St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE GOLDEN KEY

Llave de oro

From the Spanish of the Barcelona edition of 1860

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 *Llave de oro, o serie de reflexiones que, para abrir el corazón cerrado de los pobres pecadores, ofrece a los confesores nuevos* (first published 1857), in the Barcelona edition of 1860 (Librería Religiosa), where it is bound with Arsdekin's Latin *Apparatus*, which is not Claret's and is not translated. One Latin passage meant only for the confessor's private information is not translated. Where the copy used is illegible, the missing words have been supplied from another copy of the same edition; one sentence, on the remedies for the vice, breaks off in the printed book itself.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

To Confessors

My dearly beloved brethren in Jesus Christ: the Lord, in his divine goodness and infinite mercy, has deigned to entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with power to loose all sinners who come well disposed and to leave those who are not disposed still bound. It is your duty to use the means that charity dictates and zeal suggests to dispose those who are not disposed, and to bring healing to all. So it has seemed to me that the best gift I could offer you was this GOLDEN KEY, the key to the heart of man. With it you may open that royal chamber which is the dwelling of God, King of kings and Lord of lords, if it is adorned with grace; or the cave of the prince of darkness, if instead of grace it holds the filth and foulness of mortal sin.

For clearer understanding I must tell you that the heart of man is a castle with only one door, called the will. This door has a lock with two springs, called I WILL and I WILL NOT: I will the good; I will not the evil. The key to this lock, which moves these two springs, is the knowledge of the good, by which it opens and wills, and the knowledge of evil, by which it shuts and refuses. That is why the ancient philosophers said: *Nihil volitum quin praecognitum* \[nothing is willed that is not first known\].

This lock shuts so fast, and the castle is so impregnable, that neither the Angels of heaven, nor men on earth, nor the devils of hell can open it and take the castle. Even God himself seems to respect it, not wishing to constrain the will he has given, nor to destroy in that nature the wonderful order in which he wisely created it. Hence the castle of the heart is taken only by treachery, and its door opens only to the appearance of a good. Someone in charge of guarding a castle must watch closely and know how to tell friends from enemies, opening the door to the first and letting them in, and shutting it on the second and firing on them. So too a man must watch closely: open the door and let into his heart God, his chief friend, and whatever leads and belongs to God; and shut it fast and fire on Satan and all that belongs and leads to him. However flattering these things appear, and though they say they are our friends, that they are good, that they will make us happy, let us not believe them, for their goodness is only apparent, meant to deceive us, rob us and kill us. The enemies are cunning and will leave no means of temptation untried, perhaps even using terror and dread. Yet a man must not lose heart, for he knows well what Jesus Christ says: not to fear him who can take only the life of the body and after that has nothing more he can do, but only him who can take the life of the body and cast the soul into hell to burn for all eternity.

Oh, if man knew the malice of sin and the harm it does him in body and soul, in time and in eternity! I am certain he would not sin so easily, nor drink iniquity like water. If he were ever caught off guard and fell, he would have no rest until he had driven so evil a guest from his house. He would be like someone who finds thieves in his house by surprise: he cannot rest and is full of fright until he is free of them. Or like a man who has been made to swallow poison at a banquet. Surely, had he known that the deadly poison was in that golden cup full of delightful and delicious liquor, he would not have taken it; and as soon as he knows he is poisoned, he makes every effort to bring it up. Man would do the same if he really knew that sin is exactly such a golden cup, full perhaps of momentary delight and passing pleasure, but poisoned with a deadly

venom. If he were ever caught unawares and drank it, the moment he noticed he would cast it from him.

This, then, is the reason for writing this little book. It contains a series of brief reflections and warnings to be given to people so that they may not sin, and, if they have had the misfortune to sin, so that they may cast out the deadly poison of guilt at once. There is no doubt that if a man comes to form a true idea of the harm sin does to the soul, he will flee from it as quickly as, or more quickly than, he flees what does serious harm to the body. That is why the Holy Spirit says: *Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata* \[Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent\] (Ecclus. 21:2). One flees a serpent not only from its bite but also from its neighbourhood, even its presence. No one has patience to sleep beside a serpent, a viper, a toad, a salamander or any other poisonous creature. If anyone has ever rested beside such an enemy, it was because he did not know it; the moment he found out, he ran away, almost speechless with fright at the danger he had been in. And if he does this to escape a temporal punishment, how much more quickly will he do it to escape eternal punishment?

The reflections given here are few and short. The point is not to give the poor penitent a long discourse on each vice, but a brief reflection suited to his capacity, which he understands well and which pierces his heart, so that he humbles himself and repents. Then God will not despise him, but will receive him like the prodigal son.

The Golden Key

First Commandment

Simple and Brief Reflections the Confessor May Make to His Penitent, According to the Sins He Confesses

To proceed with clarity and method, we shall follow the Commandments of the law of God in order. Under each we give the reflections we have often used, which God has deigned to bless and make very fruitful.

The first commandment is: To love God above all things.

Love God, who is so good and so worthy of love. Yes, my brother, let us love God, since he loved us first: he is our Father, our Lord and Master, our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer. Oh, how much God loves us! Love must be repaid with love. Let us love him, then, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength, since we are bound to do so by the precept we have received.

If you wish to keep this precept as you should, you must keep and observe his holy commandments without breaking them. You must direct all your thoughts, words and deeds to his greater honour and glory. Yes, my brother, you must direct and order everything with this right intention. I say everything, because even the things you are obliged and need to do, such as eating, drinking, working, sleeping and the rest, become greatly meritorious if done with this right intention and in the grace of the Lord. Another thing by which you will please God and show him that you love him is to bear the pains, sorrows, adversities, persecutions and so on with patience, resignation and conformity to his divine will, in imitation of Jesus Christ our adorable Redeemer.

It is also an act of love of God to rejoice that God is known, loved and served, and to feel pain, sorrow and distress at seeing him offended and wronged; and therefore to try to have him loved by all and offended by none.

Whoever wishes to love God as he should, and as he is bound to, must be grateful for the great and wonderful benefits he has received. All nature teaches us this gratitude. The earth answers the kindly hand of the farmer who sowed it with abundant harvests; trees answer the care given them with plentiful fruit; and the brute animals are faithful and carry the loads and the persons of those who feed them. How many animals put ungrateful man to shame by their gratitude! How faithful the dog is to its master, for example! Day and night it guards his goods and person, greets and fawns on him a thousand ways, and never bites him. But ungrateful man, worse than a mad dog, barks at his Lord with the evil words he utters and bites him with the sins he commits. And since his bites are those of a mad dog, they wound and, as far as lies in him, kill Jesus Christ; as the Apostle says, they crucify him again.

Brother, if you love God you will be loved by God, and God will make his dwelling in your heart. So you must live in the grace of God and not in sin, for sin is the mortal enemy of God and of you too. Ah, what harm sin does! Flee it; keep away from it as from the sight of a serpent, for it would make you God’s enemy, unworthy of heaven and deserving of hell. You must look on it not as a friend but as your cruellest enemy, never letting it enter or stay in your heart. What would you say if you saw that Peter, say, always lives with John, dwells in his house, sleeps in his bed, and they walk out together, laugh together, amuse themselves together, and wherever one is the other is too? What would you say? No doubt you would say that Peter’s best friend is John, according to the well-known principle of St Thomas: *Amans est in amato* \[the lover is in the beloved\]. Now, then, what shall we say of a man who is in mortal sin, who lives with it, eats with it, sleeps with it, walks and amuses himself with it? We shall say that, far from hating sin, sin is his best friend, since he always lives with it; that he does as the Jews did, preferring the Barabbas of sin to Jesus, and

wanting Jesus crucified.

I especially urge you to make aspirations and acts of the love of God very often, for, as St Teresa says, they are like wood thrown on a fire, which keeps it alive and makes it grow.

Second Commandment

The second commandment is: Not to take the name of God in vain.

§ I. To Those Who Swear Truthfully but Have the Habit of Swearing

I ask them: Why do you swear without cause? They answer me: So as to be believed in what I say. Well, I tell you that by swearing like this you will be believed less, for whoever swears without cause marks himself as a liar. Just as a man who uses crutches gives clear sign that he is lame, so a man who uses the crutches of oaths shows that he limps in the truth. There are some who cannot hold a conversation without these oaths coming out: "As God exists," "May I never move from this spot," "May I never see the face of God," and so on. These people, far from being believed, are believed even less. Let us look at the matter a little more closely. Is the person before whom you swear a scoundrel or a man of honour? If a scoundrel, he will not believe you, because he will think you are swearing falsely, as he himself sometimes does. If a man of honour, he will not believe you either, because you are not speaking like a man of honour but as scoundrels do; for men of honour never speak like that, but follow what Jesus Christ says in his holy Gospel: *Est, est; non, non* \[Yea, yea; no, no\]. That is what you must do. Never swear in vain like this; get used to always telling the truth, and you will see how you are believed. And if they still will not believe you, let them go and see for themselves.

So beware of swearing, remembering the proverb:

> *In the house of him who swears Misfortune never fails.*

I must tell you that to swear like this, truthfully but without cause, now and then, is a venial sin; but to have the habit of swearing is a mortal sin, because of the proximate danger one is in of sometimes swearing falsely. So you must resolve never again to swear as you have done till now. To amend, take the following remedy.

Remedy. 1. A firm resolution never to swear again. 2. Every morning pray three Hail Marys to Most Holy Mary and an Our Father to your Guardian Angel. 3. If an oath ever slips out, as soon as you are alone make a cross on the ground with your tongue, kiss it, and pray a Hail Mary to Most Holy Mary, that she may obtain for you the grace to amend this vice.

§ II. To Those Who Swear to Do Something Evil

My brother, have you sworn to do something evil? Yes. Then you must know that each time you have committed two sins, mortal if the thing was grave: one against religion, the second commandment, and the other against the precept to which that thing belongs. For example, against the third, if you swore not to go to Mass on a certain holy day of obligation or to work on a certain feast day; against the fourth, if you swore not to obey your parents; against the fifth, if you swore to kill your enemy, and so on. If the thing sworn is light, these are two venial sins, one against religion and the other against the precept or virtue the thing sworn opposes. St Alphonsus Liguori, however, inclines to the view that the sin against religion is grave, because of the grave irreverence done to God in calling him to witness a sin, even a light one. I should note that when someone, moved by anger, swears, "As God exists, I'll kill you," and the like, St Alphonsus says that he does not ordinarily commit mortal sin, because of the lack of knowledge or deliberation with which he says it. Such oaths, whether of grave or light matters, must not and may not be kept; otherwise one would imitate

Herod, who had the Baptist beheaded because he had promised with an oath to the dancing girl, daughter of Herodias, to grant her whatever she asked.

Reflection. You must know, my brother, that by this oath you do grave injury and irreverence to God. To understand it better, tell me: would you dare to go before a person of authority and goodness and tell him he must be witness to a wicked or knavish deed you intend to commit? That is exactly what you do, and infinitely worse, when you swear to something unlawful. You call the Lord of all things to witness your sin, and want him to set the seal of his authority on your crime. Your wickedness would be greater still if you meant to carry out the evil you have promised by oath, for that would be making the divine authority serve as a bond of iniquity for carrying out the very wickedness it absolutely forbids.

Remedy. The same as in § I.

§ III. To Those Who Swear Falsely

My brother, have you sworn to a lie? Yes.

First excuse. "But I wasn't harming anyone." Indeed! Is God no one? Are you no one? You must know that you committed two sins, one venial and the other mortal. I say venial, supposing the lie was light; but the other is mortal and very grave, because of the grave irreverence done to God, and you made yourself liable to the eternal pains of hell.

Reflection. You must know, my brother, that swearing falsely admits no lightness of matter: that is, to swear like this is always a most grave mortal sin. Would you have the nerve to call a great lord of virtue and power as a false witness? Certainly not. If anyone has ever tried to back up a lie with perjured witnesses, he did not seek out a man of honour but a scoundrel or a bandit. Yet this is what you do when you swear falsely: you make the witness of your lie that very God who is called the God of truth, and is Truth itself, *Ego sum veritas* \[I am the truth\], and you treat him like the vilest and most abominable of the rabble. That is why St Thomas says that perjury is a greater sin than homicide, because perjury is against God, and homicide against man.

Second excuse. "Father, I swore to do a friend a favour." Badly done. To do a man a favour you have done a very great disfavour to God, the best of friends, and gravely harmed yourself, for by this false oath you have offended God and made yourself unworthy of heaven and deserving of hell.

Third excuse. "Father, if I hadn't sworn like that, they would have caught and perhaps killed a man, because something would have come out that there were already some signs of, and if it were known it would have cost him his life, or at least a long term in prison."

It does not matter that harm comes to an individual when the public good requires it. See, says St Alphonsus, how crimes multiply when witnesses deny what they have seen: so wrongdoers are acquitted, and thefts, murders and so many other evils increase. If such men were punished, we should not have to lament so many crimes. You must know that authority is like a surgeon who tries to cure a patient and applies the remedy where the disease is, and when a limb is cancerous, cuts it off so that the whole body may not perish. So authority, as surgeon of the whole moral body, when it sees an individual who is, so to speak, cancerous and pernicious to the whole body by his crimes, separates or cuts him off. But how can it do this if the witnesses who know the facts do not declare them? For even if the judge suspects and presumes who committed the crime, his hands are tied, since he must proceed *secundum allegata et probata* \[according to what is alleged and proved\], as is well known.

Fourth excuse. "Father, my friend would have lost his lawsuit." A fine idea! So that your friend might win a temporal lawsuit, you have lost the spiritual and eternal one. A fine charity indeed! To show charity to your neighbour you have committed a most grave sin and deserved hell.

Fifth excuse. “To get what I wanted, I not only had to swear falsely myself; I also had to find some others to do the same.” Then you have committed many sins, because you are the cause of all the sins they committed in swearing. You are also guilty and bound to make restitution for the damage you caused your opponent by your false oaths. If you have anything the judge awarded you because of the false witnesses you produced, it is not yours, and you are bound to restore it, however much it was decided in your favour. You must know that each witness committed three mortal sins by swearing like this before the judge to the harm of a third party, and you must answer for all of them.

