation of the principal doubt: when such a libidinous stirring is a mortal sin, and when not—for about venial sin, in view of what has been premised, no scrupulous or doubtful search is to be made. Let us consider how the free will stands toward that stirring or temptation; and this can come about in many ways.

In one way the will stands purely privatively, both directly and indirectly: that is, without any act of willing of its own, at any point of time; so that it neither willed beforehand that the stirring should happen, nor, while it happens, willed anything that of itself disposes to it, nor, after it has happened, notices it, and for that reason neither consents to it nor dissents from it, being perhaps occupied with something else, or in sleep.

In another way the will stands purely positively, both directly and indirectly: that is, with an act of willing or of refusing; so that it willed deliberately beforehand, or refused, that the stirring should happen; or, while it happens or after it has happened, it is deliberately pleased or displeased with it; so that it has a free consent or dissent in such a stirring, accepting it or rejecting it, with advertence that it so wills, or that it does not so will.

Otherwise the will stands toward that libidinous stirring in a kind of middle way: so that it neither stands purely privatively, neither willing it nor refusing it; and likewise it does not stand purely positively, willing it or refusing it deliberately and turning itself actually towards it; but it stands as it were dissembling, or sleeping, or not caring; so that it neither consents expressly and actually in that libidinous stirring, nor dissents expressly, but dissembles and dozes, when it was bound to attend and be watchful; or, when it notices the danger, yet does not try to meet it or to spring back from it.

Notable VI

(col. 339) Therefore let us say, sixthly and in consequence, that a twofold consent is commonly distinguished in the will: one complete, deliberate, and direct; another incomplete, or interpretative, and indirect.

The first occurs when the will sufficiently and actually advertises, by the judgment of reason reflecting upon itself, that it is acting thus or thus, and nevertheless wills to act thus; and this consent is commonly well enough known even among the little educated or those practiced in morals, because it is full and direct.

But the other consent, which we call interpretative, is harder to notice, for it comes about in many ways. One way is when reason ought to be wide awake about something to be held down or driven back, while it is already actually rising up; but it omits and neglects to drive it back, as if keeping silence, according to the common saying: He who is silent seems to consent. So a negligent sailor is called the cause of the sinking of the ship.

It is said advisedly, however, “when reason ought to be wide awake about something to be held down”; for if the act were indifferent, or such that reason ought not to labor to drive it back or hold it down—because, namely, no danger of sin threatens—then the will is not said to consent by its silence in such a silence; indeed sometimes it should rather be called dissenting, as happens in temptations of blasphemy and many others, which are better overcome by keeping silence, or by not noticing, than by fighting and striving directly against them. So in civil matters it is sometimes true that he who is silent does not at once seem to consent; rather he is more truly judged to dissent. Another rule says: He who is silent neither grants nor denies. Further, this second consent is sometimes indirect: namely, when the will wills or does something upon which something that is a sin is wont to follow; as when someone makes himself drunk voluntarily, upon which sleep follows, and from sleep the omission of rising for the divine Office to which he is bound: this omission of rising is called voluntary indirectly, namely from a primary consent in the manner described; but the acts that follow from it have only so much of vice as there is of consent in the principal act going before, and no more, unless another consent were added.

We can distinguish in other words concerning the consent of the will, and likewise concerning dissent. Hence, when some blameworthy object is set before it, the will can stand toward it in seven ways. In one way, because it truly wills that object. In another way, because it wills it interpretatively, or by reputation. Again, it wills it directly or indirectly. Again, it wills it fully and perfectly, or half-fully and imperfectly. Again, lastly, it stands in suspense, and in a manner neutrally: as having, namely, no act of willing or refusing about it, but holding the judgment of reason in suspense, or turning itself to something else.

And this distinction, if it is well conceived, is a key in every moral question for opening a way out of innumerable difficulties.

Notable VII

Let us say further, seventhly, that concerning the carnal act, or any act of this kind set before the will, the will can stand in many ways.

In one way, because it consents to the deed, if the means were at hand, or unless shame or human fear hindered it. In another way, because, although it shrinks from and shudders to consent to so wicked a deed, it nonetheless turns over and over in its mind the thought of it. And this again can come about in many ways.