The sin of perjury, or swearing falsely, has always been hated and punished. The sacred canons impose severe penances on it. Civil law declares perjurers infamous. In several ancient nations their hand was cut off. The Scythians punished the perjurer with death. The Japanese still punish perjurers in some cases today. From all this you must infer how great a horror oaths deserve when made without the proper conditions, which are truth, justice and necessity. When these are present, swear by all means; but without them never, for God would punish you even in this world, as has happened to others, and afterwards in the next with the most terrible pains of hell.

Remedy. The same as in § I.

§ IV. Blasphemy

Blasphemy is saying or doing something against the honour of God and the Saints: for example, cursing God, the Virgin or the Saints; using them in filthy oaths; saying something evil of them; saying that God has not done things well, that he does not care for us, that if God were God he would not permit this or that, and so on.

Blasphemy is against God, against the Most Holy Virgin and against the Saints. Some authors say that blasphemies against the Virgin and the Saints are distinct in kind from those against God. But St Alphonsus says not, because blasphemy is not directed against the excellence of the Saint except insofar as it refers immediately to God: *ideo non contra duliam, sed contra latriam peccant, et propterea non tenentur explicare an Deum vel Sanctos blasphemaverint* \[therefore they sin not against dulia but against latria, and so they are not bound to state whether they blasphemed God or the Saints\]. To me, however, it seems more fitting to make the distinction. When someone who does not have the habit of blasphemy lets a blasphemy slip, moved by passion, it is not a mortal sin. When someone has the habit of blasphemy and does not make every possible effort to root out that vice, all the blasphemies he utters are mortal sins. When someone, moved by passion, utters many at once, it is counted as a single sin.

Reflection. Do you blaspheme against the Saints? You must know, brother, that the Saints are the friends, household and courtiers of God; and just as God is honoured in his Saints, so too he is blasphemed and offended in them. If a great lord saw his household servants unjustly mistreated, would he not resent it? So God too resents blasphemies spoken against the Saints.

Do you blaspheme against Most Holy Mary? What an affront to God! When he hears his Daughter, Mother and Spouse blasphemed, God is so angered that in a way he bears it less than blasphemies spewed against himself.

Do you blaspheme against Christ? Ah, wretch! Ah, ungrateful one! Do you know who Christ is? He is true God and true man. As God he is the Son of the eternal Father, and as man he is the Son of the Virgin Mary. For love of you he came down from heaven to earth; he redeemed and saved you. He continually acts as your advocate with his Father, so that had it not been for him you would have been burning in hell many years ago. And you, like a raving sick man, turn against this good Father and heavenly Physician, as a mad dog turns on its benefactor. Oh, what wickedness!

Blasphemies against God! Against this holy and terrible name! Oh, what monstrous ingratitude! Do you know who God is? God is that sovereign Lord who brought all things out of nothing and preserves them by the same power by which he created them. This same God created you and preserves you. This God whom you dare to blaspheme is adored by the Saints, served by the Angels and revered by the whole heavenly court, and the Seraphim out of reverence must cover their faces with their wings. Ah, my brother, reflect a little, and ask yourself, or else I will ask you: Who is God? And who is this who utters blasphemies? Ah, my God! A God so holy, so good, so mighty, blasphemed by a vile worm of the earth!

What do you say when you blaspheme? Ah, words most unworthy not only of a Christian but even of a well-bred and educated man. Just notice whether a man of breeding, education and honour ever uses such expressions. This is exactly what makes the wickedness you commit when you blaspheme so much greater: the greater the one offended and the lesser the offender, the greater the crime. And what do you do when you blaspheme? You say things against God you would not dare say to the vilest man of the rabble. You spew such filth against God as you would not dare spew against a man. Ah, holy God, how blasphemers treat you! As if you were the vilest and filthiest corner of the world; for blasphemers you are the privy where filth is thrown.

Tell me, brother: before a general or a king already angry with you, would you dare to hurl curses in his face and tell him you defile yourself on him? Certainly not. Then how do you not refrain from hurling blasphemies against this God who is angry with you and has his sword drawn to slay you? If fear of a general or a king would hold you back, why does this great God not hold you back, King of kings and Lord of lords, with power over body and soul to cast you at once into hell with the devils? Since you speak the language of devils, it is only right that you should go with them, and like them you will hear the sentence if you do not amend. Hear what Scripture says: *Maledicti erunt qui contempserint te, et condemnati erunt omnes qui blasphemaverint te* \[Cursed shall they be that shall despise thee: and they shall be condemned that shall blaspheme thee\] (Tob. 13:16).

First excuse. “Father, I was angry with the work, the animals, the people,” and so on. What fault is it of God, the Virgin or the Saints if these things do not go as you would like? Why should they pay for the anger these things cause you? What would you say of someone who, annoyed by such things, came and gave you a beating? You would surely say to him: “What fault of mine is it, that you strike me like this?” What, then, do you answer Jesus, who asks you what he asked Malchus: *Cur me caedis?* \[Why strikest thou me?\] Why do you strike me with these blasphemies?[1]

Second excuse. “Father, I was angry and didn’t know what I was saying or doing.” If you did not know, learn it. What would you say to someone who, after mistreating you badly, said to justify himself, “Forgive me, I didn’t know what I was doing”? Surely you would not be satisfied with such an excuse, and would say to him: “If you don’t know, learn it.”

Third excuse. “Father, I say it without malice, only to frighten my dependants so that they do what I tell them.” What would you say of someone who, without malice, only to frighten others, seized an innocent man and killed him in front of them? You would say he is a barbarian, a brute, and deserves the garrotte. You do the same, to frighten people, as you say: you kill the most innocent Jesus. Hear what St Augustine says: *Non minus peccant qui blasphemant Christum regnantem in caelis, quam qui crucifixerunt ambulantem in terris* \[Those who blaspheme Christ reigning in heaven sin no less than those who crucified him as he walked on earth\]. And you sin even more, for they did not know him, and had they known him they would not have crucified him; but you know that it is Jesus whom you persecute, and, as far as lies in you, crucify again. You must know that blasphemy is a greater sin than homicide, because homicide ends immediately in the creature, while blasphemy reaches the Creator.

Fourth excuse. “Father, experience has taught me that unless I let off a few blasphemies the animals won’t move.” Ah, wretch! It is not the blasphemies that make the animals move; it is the shouts and blows you give them. They know from experience that when you utter such blasphemies a blow usually follows, and that is what moves them. As for the words, animals do not understand them, nor do they know whether you bless God or curse him. You can say, and shout if you like, “Blessed be God,” “God help me,” “Cursed be sin”; and then lay on a few blows, and you will see how the animals move without your offending God.

Fifth excuse. “Father, I don’t say it out of malice: it’s a vice or habit I have.” Ah, my brother! That does not excuse you; it makes you more guilty, for to sin from habit, says St Thomas, is a greater offence. Tell me: if a judge now rebuked a man for robbing and killing, and he answered, “Your Honour, don’t punish or rebuke me, for if I’ve stolen and killed it wasn’t out of malice but from a habit I have of robbing and killing whenever I get the chance,” the judge would say: “Rogue, scoundrel, for that very reason you deserve greater punishment.” The same answer must be given to the habitual blasphemer, for he deserves punishment more than anyone who blasphemes only rarely.

§ V. The Gravity of Blasphemy

The gravity of this crime is known from the punishments God has decreed against blasphemers and from the penalties legislators have imposed. Pharaoh the blasphemer was drowned in the sea. Sennacherib the blasphemer lost his army of 185,000 men and was murdered by his sons. Antiochus died covered in stench. Holofernes was beheaded by Judith. Nestorius died with his tongue eaten by worms. I myself saw a blasphemer struck by apoplexy in his tongue, so that he could never speak again. I also saw a foul-mouthed woman whose tongue swelled so much it would not fit in her mouth.

PENALTIES. God commanded that the blasphemer be stoned to death (Lev. 24:16). Nebuchadnezzar decreed death against the blasphemer and that his house be destroyed (Dan. 3:96). By positive law there was the death penalty, and it was carried out until the eighth century. By the law of Castile his tongue was to be cut out and he was to be given a hundred lashes. By the law of Catalonia his tongue was to be pierced, and lashes besides. By military ordinance the blasphemer is gagged morning and evening for eight days.

Exhortation. My brother, never blaspheme, for you would be cursed by God in this life and damned in the next. Oh, what misfortunes you would have even in this world! Water would try to drown you, as it did Pharaoh the blasphemer; you would have falls and incurable diseases, like Antiochus the blasphemer; you would be murdered, like the blasphemers Sennacherib and Holofernes. And not only on you would misfortunes come, but on others too, for because of blasphemy God sends wars and other calamities on the earth. After the pains of this life you would have to go to the eternal pains of hell. Remember the verses that say:

> *Blasphemy’s an evil word: It makes a devil of a man. Whoever will blaspheme Shall burn in eternal fire.*

Fear the harm that will come to your fortune and body in this world. Fear the harm that will come to you in body and soul in hell in the next. Fear to offend a God so good, a Father so loving, who wants to make you happy in this world and afterwards for all eternity in the next. Blaspheme no more. Use the following remedy.

Remedy. 1. In the morning make a firm resolution not to blaspheme, and to that end ask God for grace through the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, praying three Hail Marys to her. 2. If you get angry, or anger starts to rise, keep quiet. You may say: “Most Holy Virgin, help me”; “God help me”; “Cursed be sin”; for a good word is said as quickly as a bad one. 3. If you happen to blaspheme almost against your will, ask God’s pardon, and as soon as you can, make a cross on the ground with your tongue, kiss it, and pray a Hail Mary. 4. Avoid gambling and those who speak foully. If you ever hear foul speech, say, “Hail Mary most pure,” and pray to God for them, as the members of the Society of Most Holy Mary do.

Omne quippe peccatum comparatum blasphemiae levius est \[Every sin compared with blasphemy is lighter\] (St Jerome). Blasphemy is a greater crime than a false oath, because in a false oath God is taken as witness to a falsehood, while in blasphemy falsehoods are spoken about God himself (St Augustine). We have already said, following St Thomas, that a false oath is a greater sin than homicide.

Great as the sin of blasphemy is, it is also the most foolish sin, for it brings no pleasure, as lust does, and gains or gets nothing, as theft does. Tell me, brother, what have you gained by your blasphemies? Nothing but hell. And even if you were given something for each blasphemy, you ought not to utter them. If I gave you a doubloon now to go before the general or the king and say "Death to the general" or "Death to the king," would you do it? Certainly not, for fear he would ruin you for it. Then why do you not fear God, who can ruin you for eternity?

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[1] Jn 18:23 (spoken to the servant who struck Jesus before Annas; Claret identifies him with Malchus).

Third Commandment

The third commandment: To keep holy the feast days.

§ I. Not to Work

Whoever works on feast days without an excusing cause sins mortally if he works more than two hours, and venially if he does not exceed or reach that.

Reflection 1. It is contrary to bodily health. Without rest on feast days the spent strength of the body cannot be restored; nature gives way, sinking under the heavy, continual burden of work, and opens the door to illness and even death itself. Nature itself shows this: it works for three seasons of the year and in the fourth seems to rest. Trees are not always laden with fruit. Beasts of burden cannot always bear the load. Nor can man work always. There is a time for all things, says the Wise Man, a time to rest as well as to work: *Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatiis transeunt* \[All things have their season, and in their times all things pass\] (Eccles. 3:1).[1] Work may be compared to eating. No one can live without eating, but one must not eat all the time, for then eating itself would do harm. The same must be said of work. No one should live without working, according to God's sentence on Adam: *In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es: quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris* \[In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return\] (Gen. 3:19). But one must not work always, or else work would harm and kill him. Those who order work on feast days I call *Anteviventes*: those who hasten their own end. Oh, what harm to the body!

Reflection 2. By working on feast days a man forgets his noble end, which is to know, love and serve God here on earth, and afterwards to see and enjoy him in heaven. Busy with his work he does not come to church, does not hear heavenly doctrine, grows up in ignorance, loses the love and fear of God, and becomes worse than a brute, the scourge of society, and finally one of the damned. Oh, what harm to the soul!

Reflection 3. God is resentful and wronged. What would you say of a steward or tenant farmer to whom his master said: "My brother, I hand this estate over to you on condition that of every seven bushels of wheat, say, you keep six and give me the seventh"? If, after the master had made such favourable terms, he kept all or part of what he was to give, would you not say that steward is discourteous, ungrateful and a thief? Now make the application. You must know that we are all like stewards. God our Lord, master of time and of all we have, grants us six of the seven days of the week, but reserves the seventh for himself. So if you rob him of that day by working for your own interests and comforts, you will be discourteous, ungrateful and a thief. And just as the master of that steward is displeased and finally turns him off his estate, so God does with those who work on feast days. He is not pleased with them; he does not bless their labours; he sends them

droughts, hailstorms, loss of animals, illnesses, and even deaths. That is why Holy Scripture says that when a man had gone to the hills and brought back a bundle of wood, God himself commanded that he be put away and killed.[2]

My brother, I command and beg you, for the love I bear your soul, not to work on feast days. Remember these words of mine:

To work upon a holy day Is losing, never gain. Better he whom God will aid Than he who rises early.

Excuses. "I worked so many hours to finish the job." Then work at it all the days of the week. Some don't want to work on Monday, perhaps not on Tuesday either, and then they find Sunday has come and their job still isn't done.

"Father, I've worked equally every day, because I'm not a Monday or Tuesday man." I am glad of it. In that case stay up an hour longer every day, and at the end of the week you will have six hours more.

"Father, I do that already, and even so I can't keep up with my work." In that case I tell you not to take on more work than you can do. If they brought you everything that is made in the city, you would certainly say you could not do it in so few days.

"Father, I do it to keep my customers happy." I answer that your best customer is God, and if you do not keep God happy you will have no luck and no health. And if you will not abstain now for God and for the good of your soul and body, a day will come when you will abstain, laid low on a bed of pain, perhaps in the grave, and your soul in hell.

§ II. To Hear Mass in Full on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

One sins mortally by not attending Mass on those days, unless there is some excusing cause.

Reflection. On these days God commands us to spend at least half an hour hearing Mass. What do you think: is it asking too much to require half an hour to hear one Mass, when he grants us so many hours and days for ourselves? Do you not see the injustice, ingratitude and unreasonableness of someone who does not attend holy Mass? By this wicked behaviour, is one not charging God with being an inconsiderate and overly demanding master who asks more than we can do?

To show more clearly the ingratitude of someone who does not attend holy Mass, I will tell you what happens at holy Mass, for many despise the best things because they do not know them. At Mass, as faith teaches, Jesus Christ in person renews on the altar the same sacrifice he made of himself on Calvary, though now without the shedding of blood, and offers it to the eternal Father for me, for you and for all, keeping all of us and each one in particular present to him. And yet, while Jesus Christ sacrifices himself for you, you will not take the trouble, even once a week, to attend such a sacrifice and accompany Jesus with gratitude, love and prayer.

What would you have said if, being present in Jerusalem when Jesus went to Calvary carrying his cross, you had seen Jesus glance at that crowd of onlookers and call one of them by name, saying: "Francis, say, do you know where I am going? I am going to Mount Calvary to sacrifice my life for you"; and Francis had answered: "Off you go, Lord, and good luck; I couldn't care less, and I don't want to take the trouble to climb that hill to keep you company. Go and die for me, then, while I go for a walk, to the gambling table, to my amusements; yes, I'm going to talk and enjoy myself with that person I like better than you"? I ask you now, what would you have said of this man? "That Francis was not a man but a tiger and a monster of ingratitude." Don't get so worked up, sir, for I must repeat to you these words of the prophet Nathan to David: *Tu es ille vir* \[Thou art the man\]. You are exactly that Francis, who instead of going to Mass, which is the living representation of the life, passion and death of Jesus Christ, go to the gambling table, for a walk, to your amusements. By your deeds have you not given an answer like that of our imaginary Francis?

“Father, I have attended Mass.” What? Have you perhaps attended as some do, talking, laughing, watching who comes in and goes out, perhaps having arranged to meet someone, or doing even worse things? “Father, to tell the truth, I have attended like that sometimes.” In that case you would have done less wrong not to attend. First, I must tell you that you did not hear Mass or fulfil the precept of hearing it, for the precept commands an act of religion, and so Mass must be heard religiously. Second, you profaned the church, which in itself is a horrible sin, and insulted Jesus Christ in his temple and at his very altar while he was being sacrificed there for you. To make it clearer, let us go back to the example of Francis. Suppose that Francis, instead of answering rudely as we said, had followed him to Calvary, but in such a way that each time he saw Jesus fall under the enormous weight of the cross he burst out laughing; when the Jews nailed him to the cross, he too gave him hammer blows; when Jesus was raised on high, he mocked him with the Jews, despised and jeered at him; and finally, to add to his torment, when Jesus said he was thirsty, he brought him gall and vinegar. What do you think of this second case? Did Francis not behave worse than in the first? Well, that is what you have done when you attended holy Mass without devotion.

Excuse. “Father, I’d like to go to Mass every day of obligation, and I’d like to hear it devoutly too; but my companions and friends distract me and make me talk and laugh.” Leave your companions, especially since they are the occasion of your straying and disorders. Better to walk alone than in bad company. Bad company is always bad, but in church it is doubly so.

PROVERBS.

> *Whoever chatters during Mass Gives the devils a laugh. Going to Mass and feeding the mule Cost no wage and lose no day.*

Remedies. 1. Always go to Mass early; and if possible attend the principal Mass without waiting for a later one. If there is no difficulty, always go before breakfast, for that way you avoid the risk of missing Mass and hear it more devoutly. Never go to the twelve o’clock Mass unless you must, for since that is the Mass at which most irreverences are committed, you risk hearing it badly. 2. Never go to Mass with companions. Go off to church by yourself, as Tobias did, who greatly pleased the Lord by it. 3. During Mass do not be curious in looking about or quick to talk, but recollected, meditating on the Lord’s passion. For this you may use a book containing the parts of the Mass, or pray the holy Rosary, or something similar. 4. On feast days occupy yourself in receiving the holy Sacraments, reading some spiritual book, making some devotions, and practising works of piety towards your neighbour. If there is some special church service, try to attend it.

§ III. Things Some People Commonly Do on Feast Days

I. *Dances.* First I must tell you that St Gregory says that converted pagans, given their frailty and weakness, were allowed some pagan amusements if they were indifferent, because they were very saddened to see other pagans they knew enjoying their amusements while they could not; and this was an obstacle to some embracing Catholicism. Dances are among these pagan amusements. But note that dances are of two kinds. Some are entirely unlawful by natural law: for example, because of the dance itself, the manner of dancing, the manner of dress, or the persons involved. Others, which have none of these features, are called indifferent or permitted; but the best of them are good for nothing, says St Francis de Sales. (The confessor may give some of the reflections the Saint offers, and also some of those in the *Letter to Young Women*.)

Excuses. “Father, I do nothing wrong at the dance.” Nor anything good. Tell me, when you go to the dance, would you dare offer it to God? Do you expect God to reward you for the hours you spent dancing? What does your conscience say? Even if you do not sin, perhaps the devil will use you to make others sin. What a pity that you should be the instrument of the devil, who uses you as bait to catch souls, as the fisherman uses bait to get the hook into the fish’s mouth and catch it! The eternal Father sent his Son into the world to save souls, and the devil sends you to the dance to damn them.

Tell me, do you love Jesus Christ? “I love him.” Would you dare to scourge Jesus Christ? “No, Father.” Or at least to approve such scourging by your willing presence, and if need be by handing the scourges to the executioners? “Not that either, Father.” Well, that is what you do. Do you know what happened in Madrid? A girl, urged by her friends and even by her own father, went to a dance one evening. While she was in the ballroom Jesus appeared to her, scourged and crowned with thorns, and said to her: “See, my spouse, how these people have treated me with the sins they have committed at the dance; and do you too want to join them?” She burst into tears and ran out. Believe me: run from dances; do not join such people. Would that you could say with Sara, who thanked God that she had never joined with those who play nor with them that walk in lightness![1]

Ah, young one, dancing as you go, You’re skipping into hell below!

II. *Courtship.* Those who do not wish to marry, or cannot, may not court. If they wish to marry, they may keep company for a short time. When they go with a good intention they do not ordinarily commit misconduct; but if it goes on a long time, more than half a year, however good their intention, passion is kindled, and they ordinarily commit grave sins.

I ask a young man: “Do you have a sweetheart?” “Yes, Father.” “How long have you been seeing her?” “Two months.” “Do you want to marry her?” “Not for now, Father, neither her nor anyone, because first I have to finish my studies in …” Then if you do not wish to marry, or cannot, why get involved with a sweetheart and entanglements? Keeping company like this brings you nothing but harm. It distracts you from your goal; it harms the girl by keeping her deceived; and it puts you in danger of sin, for man is like gunpowder, and woman is fire. So, my brother, believe me, for I wish you well: leave the girls alone; when the time comes you will find one. Commend yourself to God, apply yourself to your art, trade or profession, and be virtuous. If you do, I assure you that in his own time God will give you a good wife. Imitate blessed St Joseph, who, commending himself to God and doing his duty, received the best spouse the world has ever seen: the Most Holy Virgin.

(The confessor should always try to prevent such courtships, and tell them that the best or only way to choose well in this matter is a holy life, prayer and counsel. Nevertheless, if they wish to marry, they may be allowed to keep company for some time, but not more than half a year.)

Another will say: “Yes, Father, I want to marry her.” Then if you want to marry her, marry her soon. *Quod facturus es, fac citius* \[That which thou dost, do quickly\],[2] and stop keeping company, for opportunity makes the thief, as the saying goes.

If someone says he has been keeping company for a year or more, even if he says he wants to marry, he should not be allowed to keep company any longer, because he has already sinned in thought, word or deed, or soon will; and it is already a sin to be in the proximate occasion of sin, whether together, alone or with someone else.

Examples. If you take a pot full of cold water and set it by the fire, little by little it warms up, and finally it comes to the boil and boils over, either on the fire itself or behind it. So it is with two who keep company and love each other. Even if at first they have no evil purpose, little by little they warm each other, and finally they come to the boil and boil over: with each other, or sinning by themselves alone, or with some other person of bad life who is easy to have.

Another will say: “It’s true I’ve sinned, but I’m going to marry her.” That is no excuse. Marriage is a contract. In other contracts, someone who wants to buy a house, say, or an animal or a vineyard, may not live in the house until he has bought it or taken possession of it, nor use the animal until he owns it, nor harvest the vineyard before he takes possession of it. So too, one who is not married may not behave as if married. This is why some who seemed bound to be the happiest married couple in the world are the most unhappy: they harvested the vineyard before its time. The farmer who picks his grapes before they are ripe makes bad

wine, even if the vines are of the best quality. So with engaged couples: even if both are of very good character, if they keep Easter before Palm Sunday, woe to them!

"Father," he will reply, "we'll get married soon enough." That is the greatest punishment God can give you. For a man who has harvested his vineyard before its time and made bad wine, the greatest punishment would be to give him nothing to drink but the bad wine he has made himself. "Then, Father, what should we do?" Let each stay in his own house, and when it is time for them to marry, well and good. Let them prepare with good works and prayers, for marriage is a Sacrament, and the grace it gives them will match the disposition with which they receive it. But woe to them if instead of preparing with good works they make themselves unfit with evil ones! Jesus and Mary will not be at their wedding, as at Cana of Galilee; the demon Asmodeus will be there instead, and will make them unhappy in time and in eternity.

Some girl will say: "Father, I don't want to sin, but he is so insistent …" Do you know the saying: "If there were no broody hens, there would be no chicks"? If you truly did not want it, he would not dare either. The woman you want for your wife, do not want her bad beforehand. The very fact that he comes to you with these things proves he treats you as a bad woman and comes only to make sport of you. To your face he will make you a thousand protestations and a thousand promises of marriage; but behind your back he will laugh at you and mock you a thousand ways. When he has dishonoured you, taken away your peace, grace and heaven, then he will abandon you, using the excuse that his parents will not allow it, or slander you by saying you have been with someone else, and say things about you that do you very little honour. And even if you do marry him, you will not live well together, for he will always think that as you were unfaithful with him before marriage, you will be so with others afterwards. Believe me, I say this from experience of what I have seen in marital disputes I have had to settle in the course of my ministry.

Warnings to mothers about daughters who are courting. Mothers, for God's sake I beg you, be careful about letting your daughters keep company. You must know that courtships will not make them marry sooner; rather they will make them marry later, or never. Look at what commonly happens. A girl keeps company with one young man. As it happens, another young man, handsome, rich and virtuous, had fallen in love with this daughter of yours. But this virtuous young man says to himself: "It's true I'd like that girl, but she is seeing so-and-so. I don't want to betray him; perhaps they mean to marry." He looks elsewhere and marries another. Meanwhile the first young man, after keeping company a long time with the girl, leaves her and marries someone else, giving his excuses; and the poor girl is left high and dry, perhaps never able to marry, when she would have married very well had she not kept company.

Believe me, mothers, do not allow your daughters long courtships. If you see that the young man courting her is not virtuous, or is not a suitable match, do not let them keep company. Do not do as some mothers do, who let their daughters grow fond of someone unsuitable and then, when they want to marry, prevent or hinder them. That is like letting a fire catch and then wanting to put it out when that is entirely impossible.

Examples. Some years ago a mother let her daughter grow fond of a young man and then would not let her marry. The girl went and threw herself into the sea, leaving her mantilla on the beach with this inscription: "My mother was my misfortune, and the sea my grave."

Another: a girl grew fond of a young man of very unequal station. Her parents would not let her marry him and made her marry another, with whom she never lived happily. One day she gave him poison, and seeing that he did not die as quickly as she wanted, she pierced his heart with an awl. She was discovered, confessed her crime, and died in disgrace on the scaffold.

Woe to you, mothers, who leave a courting couple alone! They are like two doves about to pair. You will pay for all the sins they commit. You will say you have never seen them do anything wrong. I believe it, because you go away, because you leave them alone, perhaps in the dark. But even if you do not see the misconduct they commit, God sees it, and will make you pay very dearly for it. St Bridget says she saw in hell a mother

damned for the sins her daughter had committed in the courtship she had tolerated.

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[3] III, 1"; the text is Eccles. 3:1.

[4] Num 15:32–36.

[1] Tob 3:17 (Douay).

[2] Jn 13:27.

Fourth Commandment

§ I.

Fourth Commandment

The fourth commandment is: To honour father and mother.

You must obey your parents when they forbid you, as they should, to go out at night, to gamble, to keep bad company, and anything evil.

By this you will know whether you are going by the way of Jesus or the way of the devil. Of Jesus the Gospel says that he obeyed and was wholly subject to his parents, the Virgin and St Joseph. So if you are obedient and gladly submit to your parents' will, you are going by the way of Jesus; you are doing very well. But if you will not obey them, if you oppose their reasonable will, you are following the way of the devil, who opposed the will of God and for that was cast into hell. Woe to you if you do not obey, for you too will be damned!

Example. I have read that when a girl died, people begged the Venerable Yepes to commend her to God, so that if she was in purgatory she might leave it sooner; and God let the Venerable know that those prayers did not help the dead girl, because she was condemned to hell for not obeying her parents. Ah, daughter! For God's sake obey your parents, or you will be damned for all eternity. If they took you now to prison and shut you in a cell full of fire, how you would scream! Ah, child, for God's sake have sense. See that if you fail in obedience you will be condemned without fail to the prison of purgatory, and perhaps to that of hell, from which you could never get out: there you would be burning, scorched and raging. Be obedient, child, or you will be unhappy in the next world, and even in this one you would be miserable.

I say that even in this world you would be miserable and would make yourself hateful to all, for whoever does not obey is not loved by her own family nor liked by others. How often it happens that a good young man wants to marry, asks about the girl he has in mind, and if he is told she does not obey her parents and is neither humble nor peaceable with her brothers and sisters, he changes his mind at once and does not want her. He says to himself: "Well! If she can't obey her parents now or keep peace with her sisters, she won't obey her husband or her in-laws either, or keep peace with her sisters-in-law." We know well that girls are like seedlings in a nursery bed: even when moved to another garden, they do not change their kind. Cabbages, chard, onions and so on, though transplanted, do not stop being cabbages, chard and so on. For a few days they look sad, and then they grow up prouder than before. So it is with girls. The disobedient and bad-tempered, when they marry, act bashful for a few days and go about modestly and patiently in the new house they have entered; but after a few days they take off the mask and are much prouder than they were before. That is why disobedient girls have no luck and find no husband; and if they find one, he will not be a good husband but a tyrant, a scourge God gives them as punishment for their disobedience, not a spouse who loves them.