In one way, so that it delights deliberately, fully and directly in this thought; and this is a sin in him to whom carnal intercourse is forbidden—otherwise in the married. For if some act is forbidden, delight in that act is forbidden in consequence. Likewise, if the act *(col. 340)* is permitted, the delight that follows directly and of itself upon that act is permitted with it. It is added advisedly, "of itself and directly"; for to look at a woman is not of itself a sin, and so neither is the delight that follows of itself upon that act; but by accident that libidinous delight often arises in an incontinent man which a continent man would not have. This rule is much to be noted, against the scrupulous on the one side, and on the other side against danger, and for things even lawful being cautiously given up. In another way such a one thinks about carnal delight so as to be able to drive it back by striving and struggling, as it were by force or by contrivance; and this is not always expedient, as neither is it to fight with a venomous serpent when it can be avoided otherwise. In another way he thinks of it from mere curiosity, which is often harmful and criminal. In another way he thinks of it because he does not notice any danger threatening him from such a thought, but it is turned for him into an exercise of virtue; and this would be virtuous, if the danger is sufficiently guarded against. In another way he thinks of it because he wishes, or is obliged, to teach others about this matter, or to be more fully taught about his own condition; and if he does this with the addition of a blameless guard, he does not sin mortally, even where pollution should follow. So it would be said when a man is obliged to hear Confessions, or to ride, and things of the kind.

Lastly, the will sometimes stands toward such a proposed act in a manner neutrally, because, namely, it wills nothing; or in suspense, because it is not expedient to deliberate about these things: as if the place and time are unsuitable, or if it is put to oneself which one would rather, to consent to that act or to burn for ever. He acts safely if he does not deliberate on either side, because of the danger of falling either into a false presumption, if he chose to burn for ever, or into mortal sin, if he chose to consent to that act. This is a caution very fitting and expedient against the questions which are wont to be curiously raised or put, either within or from without, where danger threatens whichever is chosen; and so the truth of that common proverb is left standing: It is better to be silent than to speak folly. So he acted who said: And I became as a man that does not hear, and that has no reproofs in his mouth (Ps. 37:15).

Notable VIII

Let us come now, eighthly, to answering certain questions which might be put in this matter of the pollution that would happen while one is awake; and let us note down some propositions which, carried over to other matters, will be able to give occasion for knowing the truth about sins.

First Proposition

No pollution, by day or by night, has more of sin than there has been of consent about it in free choice. So it is said of anger, envy, gluttony and the like.

The proposition is clear from the third Notable. Hence, if there has been no consent, true or interpretative, direct or indirect, perfect or imperfect, that pollution will be no sin at all. This is the express opinion of Augustine in the City of God, speaking of a woman corrupted by violence; for he says that that delight is no sin in the body of one who dissents, as neither in the body of one sleeping. And Bonaventure says that he speaks even of sin properly venial. But if there has been one of these consents, then the quality and quantity of the sin will have to be judged in proportion to the consent. True consent, then, has more guilt than

interpretative, other things being equal; and direct consent more than indirect; and full consent more than imperfect; indeed true consent, *(col. 341)* when it is imperfect from frailty or ignorance, is often counted only venial, because if it were perfect it would be called mortal. Likewise indirect consent causes no more malice in the acts that follow than it is itself evil. And so a pollution coming only from consent to a venial excess in eating and drinking is to be called only venial. An example is the incest of Lot, according to the Doctors. And this avails for understanding the matter of nocturnal pollution; indeed, if the sin has already been blotted out by penance, the acts that follow need not, by this reasoning, be new faults.

Second Proposition

No pollution by day ought properly to be called softness, unless it has been provoked or wrung out by free consent in one way or another. This is clear from the preceding; for as this pollution was not in the power of the one who suffered it, so neither is it a sin; but softness means a sin, for the Apostle says that the soft shall not possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10).

Third Proposition

No such pollution ought to be counted a reserved case under the name of softness—indeed not even a sin, as has been said. This is clear, because it is not softness; and one who is of this kind is rather to be pitied for having suffered something of the sort than for having done it or willed it, as happens in an erection of the member with the will resisting. “Under the name of softness” is added, because perhaps in a given case a Superior could reserve such a case to himself for a time, or for certain persons—not because it is a sin, but that he might be the better instructed, and might instruct, whether it is a sin, or a disposition to sin, or to the danger of sin, and whether it is pollution properly so called. Yet to do this generally and for always would be very harsh, indeed foolish.