Perhaps another will say she does not mean to marry but wants to be a nun… Worse still. I give you my word that unless you become more obedient and change that bad temper, I will never give you permission. The reason is obvious. How will you obey the superior and live in peace and union with the other nuns, if now you cannot obey your parents or keep peace with your sisters? How will you keep the vow of obedience if you do not know the virtue now?

"Oh, Father, my parents have such a difficult temper!" Yours is more difficult. Obey without answering back, and you will see they do not have the temper you imagine. As soon as they do not let you have all your whims, they have a difficult temper!

Remedies. 1. When they command you something not contrary to God's law, do it as promptly as you can and as well as you know how. 2. Do not answer back like some girls who, when told to do something, have the nerve to reply: "I'm not doing that; I'm not going there." 3. If you are busy with something, leave it at once, however good it is, and do not be put out by it; or at least say with all humility: "If you think it right, I'll finish this and then do the other; but if you want me to leave it, I'll do that too," and do as they say. Oh, how this obedience and docility please God and parents, and how he rewards it in heaven! Believe me, child, be obedient in imitation of Jesus and Mary, and when you feel some reluctance to do what you are told, say to yourself: "How long will you be proud and haughty? Jesus humbled himself and was obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross,[1] and will you not obey? Yes, Lord, yes: for love of you I will humble myself, obey and keep silent."

The obedience boys owe their parents. Son, for God's sake obey your parents in imitation of Jesus, who was so obedient to his Mother and St Joseph. That is what "Christian" means: an imitator of Christ. Otherwise you would imitate not Christ but the devil, who would not obey God and lost his being as an Angel and dweller in heaven and became one of the damned in hell. The same would happen to you. So try to obey in everything your parents command that is in keeping with God's law.

They will tell you not to go gambling, and you must obey, for gambling is the ruin of young men. They will tell you not to have love affairs, and you must obey, for they are the plague of youth. They will tell you not to keep bad company, and you must obey, for bad companions are thieves who would rob you of your virtues and leave you full of vices. Have few companions, one or two at most, and good ones; and if they are not good, have none, for it is better to walk alone than in bad company. They will tell you not to go out at night, and you must obey, for going out at night is a very bad sign. Indeed, the man who goes out at night for pleasure becomes a devil, not in appearance but in effect and in reality, through the sins he commits by disobeying his parents in a grave matter, as going out at night is in these times. They too would sin if they allowed you to go out at night without need, if they opened the door to you when you come home late, or left you the key to come in when you like.

The man who goes out at night also sins through the offences he commits: gambling, indecent songs, impure conversations, curses, blasphemies, companions, the danger of sinning by fights, thefts and so on, and the scandal he gives, and so forth. Oh, how God punishes young men who go about like this! Many have no luck and are as wretched as the prodigal son; others die in brawls, or kill and must escape and flee from justice, and sometimes cannot. See what happened; I can vouch for it because I was an eyewitness. A young man was out one night with other bad companions, worse than he. They brutally murdered a man. All the others escaped, and the law could catch only this unfortunate young man. He was condemned to death; I accompanied him to the execution, and after the sentence was carried out I preached on the scaffold itself beside the dead man. Ah, my son, for God's sake I beg you not to go out at night any more! Oh, if the same misfortune happened to you! You will tell me you have no intention of harming anyone. I believe it; but neither had that poor man, and the others committed the murder, and he was implicated and condemned to death. Believe me, my friend, I wish you well: do not go out at night any more, or God will punish you.

And so that you may see the offence given to God by such conduct, let me tell you some of what God himself says in the holy Scriptures: "He that afflicteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is infamous and unhappy" (Prov. 19:26). "He that curseth his father, and mother, his lamp shall be put out in the midst of darkness" (Prov. 20:20): that is, his life, in death. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and that despiseth the labour of his mother in bearing him, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it" (Prov. 30:17).

Hear the penalty God had laid down for the children of his people: "If a man have a stubborn and unruly son, who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother, and being corrected, slighteth obedience: they shall take him and bring him to the ancients of his city, and to the gate of judgment, and shall say to them:

This our son is rebellious and stubborn, he slighteth hearing our admonitions, he giveth himself to revelling, and to debauchery and banquetings: the people of the city shall stone him: and he shall die, that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel hearing it may be afraid" (Deut. 21:18–21).

Oh, if only this law were in force now too! We would not see so many bad sons. But if men do not punish, God does, so that these sins of children are always punished in this world and the next. Listen to what Martínez and St Alphonsus Liguori relate: "A mother had two sons. The elder went out at night, and however much his mother admonished him, all her warnings were useless. One night, after he had gone to bed tired of roaming, he was lying beside his younger brother when, behold, God sent him five demons. The chief of those infernal ministers seized that bad son by the feet, dragged him out of bed, and, laying him on the floor, with a great blade split him open from top to bottom and cut him in two. At once the other four demons each took a quarter of the wretch and carried him off, body and soul, to hell."

Here one may apply what Holy Scripture says: *that all the people hearing it may be afraid*. Indeed, my brother, who will not fear? Does God not have the same power now as then? Does he not abhor the disobedience and bad manners of children now as he did then? Yes. Fear, then, that the same may happen to you. Tell me, what would you do if some night, when you had lain down to rest, the devil appeared as executioner of divine justice, seized you by the feet, threw you out of bed and tore you to pieces? Strength, weapons and shouts would be no use to you there, just as criminals' bravado is no use when they are in the executioners' hands to suffer the penalty imposed on them. See that the demons are the executioners of God's justice, and when he pronounces sentence against you, you will not escape. Ah, my son, believe me, for I wish you well: never go out at night or with bad company; do not fail in obedience to your parents, who love you and wish you well. It is one of the things that most pleases God, and I give you my word that you will be happy and blessed in this world and the next.

[1] Phil 2:8.

§ II. Reverence

My brother, if you consider that parents are images of God, and that all paternity comes from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as St Paul says (Eph. 3:15),[1] you cannot help respecting it. You would therefore sin mortally if you insulted them to their face, calling them beasts, thieves, drunkards, witches, villains and so on. In ancient times a son who abused his father or mother in words was condemned to death. Holy Scripture says that whoever honours his father and mother will live a happy and long life; but on the contrary, whoever fails in this respect will be unhappy and wretched.

In proof of this truth I could tell you many examples. We read in Holy Scripture that Absalom failed in respect to his father: he tried to take his kingdom and made war on him; but God punished him so that he died hanging by his hair from an oak, pierced by three lances from the general Joab. Do you not see how God punishes bad sons?

Another example. See what St Bernardine of Siena relates. He tells that when a young man sentenced to death was already dead on the gallows, his beard was seen to grow and turn white like an old man's. The bishop was praying for the wretch and had a revelation that if God had not abandoned him for his lack of respect towards his parents, he would not have committed the crimes that brought him to the scaffold, and he would have lived to a very great age. Do you not see how failing in respect towards parents brings a short, unhappy and wretched life?

But you must know that the saying, as well known as it is true, will come true in you: "As you do, so you will be done by." St Alphonsus says that a father was barbarously treated by his son, who dragged him by the feet; and when they reached a certain spot, the father said: "Enough, son, go no further, for I once dragged

my own father as far as here, and God has allowed you to drag me in just punishment." Oh, if I had the power of St Anthony, who once, hearing the confession of a young man who had kicked his mother, filled him with such horror at this wickedness, and such sorrow and repentance, that on reaching home the son cut off his foot! I will not say you should cut yours off, but you should have the sorrow and repentance he had.

Instead of weeping and repenting, perhaps you will want to excuse yourself and tell me: "Ah, Father, my father has such a difficult temper, and my mother is unbearable!" But I will answer you with the words of God himself: "Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life. And if his understanding fail, have patience with him" (Ecclus. 3:14–15). Do you not remember the saying: "Against a father there is no arguing"?

Remedies. 1. For the past, ask God's pardon earnestly for having failed in respect and veneration towards his image, your father or mother. 2. When you get home, ask your father's pardon and, like the prodigal son, say to him: "Father, forgive me for the love of God, for I have sinned against God and against you." 3. Put on a heart of charity and patience. Do not get angry; and if you ever do, shut your mouth, call on the help of Jesus and Mary, and remember that when you were small they too had much to bear from you.

[1] Eph 3:14–15.

§ III. Support

You must support them when they are poor, blind, sick and so on. Remember that when you were small you could not earn your keep: they fed and clothed you. It is only right that you do the same for them. The earth repays the farmer gratefully, giving much more than was sown in it. And will you be ungrateful to your father, who rendered you so many services in your childhood? Plants and trees repay; would you not? Beasts are grateful; will you not be?

Excuses. Be quiet, for God's sake, you are in the wrong. I will explain myself better with a comparison, and you will see your wicked conduct more clearly. Have you seen an orange? While it is whole and full of juice it is prized and wanted; but as soon as it is squeezed it is despised and thrown on the rubbish heap. You have done the same with your father. While he had something, you valued him and loved him; but as soon as you have squeezed him dry, you despise him and throw him out like worthless dross.

For God's sake I beg you to have more charity and piety towards your father. This is one of the means God has put into your hands to fill you with happiness, if you fulfil it well. But take care: if you do not behave towards your father as you should, misfortunes will come on you, your house and your family.

Remedies. 1. Take no food or drink unless there is first some for your parents. 2. As for clothing, see that they lack nothing, whether for the body or for the bed. 3. Food, clothing and everything else should be given them gladly and lovingly, and never grudgingly or with disdain. 4. In illness, see that they are well cared for in body and soul; and after death, with the proper funeral and prayers for their eternal rest.

§ IV. Duties of Parents

In the little books entitled *Advice to Fathers of Families, Married Women and Widows,* I have already described how parents should bring up their children well. Nevertheless I will give a few brief reflections here.

Point I. Vigilance. Fathers and mothers, you must watch over your sons and daughters and be wary of all the evil they may hide. There are mothers who say, after some misfortune has happened: "Oh, who would have thought it?" You should have thought it, fathers and mothers; you should have watched and taken precautions. You take care with the little ones so they do not fall down the stairs, into the well, the river and

so on. So too you must watch that they do not fall into any vice. It is true that while they are very small, before the age of reason, there is no mortal sin; but woe to the boys and girls who begin to come to the knowledge of evil! What ordinarily happens is that they grow used to wickedness as if it were second nature, and afterwards drink iniquity like water. This is for two reasons: first, because their corrupt nature, inclined to evil from their earliest years, drags them towards evil; second, because, having become familiar with vice from their tenderest years, they no longer know how to abhor it, and so they commit wicked deeds with the greatest ease and almost without remorse of conscience.

Therefore, parents, and especially you mothers, never have your sons and daughters in your bed, especially if they are over four or five. What harm has followed from this! Nor should you make boys and girls sleep together, even if they are brother and sister. I know of many wicked things that have followed from it. There is danger, and great sins sometimes follow, even when they are of the same sex. Nor should you make boys sleep with maidservants or other older girls, however small the boys are. Best of all would be for each to sleep separately in his own bed.

Mother, try to watch whom they play and amuse themselves with, for sometimes the devil uses other boys and girls to catch them. When your children are grown, you must warn them kindly, urging them not to keep bad company, not to go to the gambling house, not to have love affairs or friendships with girls or other women; to be good; and that when the time comes God will provide. Never let them go out at night without need, for that is the ruin of young men. If they go out, do not open the door to them, nor leave them a key so they can open it themselves.

Someone will say: “Ah, Father, I don’t open the door gladly when he comes in at night; I do it only so that he won’t be lost!” Ah, woman, the son who goes out at night is already lost; and if you open the door to him you will be lost along with him. Believe me, do not open the door to him: better that he be lost alone than both of you.

Do not allow your daughters immodest dress or bad dances; even those not considered bad are very dangerous. Do not let them keep company at night; and even by day do not let them be alone together, nor even by day and in company allow long courtships. With young men who like to court girls for a long time you must do what you would do if you kept a dry-goods shop. Suppose a customer came and said he liked such-and-such cloth, asked its price and said he wanted to buy it… If he repeated the same thing most days for a month, a year, and never made up his mind to take that cloth, what would you say to such a customer? I think you would say to him: “If you want it, take it and God be with you; but if you don’t want to buy it, go in God’s name, and someone else will take it. As it is, you neither take it nor let anyone else, since they see you’ve been haggling over it. But if you want to take it, take it now and welcome, and don’t waste my time.” You must do the same with these young men who like to court your daughters. If you see he is not a suitable match, take care not to give him room or opportunity to court. If you like him, do not delay long in telling him what I said about the cloth; for if not he, another will take her; and even if he intends to take her and marry her, it is not right to waste time and put oneself in danger of sinning, as unfortunately happens.

Point II. Instruction. From their earliest years teach them Christian doctrine, and to fear and love God. Would that you said what the holy queen Blanche, mother of St Louis, king of France, used to say! “My son,” she said to him, “I love you dearly; nevertheless I would rather see you dead in my arms than in mortal sin. Oh, my son, never sin: as long as you keep yourself without sin you will be beautiful as a little angel; but if you should have the misfortune to commit a mortal sin, your soul would become ugly as a devil.”

When he is in front of the fire, or of some oil lamp or candle, you can say to him: “Ah, my son, see, you could not bear to hold your little hand in those burning coals, nor your finger in that flame; well, if you committed a mortal sin and died in it, you would have to go to the flames of hell, to burn for all eternity.”

“Ah, my little son, never sin. Just as you would not dare to do anything wicked in front of me, neither must you do it when I am away; for though I do not see you, God sees you, and he can strike you dead on the spot and cast you into hell.”

Showing him a Crucifix, say to him: “Look, my son, at Jesus Christ: how much we have cost him! For love of us he willed to die on a cross to save and redeem us. Always love him; never offend him; never ever sin, for whoever sins crucifies him again.”

Before an image of the Most Holy Virgin say to him: “Do you see, my dear son? This is an image of Most Holy Mary: she is your Mother who is in heaven. Be devoted to that Lady who is so good. Let’s see you say a Hail Mary to her.”

Teach him also how to hear Mass, as in the little book entitled *Straight and Sure Way to Reach Heaven*; and it will be good for him always to have it at hand so he stays still. Teach him also how to pray the holy Rosary and make the Christian exercises of morning and night, and when he is old enough, how to receive the holy Sacraments. How blessed would the boys and girls be who were brought up like this by their mothers! Do it, madam, and I give you my word that God will repay you, and even in this world you yourself will gather the fruits of the good seed you sow.

Excuse. “I have other duties.” I believe it; but you have this one too, and it is among the chief. Just as you provide him with food for the body and do not let him perish because of your occupations, so you must not deprive him of this food for the soul, which is worth more than the body. So that you may keep it in mind, I will summarize the virtues you should instil in him towards God.

1. Teach him that there is a God.

2. That there are three persons in the Most Holy Trinity.

3. That the second became man for us, and suffered and died on a cross to save and redeem us.

4. That God is in every place and sees and hears everything.

5. Show him images of Jesus Christ; tell him how much he has loved us and that this is why he did and suffered so much.

6. Show him also images of Most Holy Mary and of the Saints, and teach him to be devoted to them.

7. Charge him never to do anything bad; and even if he sees others misbehaving, not to imitate them. For just as, seeing others throw themselves into a well, he would not follow them, so he must not follow those who throw themselves into the well of hell.

8. That he keep away from boys and girls who do bad things, as if they had the plague or the itch.

9. Instil in him a great horror of sin, because of the bodily, temporal, spiritual and eternal goods it takes away, and the temporal, bodily, spiritual and eternal harm it causes.

10. Fear of offending God, who can punish him with the eternal pains of hell; and for this, make use of fire, of the light or flame of the candle, oil lamp or lantern.

11. Try to instil in him a great respect for churches; so, however small he is, never let him shout, play or run in churches or chapels.

Virtues a good mother should instil in her child towards his neighbour. You must know, sir or madam, that the child, however small, already shows us that he is made for society. Perhaps you yourself have noticed that the sight of his fellows pleases him and fills his tender heart with joy. He responds with a grateful smile to those who make much of him; he knows very well how to tell people who are kind to him from those who are not. So one must not neglect this sociable nature of the child, but cultivate it and plant in his tender heart

the virtues he must exercise and practise towards his neighbour, and at once pull up any weed of disordered passion seen sprouting in his earliest years.

Children, as you may have noticed, are naturally compassionate: their neighbours' sufferings echo in their hearts. They cry if they see others cry; they are saddened and frightened if they see blood, sores and so on. It would be good to let your child see some misery of others, so that he may thank God for not having given it to him, and also learn to be compassionate to his neighbours. You might say to him: "Look, my son, do you see this blind, lame, dumb, deaf or sick man? He is a rational creature, a man like you, destined for the same end as you; and yet, by God's permission, he was born so, or has come to that illness or that misery. Ah, my son, why he and not you? What right had you more than he to bodily health and soundness? Why was he born so poor that he can scarcely eat a mouthful of bread, and has great trouble covering his nakedness, when you lack neither food nor clothing? When have you deserved it more than these?

"Ah, my son, you can put it down only to God, who distributes his goods to whom he will and when he will, so that those who receive them with no title at all, by the sole goodness of God, may be the more grateful. He also shares out his goods so that those who receive them may be like his stewards or overseers: he entrusts his goods to them so that, taking from them what they need for their station, not for luxury and superfluity, they may distribute these benefits to the poor."

Say to your child: "My son, treat these poor people as you would wish to be treated if you were like them; have compassion on them; console them, help them, protect them, and do them all the good you can." You will do a very holy thing if you see to it that the poor who come to your house to beg are given alms by your little son's hand; so he will grow up compassionate and charitable to his fellows.

Never allow him to quarrel, hit or scratch others. If another child ever takes something from him or hits him, try to inspire him to forgive him and pardon the injury, as the Gospel says and Jesus Christ practised.

Never imitate those Christian mothers, unworthy of the name, who, to quiet children crying because something was taken from them or they were hurt, inspire them to revenge, telling them they will punish the other child, and sometimes even going through the motions as if actually punishing the one who hurt them… What a perverse and unchristian teaching!

Never let your child be cruel to little animals or beasts; for whoever has no compassion on beasts has none on people either.

Never allow or overlook the petty thefts some children commit. Rebuke him if he commits them, and punish him if necessary by making him give the thing back himself: perhaps that is the best way of correcting them.

Nor let him tell lies, not even to excuse himself. If he frankly confesses his fault, be very indulgent in forgiving him; but if he denies the truth, punish him double, and more for the lie than for the fault itself. Say to him: "If you had told me the truth frankly, I would easily have forgiven you; but since you have lied, you will be punished more for the lie than for the fault itself."

Nor let him tell tales about the faults of other boys or girls or other people. Often instil in him this holy maxim: *Treat others as you would have them treat you.*

Point III. Correction. You know well, madam, that it is sometimes necessary to resort to correction; but note that sometimes the correction given deserves correcting more than the fault it means to correct. Here, then, in a few words, is how you should behave.

1. With gentle words say to him: "My son, why did you say, do or leave undone this? Don't do it again; be more careful."

2. If he falls again, say to him, also kindly and without anger: "My son, I warned you the other day to mend your ways; otherwise I will have to punish you."

3. If he fails a third time, then impose some penance: for example, take away his dessert at table, or some fruit at his afternoon snack or at supper; do not let him go to play, and so on. On a feast day make him wear his ugliest, most torn clothes, or hat, or shoes. This penance of clothing is the one proper to girls; so use this remedy with them, for with them it is most effective.

4. Never let them sulk or throw tantrums when you punish them; if they do, apply the punishment more severely.

5. Give few commands, and easy ones to carry out. If you see he will not carry them out, better not to give them for the moment; for he would lose the obedience and respect he owes you, and you would lose your patience, and so both would fail.

6. When you have threatened him with something or some punishment, see that you carry it out. Say to him without anger: "My son, I told you that if you failed you would have to suffer this… I must punish you, or else God would punish me."

7. When you are upset or angry, keep your mouth shut; do not correct then, for correction never bears fruit when given in passion. In that case it is rather a venting of the passion of anger than a real desire for the amendment of the one who errs; for if one really desired his amendment, one would do it at the right moment and in the best way. Just as it is imprudent to put to sea when it is stormy, it is equally imprudent to correct when one is angry.

Point IV. Correction in anger. Excuse. "Father, one day when I was angry with my son because he hadn't done what he was told, I swore at him and cursed him." There you see what correction in anger produces: much harm and no good. What would you say of a mother who, to wash a child's dirty face, came at it with a rag dirty with ink and soot? Certainly, you would tell me, far from cleaning it, she makes it dirtier still. You have done the same with this kind of correction: you have soiled him still more with the scandal. If a mother, to remove a fly from her child's face, struck at it with a great mallet to kill it, she would certainly hurt her child more than the fly.

When I hear a mother cursing her child, it grieves me so much that my heart seems to break in my breast with sorrow and fear that the curses the mother hurls at the poor child may overtake him. For I have seen them fulfilled many times, since God our Lord wills that so much heed be paid to what a mother says that he takes it as a sentence and takes great care that it be carried out. I could tell you countless examples I have read in authors and seen with my own eyes.

St Augustine tells of an angry mother who uttered an imprecation against her children. Misfortune overtook them all; he assures us that he saw two of those unhappy children wandering scattered through the world, proclaiming how terrible a mother's curse is; and the mother, seeing afterwards the misfortune that had befallen her children through her wicked tongue, killed herself in despair.[1]

The celebrated Arbiol says that an angry mother said to her son: "You'll end on the gallows," and the poor wretch died on the gallows.

A boy was fond of swimming, and one day his mother said to him: "I wish you'd never come out of the water," and he never came out of the water.

A mother said to her grown son: "I wish you'd break your neck," and as she said it so it was fulfilled: one day he went up the mountain to gather firewood, climbed a tree, fell, and broke his neck.

Another disconsolate mother once came to find me and said: "Oh, Father, I have a baby in the cradle who is bursting." I asked her: "Why, what is this?" "Oh, Father, it's my fault: in anger I said to him, 'I wish you'd burst.'"

In another town a mother came to me and told me, more with sighs and tears than with words: “Father, I had so many children, and while I was away from home to go to market, on my return I found them all suffocated, shut in as I had left them.” “Why, what was this, woman?” “Oh, Father, I can only attribute it to God’s punishment for my wicked tongue; for I had the habit of saying to them when they annoyed me: ‘May I see you choked.’”

Excuse. “Father, when I curse my children I don’t mean it from the heart, and I certainly wouldn’t want those curses and misfortunes to overtake them; but when I’m angry I don’t know what I’m saying.” Ah, woman, it is not to be thought that a mother wishes such misfortunes on her children; nevertheless, they are fulfilled! And what grief would you have if you saw them fulfilled in your child? For God’s sake I beg you not to curse any more, for cursed children will never be good. When something goes badly, people say: “It seems this thing is cursed.” Well, if your child is cursed, he will not go well either, or have good luck.

If, when your plates, glasses and so on were dirty, you took stones and threw them at them to wash them, you would certainly not wash them but smash them, and once broken they would be of no use to you. I say the same of your child: if, to correct some fault of his, you throw stones of curses at him, far from amending him you will make him wicked for ever. This is why some children are as they are; and perhaps you too will be punished if you do not mend your ways. Hear what I saw with my own eyes.

One day, passing along a street, I heard a mother cursing a son of hers in her irritation. As it grieves me so much to hear such things said, I rebuked her. She went off, and I went off to my duties and thought no more of that woman. Afterwards they came to my house saying I should hurry to a house where a woman was very ill. I went, and was astonished to see that same ill-fated woman whom I myself had corrected, lying in bed, so red she seemed on fire, her eyes rolled back as if starting from her head, her tongue long and thick so that it did not fit in her mouth. I called her by name, but she answered neither by word nor by sign, nor gave any sign of sorrow for her sins.

Another day I went to the house of a man who was in the habit of using foul words, and God punished him so that he lost his speech and did nothing but weep. I could tell you a thousand other cases.

Ah, woman, for God’s sake I beg you not to curse your child or anyone again. A good word is said as quickly as a bad one.

Remedies. 1. If your child ever does something wrong, correct him kindly. Remember that you also commit your faults and God bears with you; remember that when you were small you perhaps committed more faults than your child does now. 2. If you want to say something, say: “God bless you”; “God make you a saint”; “God crown you with glory.” 3. If you ever get angry, keep your mouth shut for God’s sake, for you will have to repent afterwards of everything you say in anger. 4. If in spite of all this some curse or bad word escapes you, as soon as you notice and have the chance, make a cross on the ground with your tongue, kiss it and pray a Hail Mary. 5. If the child is small, kiss him three times, praying a Hail Mary each time. If he is grown, kneel beside him when he is asleep and pray three Hail Marys.

[1] Augustine, *City of God* XXII, 8 (the ten children of a mother of Caesarea in Cappadocia, two of whom came to Hippo).

§ V. Husband

One of the husband’s duties is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, and as he loves his own body.[1] So you must love your wife outwardly and inwardly; you must not mistreat her in deed or word. You must live so that she is content with you. Do not come home late at night. Do not be like those men who linger very late in the café, the inn, the tavern and so on, gambling, eating and drinking, spending what the wife needs for the family, coming home late and greatly angering the wife, who, perhaps in irritation, will curse her husband.

Hear what happened in a town in Catalonia. A husband used to go to the inn every feast day. His wife scolded him; and one day, urging him not to go there and seeing that he paid her no heed and went in spite of her warnings, she cursed him in her irritation: “Please God you can’t come out of there on your own feet.” A horrible thing! After he had been there a while, such an illness came over him that he had to be carried home on others’ shoulders on a stretcher. For God’s sake I beg you not to provoke your wife; for though you are the head of the house and she must obey you, you also have a superior, who is God, whom she will call upon in her distress, and she will obtain for you heaven’s curse and punishment.

[1] Eph 5:25, 28.

§ VI. Wife

You must be subject to your husband; you must love him and seek his whole good of soul and body. Above all you must seek peace, union and harmony between you.

Note. Wives’ complaints usually come from three sources: their husbands’ faults, their children’s faults, and lack of worldly goods.

Point I. Husbands’ faults. A woman says: “Oh, Father, how unhappy I am! I have a husband with a very bad temper: he’s choleric, capricious, lazy, a gambler, and so on.” Don’t be alarmed; have confidence; commend him to God. For my part I give you my word that I will do so too, that God may touch his heart and convert him. Besides, put it into practice: treat him kindly, and so you will calm him, as prudent Abigail did with the angry David; and God himself says that *a mild answer breaketh wrath*.[1] Take pains also to prepare his food the way you know he likes best, and let him see that you seek every possible pleasure and comfort for him. I say the same of his clothes and the other things of the house. Oh, how you will win his heart if you follow my advice!

When you know your husband is drunk or angry, keep quiet for God’s sake, however right you are: behave as if you were the one at fault. Very often, if some husbands beat their wives, it is because of their tongues; if they had kept quiet they would not have been beaten.

Arsdekin relates that a surgeon was once called to treat the wounds a woman’s husband had given her with a stick. They were many and serious; but as soon as he saw the woman in that state he had a large poultice applied to her mouth, where in fact she had no wound at all. Thinking it was a mistake, they asked him why he ordered this, and he answered that unless the mouth was cured it was useless and a waste of time to treat the other wounds, because there would soon be more; but if this one was cured well, she would never have them again.

The same author gives another example in confirmation. There was a woman who was very often beaten by her husband. One day she asked a doctor what remedy there might be to free her from such trouble. The doctor gave her a bottle of plain water and told her that when her husband came home angry she should fill her mouth with that water and not spit it out while he was angry, giving her his word that if she did this exactly her husband would never beat her again. And so it was: since her mouth was full of water she could not speak, and since she did not speak her husband had no reason to beat her. So you see, madam: keep quiet. When you see your husband in a good humour, and you know he will not be upset, then tell him things kindly, and you will see how he mends his ways.

It is also good, when you have tried these means and see that you cannot overcome his bad temper, to make use of the parish priest, the confessor, or some other person you know may achieve by his reflections what you cannot.

Finally, if you see there is no remedy at all, have recourse to holy patience. Do as Jesus did: when he understood that it was his Father's will that he drink the chalice of his passion, he took it with great resignation and conformity to the will of God.