Fourth Proposition

No flux from the members appointed for generation is to be counted of itself pollution or softness, if it has not been truly seminal. Hence a urinary or menstrual flux, or one of the other, intermediate humor, is by no means to be called softness or pollution. And in consequence it is clear that neither should these cases be reserved under the name of pollution, as the preceding proposition set out. But it was said in the proposition that these fluxes are not to be counted of themselves softness, because by accident, or by reason of something joined to them, it can turn out otherwise, as the following proposition teaches.

Fifth Proposition

Though no pollution or flux occurs, it is possible for a man, while awake, to stain his soul with a filth more grievous and more disordered than does another who is truly polluted, or overcome by softness—indeed by fornication, indeed by adultery, or sacrilege, or incest. This proposition is drawn from what we said before, in the second Notable, about the cause of delight and itching. Hence also, for this reason, a eunuch is said to deflower a virgin. Boys, moreover, as well as girls, are said to burn for one another before the years of marriage. The frigid, too, and the bewitched, who cannot emit seed, are said sometimes to defile themselves with wicked and most evil allurements; and these things are done the more shamefully, by unlawful handling or otherwise, the longer this shameful stain of passion lasts, thrives and burns, without being allayed by the outflow of seed.

Sixth Proposition

A pollution or flux which has had nothing of consent, and in consequence nothing of sin, does not impede *(col. 342)* a man of itself from celebration. We say “of itself,” because by accident it is otherwise: as when the one who suffers it is scrupulous and timid in this regard, and makes for himself an uneasy and doubtful conscience; or because the sufferer feels himself coarsened and cast down in mind by this foulness; or

because he cannot sufficiently drive out the slippery or shameful thoughts that rise from it. Hence it is to be noted that, as voluntary and slippery imaginations dispose most of all to such foul stirrings, so, conversely, dreams by night, or thoughts in waking, sometimes come from such stirring and carnal stimulation, just as an angry man thinks otherwise, and other things, than one who has been calmed, and one who fears than one who is secure. Let us say besides, concerning the principal point, that in the case of which we speak, though the man was involuntary in suffering it, there yet remains in the soul a certain carnal taste; for as, when the spirit has been tasted, the flesh loses its savor, so, when the flesh has been tasted—that is, carnal pleasure—every spirit loses its savor even against one's will: that is, every spiritual exercise.

Others add, relying on the sayings of Bonaventure and the like, that it is a general impediment, because for celebration there is required not only spiritual cleanness from sin but bodily cleanness from such a foul humor. How far this holds true we think we have laid open when we spoke in the little treatise On nocturnal pollution. Hence the Doctor Peter de Palude, learned in the Canon and Civil Laws, and in the Divine likewise, says of nocturnal pollution: "If it has had no blameworthy cause, a man ought to abstain from celebrating; he ought, I say, by counsel, not by precept, as though he sinned mortally if he celebrated." So Augustine seems to speak of those who communicate daily, that "he neither praises nor blames, but leaves them to their own sense and devotion." Hence, if one of the spouses rendering the debt is not kept from Communion, according to Bonaventure, it seems that that bodily stain does not impede Communion; indeed it would not impede celebration in a Greek Priest, who is likewise bound to render the debt to his wife when she asks.

Seventh Proposition

As not every enticing thought rising up in the soul, even with some doubtful, interpretative or imperfect consent, and likewise not every itching, or tickling, or stimulation rising in the genital members from this enticement, impedes from celebration; so neither does a flux following from it of itself impede, so long as reason does not consent, or so long as it resists and does not fully consent to it.

The first part, I think, all grant. Of the second part the reasoning is the same, if the preceding proposition is attended to. Yet the counsel in this matter is that occasions be diligently avoided, and that a man take pains not to fix in himself any amorous and sensual thought about anyone or anything so firmly that he cannot pluck it out when he will. And so, says Seneca, lend yourself to things, and do not give yourself.

Eighth Proposition

Carnal thoughts, and the fluxes that follow from them without voluntary consent, are for the most part overcome more wholesomely, more safely and more effectively if reason behaves towards them in the manner of one who does not care, or who turns the will to other things, than if it is anxious, saddened, troubled, and tries to drive them out. Let the little Treatise composed in French, On the remedy against temptations of blasphemy, be noted in this place. For vehement thought or imagination increases the urge, and so feeds thoughts of this kind, multiplies them, and makes them more effective toward the flux that follows. But if he dissembles, and cares no more about it than about the flux of any other natural humor, he will be at rest. The example might be applied to this matter of the fearful, who would never cross a beam set on high *(col. 343)* without falling, while the bold, by habit or otherwise, would leap across it in complete security. Such a turning aside comes about in many ways. Sometimes by making the sign of the holy Cross on the breast or on the forehead, which some count most effective, as that sign is triumphal and saving, and besides is a sign of the deepest humility; and humility overcomes the snares of the devil, as Anthony says. This turning aside comes about at times by some bodily hurt, in the tongue or elsewhere. Sometimes by a kind of reproach and stern address to one's thoughts, as though there were some tempter appearing outwardly, saying thus: Fie, fie upon you, most vile thoughts! Away with you, off with you in an evil hour! I am busy with other things; I give you no hearing, no sight; depart from here, you Sirens, sweet unto

destruction. This turning aside comes about sometimes, too, by a kind of mockery of such an illusion, rising up so manifoldly and so shamefully in the mind. It comes about, lastly, by avoiding idleness, by a pure and naked Confession, and above all by hope in the divine help and by imploring it, without which plainly no one can be continent.

Ninth Proposition

It is difficult, or impossible, without divine revelation, to know generally and with certainty the root and cause of a pollution by day: whether, namely, it comes from true or interpretative consent; or from direct or indirect consent; or from full or imperfect consent; or whether it has come about without any consent of the higher reason, or of the lower.

I think this proposition is known to those who consider it. From it it follows in consequence that, because blessed is the man who is always fearful (Prov. 28:14), and because it belongs to good minds to make a conscience where at times it would not of necessity have to be made, it is expedient to confess such things, and not without the counsel of the prudent and experienced to count such things as nothing, or to despise them in themselves. But let such a Confession be pure and devout, in which a man shows himself and lays open the hidden things of his heart to the Priest who is discreet and prudent, or experienced; who knows how to discern the nature of the disease, and to give wholesome counsel to the penitent according to his condition and the other particular circumstances; and to whom full trust is rightly given by the penitent. This counsel of making a pure Confession has its place not only in the present matter: in every spiritual disease it is a most effective remedy.

But it is expedient that, after receiving counsel from the prudent, the experienced and the devout, a man let go of excessive scruples and fears; otherwise he would fall into pride of spirit, unwilling to take his understanding captive to the counsel of his elders. He would fall, nonetheless, into a kind of faintheartedness and disquiet of spirit, which could not sufficiently receive him whose place is in peace (Ps. 75:3); nor would such a soul ever ascend to the height of perfection. But the Superior and experienced man, whose counsel is sought in this matter by his subjects, ought, when he has examined everything, to say with a definite and solid answer: Do so. For if the Physician wavers in healing, what secure steadiness is to be hoped for in the sick man? Hence the Tragic poet says: He who gives the afflicted a doubtful safety denies it.

Tenth Proposition

To meet the dangers and scruples which arise from a foul flux by day, its causes and roots must be diligently considered, so that, when they are known, a diligent and discreet provision may be made. And we call that provision discreet which neither wishes to cut away the causes with a greater loss of danger and scandal than such a flux—which is sometimes no more than venial, especially when that humor is the intermediate one of which we spoke—nor, on the other side, allows those things to be done licentiously which are of themselves blameworthy, *(col. 344)* and can easily be cut off: of which kind are slippery looks, foolish glances, a companionship more friendly than is fitting, bearing in itself a delight which, even if not of itself libidinous, is yet dangerous and more sensual, and which nonetheless sometimes tries to colour itself—or rather, more truly, to obscure itself—under certain offices of spiritual edification, such as Confession, or reading, or instruction. But let the Superior, on the other hand, beware of excessive suspicions; let him keep himself from a kind of useless jealousy (if I may so speak) over his subjects: not, namely, enjoining excessive fasts, or separating them from one another without use, and forbidding spiritual conversations or offices. Keep, finally, that saying of the Comic poet: Nothing too much; and that of the Wise Man: Be not over just (Eccles. 7:17); because he that wrings hard draws out blood (Prov. 30:33).

It is difficult, I confess, in this matter so to keep the golden mean; but the spiritual man judges all things as in clear air with the sun shining, as in a bright spring without mud: he judges, moreover, every day (Rom. 14:5).