As a model for all married people, I will tell you here what the histories say of St Monica. This Saint was a Christian, and her parents married her to a nobleman named Patricius, a pagan, of a harsh and ill-natured temper. But the Saint achieved so much by her patience that he was converted to the Christian religion, and from a wrathful man became gentle as a lamb. The Saint behaved like this: she served him as her lord; she spoke to him more by her conduct than by her words; she bore the insults he said to her; she commended him earnestly to God, that he might make him Christian and chaste. When he was angry and beside himself with rage she did not resist him, in deed or word; she kept quiet, and when he had calmed down she modestly explained herself. She never complained to other women of her husband's ill-treatment, nor spoke ill of him, as less prudent and less patient women do. When other married women, her neighbours, complained to St Monica of their husbands' ill-treatment and showed her the bruises they had given them, she told them how she behaved and how they should behave; and those who took her advice felt how it helped them and rejoiced, while those who did not felt their hardship and wept. St Monica used to say to women who spoke ill of their husbands: "The wife who speaks ill of her husband is no less to blame than the husband who by his bad life gives his wife occasion to speak ill of him."[2]

Sometimes mothers complain of their grown children. Let them imitate this same Saint with her son Augustine, who at sixteen became a libertine and a heretic; but in the end, through the Saint's patience and prayer, he was converted and became a great Saint.

Sometimes a woman complains of her sons, daughters, menservants and maidservants. I say to them: "Madam, for God's sake a little more patience. You must consider that they are blind or sick; and you know the blind and the sick must be treated with patience and charity rather than with severity." There are times when one must know how to overlook things in order to correct better. Sometimes one must do as the fisherman does, who lets the small fish go to catch the big ones. Remember that you too have committed your faults towards God, and this good Lord has borne with you so many times without casting you into purgatory, or perhaps into hell, as you deserved. I ask: who commits more faults, you towards God, or your household towards you?

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[1] Prov 15:1 (Douay: "A mild answer breaketh wrath"); Abigail, 1 Kgs (1 Sam) 25.

[2] Based on Augustine, *Confessions* IX, 9.

The Golden Key

Fifth Commandment

The fifth commandment: Thou shalt not kill.

Do you bear ill will or hatred towards anyone? “Yes, Father, because he has dishonoured me, harmed me,” and so on. (Here ask about the persons hated, the length of time and the frequency.)

Reflection. Of course you are a Christian, are you not? “Ah, yes, and a Christian I want to die.” Then, brother, “Christian” means one who follows the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. His teaching, set down in the Gospel, tells us: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). “This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). “But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good, and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:44–48).

You see, then, my brother, the teaching of Jesus Christ. And what shall I say of his example? Though true God and man, worthy of all love, honour and glory, most innocent and a benefactor even of the lowliest, he was slandered, persecuted, condemned to death, even the death of the cross. Compare your persecutions with those of Jesus: what a difference!… Jesus innocent, and you a criminal, deserving not only these persecutions but temporal death and the eternal death of hell.

God our Lord sometimes behaves towards us like a surgeon who, to cure the patient, applies leeches to suck his blood, knives to cut his flesh and cauteries to burn him alive. And why does the doctor do it? For the patient’s good. Just as it would be madness for the patient to complain of these things and fly into a rage at them, so it is madness for a Christian to fly into a rage at those persons whom God permits to do us this harm for our good. Rather we should love them more than our very friends, for how useful and profitable they are to us. A sick man, for example, values in his illness the leeches that suck his blood for his good more than the dog that fawns on him. So too a tailor prefers, say, the customer who gives him plenty of work to the friend who comes to his shop only to joke and keep him from working. (The confessor may use the comparison of those who argue against a thesis at a public disputation, who make the defender shine.)

“Oh, Father, he bore false witness against me!” Look at Jesus: how many false witnesses rose against him, worse than against you? “Oh, Father, he robbed me!” Look at Jesus, who was robbed even of his clothes and had to die naked on a cross. “Oh, Father, he wounded me!” Look at Jesus, wounded with scourges and thorns and dead on a cross. Remember that your neighbour, against whom you bear this grudge, was created by God like you and redeemed by Jesus like you, and that we are all children of the same parents and destined to the same end.

And even if he did not deserve forgiveness on all these grounds, God deserves it, who commands it of us and urges this love on us so earnestly that he will take all the good or harm we do our neighbour as done to himself. Besides this example of Jesus, who, nailed to the cross, prayed for his enemies, I could tell you countless examples of Saints who did the same. David forgave and prayed for Saul, his mortal enemy. St Stephen prayed for the enemies who were killing him.

Ah, sir! Think of the many offences and injuries you have done to God, and I give you my word your anger will calm at once. And understand that you pronounce sentence on yourself when you pray the Our Father, for you say: *forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors*. If, then, you do not forgive, neither will you

be forgiven by God. One may say you are already damned; for even if you had committed no other offence in your whole life than the hatred you bear, you would be damned for that alone, for it is a great sin. You must know that, as St John says, he that loveth not abideth in the death of sin.[1] You not only do not love; you hate.

"Father, I want revenge…" Ah, wretch!… So you want to snatch the sceptre from God's hand, usurp his rights, and like the devil make yourself like the Most High? Do you not know that God says: "Revenge is mine; I will not have anyone take it; I reserve it to myself, and I will repay each in due time"?[2]

"Oh, Father, they have killed my son!" Listen to what St Alphonsus relates. He says that a father's only son was killed, and the murderer, fleeing from justice, took refuge in the house of the dead man's father, not knowing it was his father. But Caesar, as the father was called, knew who the murderer was. And what did he do? He received him kindly and gave him money and a horse so that he could reach safety. That is how true Christians take revenge.

Another very similar example is read in *The Spirit of St Francis de Sales*. The Saint told the following incident that happened in Padua. The students of that university had the bad habit of going about at night armed, challenging everyone they met with "Who goes there?" and firing on whoever did not answer to their liking. It happened that a student passing along the street did not answer the "Who goes there?" and they killed him. The assailant went to take refuge in the house of a good widow whose son was his fellow student and friend; and confessing the crime he had just committed, he begged her to hide him in a secret place in her house. The good widow shut him in a remote room. But behold, a little later they bring her her son, dead. There was no need for much inquiry to know who the killer was. She goes to him and, bathed in tears, says to him: "Unhappy me! What had my poor son done to you, that you took his life so cruelly?" The other, seeing that the dead man was his friend, begins to cry out and tear his hair, and instead of asking pardon of the grieving mother, throws himself at her feet, begging her to hand him over to justice, because he wished to pay publicly for so atrocious a crime. The widow, no less Christian and devout than she was a mother, was so moved by the young man's repentance that she told him to ask God's pardon and promise to change his life, and she would let him go free; and so she did, on the student's promise. This wonderful example of mercy so pleased God that he allowed the soul of her son to appear to his devout mother and assure her that the charitable pardon she had given to the one who killed him unknowingly, and on whom she could so lawfully and easily have taken vengeance, had been so acceptable to God that for its sake he had freed him from purgatory, where otherwise he would have been a long time. Oh, how true it is that *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*,[3] for themselves and for others!

These and other examples I could give you should move you to forgive your enemies; but above all the example of Jesus Christ, as it moved the emperor Theodosius. When people asked him to pardon those very persons who had offended him, he answered: "Why should not we, who are men, forgive other men who have wronged us, when Jesus Christ, being God, forgave so freely so many and such great enemies?"

But remember, sir, I repeat, that if you do not forgive, neither will you be forgiven by God, as Jesus Christ himself tells us in his Gospel. He makes it plain in the servant who did not forgive his fellow servant a small sum he owed him, and whose master then did not forgive him what he owed, which was much greater.

Even if you were a person of great virtue and very close to God, if you did not forgive he would withdraw his help from you and you would be lost. See what happened to a priest named Sapricius. This good priest was being led by the tyrants to execution, and the Angels were already preparing for him the palm and crown of martyrdom. At that moment Nicephorus, who had wronged him, came to him and asked his pardon; but Sapricius refused it. The Lord withdrew his grace from him; he failed in the constancy of martyrdom and apostatized. Ah, the wretch!

Arsdekin relates that a woman bore ill will towards some people. When she fell ill they brought her the most holy Viaticum, and in sight of everyone she turned her face to the other side of the bed, saying: "Just as I

turned my face from those people, not wanting to forgive them, so God turns his face from me"; and she died at once.

The same author tells of another person who bore ill will. When he died and the customary funeral was being held, a marvellous thing! They saw the image of the Crucifix unnail its hands and stop its ears with them, saying: *Non pepercit: nec ego parcam* \[He did not spare: neither will I spare\]: he did not forgive, nor will I forgive him.

"Father, this is a very bitter, repugnant and hard thing." I know, my brother, that for a heart with little humility it is hard and repugnant to forgive; but you must know, sir, that the more this sacrifice costs you, the more meritorious it will be. God will be most grateful for it, as he was with St John Gualbert, to whom the image of a Crucifix bowed its head, approving and praising the pardon he had just granted his enemy.

But if you are so proud that you will not root out the hatred you harbour in your heart, and would rather go on to revenge, what do you gain by it? Nothing but misfortunes; for you harm yourself more than your enemy. The vindictive man fares like Samson's foxes, which, while they burned the Philistines' wheat, were burned themselves. The vindictive are like bees, which die in stinging and suffer more harm than they do. They are like those who snuff a candle or lamp with their fingers, who burn and blacken them to remove the snuff. They are like a man who strikes a rock with a sabre: he and the sabre take more harm than the rock. That is why St Jerome said: *Apud christianos non qui patitur, sed qui facit contumelias, miser est* \[Among Christians it is not the one who suffers insults who is wretched, but the one who inflicts them\].

Oh, what harm the resentful and vindictive man does himself! How many mothers, after a fit of rage, have given the breast to their child and killed it! And how many have brought on themselves hysterical illnesses, paralysis, apoplexy and the like! Cromer, in his history of Poland, book XIII, relates that Wenceslas, king of Bohemia, once became so enraged with a servant that he wanted to kill him with his own hands. But so great were his fury and rage that he was seized with palsy, and within a few days he died.

Remedies. 1. When you see your enemy, say: "Lord, forgive us." 2. When your enemy passes near you, greet him first, in imitation of Jesus, who, as soon as he saw Judas, said to him: "Friend, whereto art thou come?"[4] 3. Pray the Our Father and Hail Mary every day, that God may give your enemy what is best for him. 4. Never speak ill of your enemy, nor listen to others who, to please you, speak ill of him.

§ Sole. The Malice of Abortion

Aliquae sunt mulieres, quae procurant abortum, v.g., per medicamenta, per sanguinis emissionem, etc. \[There are some women who procure abortion, for example by drugs, by bloodletting, etc.\] By these means, more often than not, they achieve nothing.

This is a wickedness that not even wild beasts commit. No wild beast has ever been seen to do what you have done. A mother kill her own child!… Is it possible!… To destroy in her own womb the fruit she has conceived! To try by an enormous crime to exterminate her own child even before it has life, or, if it has life already, to make it die before it is born!

This crime is so enormous that it makes not only bodies perish but souls too. Consider well what you have done: you have deprived of blessedness and the sight of God a soul that bore for ever the stamp of the image of the Godhead; a soul for whose ransom Jesus Christ gave all his blood and his very life; a soul capable of enjoying eternal happiness and destined to live in the company of the Angels. Moreover, this creature was your child, and mothers naturally desire and seek their children's good. But you have done just the opposite: you have deprived it of the goods of this world and the next. I no longer wonder that all laws have laid down the most terrible penalties against such a crime. Ah, woman, for God's sake repent truly, and accept in a spirit of penance, etc.

[1] 1 Jn 3:14 (“He that loveth not, abideth in death”).

[2] Free paraphrase of Deut 32:35 / Rom 12:19 (“Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord”).

[3] Mt 5:7.

[4] Mt 26:50.

Sixth Commandment

§ I. General Reflections

Sixth Commandment

The sixth commandment: Thou shalt not commit fornication.

Against the unchaste, who drink iniquity like water, and do not consider lust a sin, or only a trifling thing not worth accusing themselves of in confession: so blind are they!

You must know, my brother, that what you are doing is a mortal sin, for it is contrary to the sixth precept of God's law; so much so that, after killing, it is the greatest sin there is against one's neighbour, as you will see if you consider for a moment the order of the commandments. In the fifth we are forbidden to kill, and in the sixth to do indecent things; for the same reason it is a greater sin than stealing. By this sin, my brother, you have made yourself liable to the pains of hell.

That you may better understand the malice of this sin, I will use natural reason. You must know, my brother, that the Creator has given man so strong an inclination to these things because, if man were like a statue, the human race would soon have come to an end. But men, finding themselves impelled to it, take up the state of marriage; they marry, and then they may do what the laws of marriage permit and may lawfully satisfy their passion without any disorder resulting. Rather, it is like the weights of a clock, which keep the propagation of the human race moving in good order and harmony. But I have said, and mark it well, that it must go according to law and good order, and not according to each one's whim; for then one would make oneself guilty of a most grave offence and deserving of great punishment.

I will explain with a comparison. Suppose you are a soldier, and your general gives you cartridges or ammunition to fire when he orders. As a good soldier you will keep your cartridges and take care to have them well guarded in your cartridge-box, avoiding every danger of their catching fire. Now suppose you do not do so, but spend the cartridges as you please to amuse and enjoy yourself. What will the general say to you? Will he be very pleased? Will he not punish you? Certainly… Will he not put you in the cells? I think so. Now make the application. God our Lord has given you this inclination and this vital fluid so that you may marry and have the means to fulfil the duties of that state. But if, for your whim, pleasure and delight, and as if for amusement, you squander it, it is most certain that God our Lord will be greatly offended with you, who waste uselessly and at your whim that substance, the means of the preservation and propagation of the human race, and who prevent, destroy and kill those beings who would in time exist. And just as the general puts in the cells and punishes the soldier who without orders and uselessly squanders the ammunition at his whim, so God our Lord, who is not only general but King of kings and Lord of lords, will put you in the dungeons of hell and punish you eternally.