But the carnal man judges as in dark air, with the sun not shining, or as in a turbid and muddy spring, not discerning between the coarse things, even with venomous reptiles mixed among them; as, besides, in a gloomy house, scarcely telling these things from those by groping. He judges, lastly, scarcely between day and night; and so he very often deceives himself, and stumbles by day as in darkness. But the guiding hand of a spiritual man ought to save him. And if he resists, if he spurns his Guide, if he would rather be his own director, his own Prior and Abbot, while he goes through darkness and steep places, he indeed will bear his own damnation, and the Guide will go free.

Eleventh Proposition

Consent sometimes goes before bodily pollution, sometimes accompanies it; sometimes there is feeling about it, not consent; but sometimes the feeling brings it about, and so it happens not only with consent or with feeling, but from consent. The last of these is the gravest, and makes the pollution properly blameworthy. Finally, the first three, although they do not make the pollution properly and of itself blameworthy, are nonetheless themselves faults and sins. But the other—when, namely, the pollution happens with feeling but not with consent—is not of itself a sin; indeed it often increases merit, as the matter of virtue, while the violence of the passion is resisted; which, the more it is felt, entices and drives the more, and so likewise the resistance has the more of virtue. Let us add that, although a bodily pollution, and one truly seminal, by day or by night, ought in no way to be wrung out knowingly, even for the sake of health, or of relief of the body, or of gaining the judgment of reason; yet if, while it comes about without such consent procuring or wringing it out, it is pleasing—not because it is a delight, but because it brings relief to the body—this is not judged to be a sin. Yet let a man, especially a novice, see that he does not lead himself astray by such complacency, pretending one thing and doing another. It is more wholesome, therefore, to turn one's thoughts and judgments away from this matter than to dwell on them.

Twelfth Proposition

A pollution by day or by night, while it is felt to flow out, ought not to be violently held back, if it is probably judged that such violence would be in vain; nonetheless, for the exercise of virtue, and to escape danger, it seems expedient that a man should try to hold it back as far as he feels or finds it can conveniently be done. For even if this holding back should harm the body, it will profit the soul. Nature afterwards, in one way or another, casts such a humor from itself. This is clear in women after childbirth, whose breasts dry up while the milk is not drawn out, which otherwise is always ready to flow. So these pollutions, and indeed the itchings, are more safely overcome by not using and not exercising them, but by abstaining. *(col. 345)* They know it who have had experience, even in sensual itching. And as for this pollution, even in waking: if from beginning to end it has reason and will continually resisting, as far as it can according to the case in hand, the will shall be reckoned not only not to have sinned mortally, but to have merited in many ways, according to that saying of blessed Lucy: If you corrupt me against my will, my chastity will be doubled to my crown. The case of pollution by day can happen to those who must of necessity hear Confessions, or think or do some such things, upon which such a passion of foulness sometimes follows, though they resist with all their power and guard themselves from beginning to end. And if anyone says: Let such a one, who is so frail and slippery, give up hearing Confessions, and preaching, and the like—the answer is that in many cases this ought not to be done, because of the necessity of counsel, the avoiding of scandal, and the obligation of office. But what these cases are cannot be determined generally by rule; let us refer it to what a wise man will judge, when the condition of the circumstances has been weighed. Yet I counsel that one who is to hear Confessions in such danger should come prepared, with fear and trembling. Let him turn away besides, as far as he can, his face, or the eye of the flesh, and no less the eye of the mind, from sensual gazing on the one who speaks or confesses; but let him ascend into the citadel of reason, and there consider that one's soul as sick and wounded, because the flesh profits nothing (John 6:64).

Finally, one about to celebrate, if he can defer this duty of hearing until after his Mass, acts more safely, because a recent flux of this kind impedes celebration more than an old one. Let the confessor also set himself in that bodily state in which he will be less stimulated — standing, or kneeling, or prostrating himself somewhere. Let his speech, when it comes to such things, be brief and firm — especially where the penitent is ready, shame not holding him back, to pour out the whole poison of his own accord; but where by a certain affability one must wring from a too shamefaced penitent the nakedness of his uncleanness, there is certainly greater danger. Yet if charity descends to search these unclean things — not curiosity or wantonness — the Author of charity, God, will help, making with the temptation a way out (1 Cor 10:13).

For fuller understanding of the foregoing, note first the Summa Confessorum, title on bigamists, where it is asked how virginity is lost; also the little treatise which some ascribe to Saint Thomas, but which from style and matter appears rather to be Bonaventure's, beginning Quoniam fundamentum et janua…, and it is very useful.

Finis.