Another reflection. You must know, my brother, that this vice of impurity is very blameworthy and harmful to the one who commits it. To help you understand, I will use a comparison. I have told you that the Creator has given man this inclination for the preservation and propagation of the human race, for otherwise the world would be at an end; but this must go with due order, place and time. Otherwise the harm and injury that would follow, to the detriment of the preservation of the human species, would be incalculable, and it would soon be destroyed. Do you know gunpowder and its properties? Gunpowder is used for hunting, for war and so on, but all this must go in due order. Suppose that order fails: for example, that the powder catches fire in the factories themselves, in the hunters' pouches or in the soldiers' cartridge-boxes. Would it serve any purpose? No; rather it would harm the powder-makers, hunters and soldiers, as has unfortunately sometimes happened, and the poor men have paid very dearly for it. Make the application, then. Those who do impure things as you do, far from benefiting the human race and acting according to the Creator's designs,

harm and kill themselves, becoming victims of so much harm in this life and deserving great punishment in the next. If you reflect even a little, I think you will grasp the weight of this reflection.

§ II. Reflexiones faciendae mollibus, qui se ipsos polluunt [Reflections to be made to the soft, who defile themselves]

Ah, my brother! I am sure you are not aware of the gravity of this sin, for I am quite convinced that if you knew what you were doing you would not do it. Listen to me, then, for your life's sake. You know well that no one may kill another for pleasure or whim, nor even himself, for no one is master of his own life. Well, when you do this wicked thing, you kill and destroy what might in time have been a creature, a child of yours. What barbarity!… What would you say of a father who killed his children for mere pleasure? What cruelty! Would he not deserve to be burned alive? *Tu es ille vir* \[Thou art the man\]: you are that cruel, barbarous and inhuman father who kills his children for mere pleasure. If your father had done this with you, you certainly would not exist; you would not have that body or that life which you misuse so badly.

You do another harm to your children and to the public good by this wickedness. Let us see it by a comparison. Suppose a man has a sack of very good flour and a cask of superior, generous wine to enjoy in due time; but at his whim this man has thrown away and wasted all the finest of the flour, so that nothing is left him but the bran: what bad bread he will make! He has thrown away and wasted all the generous wine, so that nothing is left him but the dregs: what a bad drink he will have! Now let us make the application. You are that man, whom the Creator had provided with this generous wine of love, to drink when married in the company of your beloved wife; but since you have spent it on your drunkenness and impure follies, now nothing is left you but the dregs. He had also provided you with good, fine flour to form healthy, sturdy loaves of children; but since through your vices you have wasted and thrown away this fine flour, and now nothing is left you but the bran of your spent and worm-eaten health and constitution, tell me, what children can you have? Alas, at best sickly, wan and imperfect. Even ordinary people know it when they say: "For the sins of the parents the children go hunchbacked." Oh, how often we see children ailing through their parents' excesses! How many are vicious! For from white parents are born white children, and if the parents are black, their children too are black with impure vices, as physicians' observations show. (See Descuret, p. 272.)[1] You see, then, how great a sin it is to do these wicked things. But even if it were not a sin, for the harm alone that you are going to cause your children you ought never to do it, and you ought to repent of having done it until now.

Another reflection against the same sin. Tell me, brother: if you were offered a very sweet drink or a dish of very rich food, entirely to your taste, but a trustworthy person told you, "Be careful about taking that food or drink, for I know they are poisoned," what would you do? Would you take them? Surely not. Then neither should you take that cup, that dish of impurity, however sweet and pleasant it seems to you, for it is a poisoned thing that wounds and kills body and soul.

Besides, it is not so delightful a thing as the devil and passion paint it. Rather, after a brief pleasure which, they say, passes like a flash of lightning, it brings a great sadness, as the philosophers say: *Omne animal post coitum tristatur* \[Every animal is sad after coition\].

The modern physician, learned and admirable, Dr Francisco Devans, says: "The unchaste man lives sad, languid and weary of his own existence; he kills himself or dies before his time" (vol. I, p. 343).

Another reflection. This vice is so fatal that it prevents the sick from recovering their health. For Dr Francisco Devans says (vol. I, p. 363) "that nature, in order to convalesce or heal, needs radical strength; and if the patient has exhausted it through the vice of impurity, he must necessarily die."

Another reflection. This vice brings illness, and even death itself, upon the robust. The aforesaid doctor says (vol. I, p. 353): "Sensual pleasures are the principal cause of illnesses, spasms, convulsions, visceral

congestions; they produce irregularity of movement and exhaustion of strength."

Natural reason. If you reflect a little on the wickedness you commit, you will see how it is taking away your strength and health. To help you understand, I will use this comparison. If you take an orange and squeeze it, how is it left? Dear God! all shrivelled, arid, dry, and good for nothing. The same happens to the man who squeezes his constitution with this accursed vice: he is left dry, arid and wasted, so that he himself opens the door to every illness. Physicians say, and it is a principle of medicine, that illness is a disorder of the humours; and since nothing disorders the humours so much as this accursed vice, it follows that nothing causes so many illnesses and deaths. That is why Seneca calls it the greatest evil. Cicero says it is the capital plague; and just as plague causes so many illnesses and deaths, this vice of impurity causes equal ravages and even greater.

Here many examples may be told that authors give and that are seen with one's own eyes. I have seen them many times. I have dealt with very many in whom this vice had weakened the strength of arms and legs; who suffered in the chest, from breathlessness, and who ended consumptive; whose sight it weakened, and who became tremulous.

Ah, my brother, for God's sake do this no more, for you are destroying yourself: you will become ill and even consumptive, and so you will end by killing yourself. Hear this comparison. If you have an oil lamp burning and take away the oil, is it not true that it will go out? The same will happen to you, who are squeezing yourself dry with this accursed vice. If you were bled very often, is it not true that it would weaken and kill you? Well, by doing this you weaken and kill yourself. Siniscalchi relates of a boy of sixteen that the first time he did it, because another boy had taught him, he fell dead, and afterwards appeared as one of the damned.

And what I say, that this vice sickens and kills the one given to it, is fully in keeping with the principles of medicine and with what physicians say. Hear what a doctor of the faculty of medicine of Montpellier, M. François Devans, says (vol. I, p. 346): "People have been seen to perish suddenly in the midst of venereal pleasures."

In girls who have this vice it weakens them so much that sometimes it makes them lose their sight or greatly weakens it; and so I have good reason to tell you: Ah, sister! Do this no more, for it would greatly weaken your bodily strength and your sight too; and if you went blind, what would you do? Ah, poor wretch, how unhappy you would be! This too agrees with the principles of medicine, for Mr Devans says (vol. I, p. 346) in one of his medical laws: "If sensibility or voluptuousness is increased, it is to the detriment of other kinds."

Harm it does to the powers of the soul. Harm to the understanding: the unchaste become fatuous, foolish, and above all insane. According to the physician Parchappe, insanity is found among them at a rate of 19 per cent. Harm to the memory: "Their memory weakens and they forget the past. The voluptuary has not, and cannot have, any constancy, nor can he follow anything through with seriousness: he is good neither for study nor for work" (Devans, vol. I, p. 377). Harm to the will or the heart: "Voluptuousness weakens the human heart and enervates the principle of rectitude." Bossuet (in Devans, vol. I, p. 370). "The man given to pleasures wants to concentrate everything in himself, and a whole world is not enough for him" (ibid., p. 377). "He is necessarily selfish, and in time he becomes cruel" (ibid., p. 314). "The more sensual a man is, the more brutal he becomes, as the history of the ancient Caesars proves." "A man's pleasures overturn both his lives, the moral and the physical" (ibid., p. 343).

Ah, my brother! For God's sake I beg you not to abandon yourself any longer to these abominable acts, for they harm not only your body but also the powers of your soul. Your understanding would be darkened, your memory lost, and your will so corrupted that, having tasted this accursed honey, all good things would become insipid to you, your devotions, your almsgiving and the rest; and after so much temporal harm you

would end in harm that will have no end. If you were told, “If you do this or that, we will take you to prison, lead you to execution, shoot you, burn you alive,” would you do it? Certainly not. Well, I tell you in God’s name that if you commit this sin you will be led to the prison of hell and tormented in those eternal torments. Ah, wretch! For a pleasure that passes in a moment you deprive yourself of the eternal joys of paradise and deserve the eternal pains of hell; and what is more, you offend in his very presence God, who is your father, your benefactor, your master, your judge and your all. For a vile pleasure to displease God and crucify Jesus Christ again! My son, for God’s sake I beg you to sin no more: make a firm resolution never again to commit such sins.

Note. Because this matter of impurity is, unfortunately, so common and so pernicious, I wish to cite here some authorities of great weight.

Debreyne, formerly professor of medicine in the faculty of Paris, who later became a priest and is now a Trappist monk, says many things on this, from which we extract the following:

Onanismus, seu manustupratio, a stupratione manu facta, seu pollutione, dicitur, estque foedissimum vitium, quod hodiernis temporibus maximam in juvenibus exercet stragem et quod ab omnibus est satis cognitum \[Onanism, or manustupration, so called from defilement done by hand, or pollution, is a most foul vice, which in these times wreaks the greatest havoc among the young and is well enough known to all\].

I. *Manustupratio in hominibus* \[Masturbation in men\]. *In pueris venit aliquoties a causa intrinseca, nempe a systemate nervoso aut ab organis generationi deservientibus. Hujusmodi pueri sine apparente causa organa genitalia contrectantes hocce vitium contrahunt. Aliquoties a causa extrinseca venit, nempe cum alii pueri, aut feminae, imo aliquando eorum matres, quae eorum curam gerunt, ne plorent, eheu impudens malitia! eos contrectant, et ejusmodi passionem excitant.* \[In boys it sometimes comes from an internal cause, namely from the nervous system or from the organs of generation. Boys of this kind contract the vice by handling the genital organs without any apparent cause. Sometimes it comes from an external cause, namely when other boys, or women, and indeed sometimes their own mothers who have charge of them, handle them to stop them crying (alas, shameless wickedness!) and so excite this passion in them.\] Sometimes it comes from their leading one another astray. On p. 60 of his *Essai sur la théologie morale*, 1844 edition, he cites Dr Doussin-Dubreuil, who relates that a boy began to give himself to this unspeakable vice at the age of five, as a result lost his reason at eleven, and died at sixteen like a beast. Dr Deslandes (ibid., p. 61) tells of a child who already had this vice at eighteen months. On the same page he cites Dr Tissot, who tells us that a young man of Montpellier, a medical student given to this vice, died like a madman, in despair. The same author tells of a boy of seven who also had it and died consumed by this vice, never having corrected himself of it to the end of his life. Dr Tissot tells of a young man of seventeen, given to this unspeakable vice, who lost the strength of his arms and legs; suffered in the chest; felt such pains along his whole spine that they made him break into desperate cries; bled from the nose, drooled continually and could not stand; and who, robust as he had been before this vice, and of great talent and learning, afterwards became fatuous and died mad and raving.

On pp. 65–66, citing the German physician Gottlieb Vogel, he says that the young man who is a victim of this shameful passion “loses little by little all his moral faculties; his outward appearance becomes brutish; he becomes stupid, lascivious, sad, soft; he becomes lazy, an enemy of and incapable of any intellectual function; he lacks presence of mind… unable even to answer a boy. His soul grows weak and is capable of nothing; his memory deteriorates day by day, and though he were endowed with the most sublime talent, he soon sees himself brought to nothing: the knowledge he had acquired is wiped from his mind, he becomes a nullity, and the finest talent yields nothing. All the liveliness and pride, all the qualities of soul that gave this young man the power to attract and lead his fellows, abandon him, leaving nothing behind them but contempt, etc., etc.” And he concludes that he carries every ill, with an early and frightful death, and that nothing of the man is left to him but the shape, all the rest being worse than a stinking brute. What a horrible

picture!

Dr Franck adds that those given to this vice are harmful not only to themselves but are a burden to the society they dishonour; and so he urges rulers to keep the closest watch over them.

Page 67: “Unhappy man,” he exclaims, “he has sinned against God, against nature and against himself! He has violated the laws of the Creator, he has disfigured the image of God in his person and turned it into the image of a beast, *imago bestiae*, and has made himself lower even than the beasts…” “It is true,” he continues, “that not all onanists are treated with such rigour, and that not all are victims of their excesses; these are only a small number. But if they go on in their vice, sooner or later they may become so.” Mr Deslandes adds that they are the first victims in illnesses and epidemics.

Page 69. After giving a sad description of those given to this vice, Hippocrates adds that “an acute fever ends their days.” And even when they manage to correct themselves of this accursed vice, “*remanent in eis semper pollutiones involuntariae, imo per urinam spermatis partem effundunt, quod eorum vires maxime enervat*” \[involuntary pollutions always remain in them; indeed they pass part of the seed with the urine, which enervates their strength exceedingly\]. Since the man himself has opened a wound, it is no wonder it festers, and either takes his life or shortens it.

The physician Aretaeus says that by this sin they bring on themselves every illness; and Lommius says as much (ibid., p. 70). Boerhaave attributes to it, among other things, convulsions and wasting of the sight, and says it opens the door to every illness. Hoffmann says the same and extends it to the voice, etc. Ludwig says the same occurs in both sexes. Kloekhof says the same; and Lewis laments that young men give themselves to this vice without knowing the enormity of the crime they commit or all the deplorable evils that follow from it. The soul feels all the ills of the body. Campe, a German physician, after describing the great evils that follow from this vice, adds: “My heart breaks to see them kill themselves so.” An English author says it brings loss of the intellectual faculties; that they suffer pains in the head, chest, stomach and belly, rheumatism, and pains in the eyes, ears and tongue, and that they swell.

II. *Onanismus in mulieribus* \[Onanism in women\]. On p. 113 Debreyne says: *Pollutionis humorem in feminis toto caelo distare ab humano spermate, ipse namque nullo modo cooperatur conceptioni foetus* \[The fluid of pollution in women differs entirely from human semen, for it in no way cooperates in the conception of the foetus\]. This vice, he says, in women is offensive to God, to the woman herself and to society, for those who give themselves to it turn away from marriage. *Hoc vitium in femina essentialiter libidinosum est, et duplici modo eis debilitatem infert, et propter id quod deperdunt, et propter magnam nervosi systematis commotionem, sicut in pueris observatur, in quibus nulla spermatis fit secretio* \[This vice in a woman is essentially libidinous, and brings weakness upon them in two ways: both because of what they lose, and because of the great agitation of the nervous system, as is observed in boys in whom no secretion of semen occurs\]; so that it brings on them every illness and even death itself, according to the principle: “Man perishes by that by which he reproduces.” However small the girl *quae turpes has actiones committit fluxum humoris experiri potest, juxta proverbium: ubi stimulus, ibi fluxus* \[who commits these shameful acts, she may experience a flow of fluid, according to the proverb: where there is stimulus, there is flow\]. This vice, he adds, claims as many victims among women as among men, or more. In some it begins from the cradle, and one may say: *erraverunt ab utero* \[they have gone astray from the womb\].[2]

On p. 114 he relates the following facts, taken from the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*. A girl gave herself to this vice at the age of four. Her parents used every means in vain to draw her from it, and at twelve she died in the very act of sin. Another girl began before she was three, and as a result lost her sight and hearing, grew thin and died: all the remedies of the art could do nothing for her. Another, of five, gave herself to this accursed vice, then became a prostitute, and was very wicked, blasphemous and obstinate. Another, of four, did indecent things with girls of ten or twelve. When these moved away, she continued

doing them alone. Her parents noticed and tried every means in vain to draw her from her vice: she grew thin and became intractable, disobedient, obstinate and so on.

On p. 117 he says it is inexplicable how far amorous sensibility goes in women, even with regard to other women. Therefore mothers and schoolmistresses must be very watchful, for things happen among girls and young women that make one shudder. In the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* we read that girls are drawn by a kind of instinct to this abominable vice. Dr Deslandes says: "It is certain that a great number of girls, and most adolescent girls, are corrupted by this vice" (p. 118). And in spite of this and the immense harm it brings, physicians and moralists have scarcely concerned themselves with it, because it scarcely seems possible to them. Yet what harm it does to body and soul!… "They consult physicians," he adds, "about their broken health, their fainting fits, the disturbance of their interior functions, and so on; and when they are asked the cause, they answer that it is their great sorrows, adversities and troubles"; but it is not so: these are the effects of this vice, voluntary or involuntary (p. 119).

He then gives several cases, among others: 1. That of a girl of eighteen who had very robust health; but having given herself to this abominable vice, she became very weak and without strength. By day she was overcome with drowsiness and by night she could not sleep; she had no appetite and became swollen. But when the vice ceased she was cured (ibid.). 2. Another, of twelve, in whom it caused great pains, swelling of the abdomen, white discharges and incontinence of urine. 3. Federigo, an Italian physician, relates that a woman who gave herself to this vice became very thin, lost her appetite, suffered from wasting and could not stand. Only a month before she died did she confess her accursed vice in tears, persuaded that by it she had loaded herself with illnesses and opened the door to death, which at last overtook her (p. 120). Women who give themselves to this vice, he says on p. 125, become victims of the passion, which seems to have worse results in them than in men; for besides exhausting their constitution, it affects their sensibility more and attacks their nervous system more.

On p. 126, *tres species manustuprationis distinguit in mulieribus. Prima species, seu clitorismus, est ordinaria, fitque tangendo clitorim, quae juxta physiologistas est venerei aestri sedes aut praecipuum organum, atque in superiori et media parte vulvae, id est pudendi, collocatur. Secunda species manustuprationis in femina fit in vagina digitorum, vel quorumlibet instrumentorum introductione. Tertia est uterina, et fit tangendo collum uteri; et haec ultima ceteris perniciosior est* \[he distinguishes three species of masturbation in women. The first species, or clitorism, is the ordinary one, and is done by touching the clitoris, which according to the physiologists is the seat or chief organ of venereal heat, and is placed in the upper middle part of the vulva, that is, of the privy parts. The second species of masturbation in a woman is done by introducing the fingers, or any instruments whatever, into the vagina. The third is uterine, and is done by touching the neck of the womb; and this last is more pernicious than the others\], for it makes women barren, fills them with a thousand illnesses, and opens the door to death itself.

The illnesses that come upon women from these filthy practices are ulcers or sores, scirrhi, and cancers *in collo uteri* \[of the neck of the womb\] which kill them; it brings on a discharge they call the whites, and they become hard and graceless in temper.

Manustupratio duobus modis fieri potest, complete, et est cum seminis effusione, aut incomplete, cum sicca est et nervosa. Utraque peccatum mortale evadit, atque fatalem influentiam in generali sanitatis statu exercet. \[Masturbation can be done in two ways: completely, that is, with effusion of seed; or incompletely, when it is dry and nervous. Either is a mortal sin, and exerts a fatal influence on the general state of health.\]

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[1] Jean-Baptiste-Félix Descuret, *La médecine des passions* (1841; Spanish trans. 1846).

[2] Ps 57:4 (Douay: "they have gone astray from the womb").

§ III. How the Confessor Should Behave towards Those Touched by This Vice, Especially Women

The confessor should try to speak to them with a gentle and kindly manner, and tell his penitent to say without fear what troubles her conscience. He should listen to her with holy simplicity and evenness, without showing curiosity to know these things, and without showing astonishment at what he is told, however abominable it may be; rather he may say that she will tell him nothing new, for everything is found in books, and he knows much more than she can tell him. This greatly encourages them.

He should not ask at first about the main point, but about some circumstance. Instead of questioning about the sin he suspects she has committed and is concealing, he should ask her: "How many times have you committed it?"… If she hesitates to answer, and by her surprise already lets it be understood that she committed it, he should suggest whether she has committed it a number of times much greater than he thinks she could have; and so, believing herself found out, she will confess the true number to him. Before she finishes explaining its number and gravity, as if the confessor wished to excuse her, he should say: "Surely you would not have done this unless you had been led into it by someone else"; and from her answer he will know whether there was an accomplice. So the confessor already knows that she has sinned, and with another person; and in this way it will be easy for him to learn the condition of the person and the kind and number of her sins.

First class: remedies against impurity. 1. Eat little. 2. Eat vegetables, little meat, and even little fish. 3. Do not drink wine, beer or spirits. 4. Take a light supper. 5. Cool baths in river or sea; country air. 6. A hard bed, or at most a mattress, not of wool but of horsehair, or a straw mattress of corn husks if possible; and avoid the warmth of the bed at night as far as possible. 7. Lie on the right side, never on the back or face down. 8. If he touches himself in his sleep, he should wear a nightshirt with closed sleeves tied at the neck, so that he cannot …

Second class: physical remedies of the second class. 1. Iron preparations. 2. Magnesia. 3. Lime water. 4. Sweet spirit of nitre. 5. Barley water or couch-grass water.

Third class: moral remedies. 1. Make a firm resolution to sin no more, like one who has the habit of smoking. If he wants to give it up he makes a firm resolution to smoke no more: he throws away paper, tobacco and cigars, and goes on from one day to the next, from one week to another, and finally finds himself like one who never smoked. Well, this is the first thing the one addicted to impurity must do: resolve seriously not to do such things any more. 2. Keep away from those persons, things and places that he knows by experience lead him to sin. 3. At once turn his thoughts away from these things and fix them on good or indifferent things that hold his attention. 4. Think that God is watching him; and just as he would not dare commit such wickedness before a person of standing, still less should he dare to do it before God, who is watching him. 5. Fix the eyes of reflection on Calvary, and there he will see how the pleasures of his body have brought sorrows, pains and death to the body of Jesus. 6. Fix the eyes of reflection on the pains of hell, and on the multitude of souls burning in its fires for this sin. 7. Frequent reception of the holy sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. 8. Mental prayer and spiritual reading. 9. Devotion to Most Holy Mary: praying three Hail Marys morning and night, with the prayer *Virgin and Mother of God*; the Hail Mary every hour; a part of the holy Rosary every day with attention and devotion; fasting or abstaining from some little thing every Saturday and on the vigils of the Most Holy Virgin; reading some book about Most Holy Mary, such as *The Glories of Mary* by St Alphonsus Liguori; receiving the holy Sacraments on Saturdays and on the feasts of Most Holy Mary; calling on her in temptations, saying: "Most Holy Virgin, protect me; my Mother, help me," and so on.

§ IV. Reflections for the Fornicator

Ah, my brother! Reflect how accursed the vice of impurity is: it not only damns the one who commits it, but once he has fallen into the snare he is not only the devil's slave but also his instrument for catching other souls, as has happened to you. Do you not see how the enemy has used you to make that unhappy woman sin and be lost? "Had she ever sinned while she was a girl or a woman?" "I don't know; I think not." Then see what wickedness! What a crime you have committed!… You have taken away her grace, her honour, her temporal and eternal fortune; and perhaps she will give herself up to a bad life and be a banner the devil uses to recruit souls for hell. For it happens to many that, after falling into this sin, they easily abandon themselves to the excesses of the most dissolute life; and of these sins you are made guilty at God's tribunal. Oh, what scandal you have given! Jesus Christ says it were better for you that a millstone were hanged about your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.[1]

Excuse. "Father, the woman I sinned with was already one of those women of the world." Ah, brother, this excuse does not justify you, any more than it would justify someone who had slashed a person with a knife and said that the person he wounded was already sick and already had other wounds. For each sin committed by a soul in sin adds a wound to the past ones, increases the obstacles to conversion, sinks it deeper into hell, and increases the share of pains awaiting it in the next world. You see, then, how barbarously and cruelly you have acted. And what matters more to you than all this, see the harm you do yourself in honour, wealth, body and soul, in time and in eternity.

In honour. Even if a man or woman has the best reputation in the world, as soon as it is known that he has fallen into this accursed sin he loses it all at once. Everyone points the finger at him; everyone talks of him; he is the subject of everyone's conversation and gossip.

In wealth. How many there have been who, blinded by this accursed sin, have squandered their inheritances and lost the capital, the money they will perhaps need to fulfil their duties, spending it miserably on this accursed vice, to the scandal of many!

In body. I do not speak of the exhaustion and wasting of strength this vice causes in the one who commits it, opening the door to every illness and even to death itself, as the most learned physician Devans admirably proves from the principles of medicine. Besides this, he exposes himself to all the venereal diseases, which are not few, and even to losing his life in the very act of impurity. Everyone knows that the impure are frequently attacked by shameful, incurable diseases that cause them intolerable pains, and no one pities them; rather they say to them: "You've got what you deserve, you brute." I knew a young man who, after impure dealings, became infected, swelled up like a toad, and died in the violence of the most acute pains. Ah, my brother, if something like this happens to you, how will you be left? You will lose your honour; people will say you are a brute and rotten; you will be crippled, useless, and so on.

Death. Her and Onan, while they were sinning, were struck dead in the very bed beside their wife.[2] In Holy Scripture (Num. 25) we read that while a man was sinning unchastely with a woman, a priest named Phinees went there with a dagger in his hand and, full of holy zeal, struck them, leaving them dead in the very place of the sin; and God our Lord was so pleased with this deed and the zeal of Phinees that he praised it, rewarded him, and pardoned his people. See, my brother, what great hatred God has for this sin, how he wills that it be punished in this world; and if zealous Phinees are lacking, he punishes it himself.

See what happened not long ago in a town in Catalonia; I know it very well. A man and a woman, to sin more secretly, went to the house of a procuress and shut themselves in a room. When the procuress saw that after some time they did not come out, she knocked at the door. As they did not answer, she knocked a second and third time; and seeing that they neither came out nor answered, she feared some misfortune. She went to report it to the mayor of the town, telling him that a man and a woman had come saying they had to discuss a very important business, had retired for this purpose and shut themselves in a room; and seeing they did not come out, she had called them, but they did not answer; and fearing some misfortune had befallen

them, she had come to report it. The mayor hurried there at once, knocked, but no one answered. He ordered the door to be forced… They go in, and what do they see? Dear God! Two wretches, naked, black as demons, dead on the bed in the very act of sin!… and their souls in hell! See, my brother, how God punishes fornicators. Oh, if the same had happened to you, where would you be now? In hell, to burn for all eternity. Oh, madness! For a brief pleasure, eternal pain!…

In this very century it happened in Madrid that two young men went to the house of a bad woman. While one of them was waiting for the other, who had gone into a room, he heard an extraordinary cry. He ran in to see what it was and found that his companion had died suddenly beside the bad woman. He was so disillusioned by his companion's misfortune that he withdrew from the world entirely.

Arsdekin (p. 678) relates that a man and a woman had sinned unchastely. The man fell ill, confessed, amended his life, and recovered the health of soul and body. But the woman, continuing in her bad life, laid snares for him, and he fell into sin with her again. But, terrible to tell! in the very act the woman died. The terrified man did not know what to do; and his terror grew when he heard someone knocking at the door. Going out to see who it was, he saw in the darkness of the night two figures, like two black and horrible men (they were two demons), and one of them carried a bridle in his hand. He asked them what they wanted. "We have come," they said, "to fetch a mule of ours that is in the house." "Gentlemen, there is no mule here." "Yes, sir, there is, and we know it for certain…" They enter the house, go to where the woman's corpse is, put the bridle in her mouth, and carry her off to hell, saying meanwhile these words of the Prophet: *Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus* \[Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding\].[3] Ah, woman, if you do not amend, some day you will be found dead, and the demons will put a bridle on you like a beast and carry you off to hell. Therefore I beg you to sin no more. And I beg everyone not to do this wickedness, for, as St Paul says, no fornicator, no unclean person … hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 6:9–10).[4]

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[1] Mt 18:6.

[2] Gen 38:7–10.

[3] Ps 31:9 (Douay: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding").

[4] VI, 9".

§ V. Reflections for Adulterers

Adultery, says Job, is a heinous crime and a most grievous iniquity, a fire that devoureth those who commit it:[1] in this world with the fire of misfortunes, and in the next with that of hell.

Ah, my brother, this crime is so great that God himself commanded his people to stone them to death: "If any man commit adultery with the wife of another, and defile his neighbour's wife, let them be put to death, both the adulterer and the adulteress" (Lev. 20:10). And before that law they burned them alive (Gen. 38:24). Among the pagans this penalty was given to adulterers: the woman was burned alive, and over the woman's ashes the man was hanged. The Greeks cut off the nose of a woman who consented to adultery. Ah, my brother, if one of these punishments were applied to you!… But if men do not do it, God will.

Do you not see what injury the man does to God who loves the woman the devil procures for him more than the one the Lord gave him? The adulterer despises the sacrament of Matrimony, which he profanes; he fails in the fidelity and word he gave, and so on.

Ah, woman, if the Greeks' penalty were applied to you!… You would have to go through the streets without a nose. What shame and confusion for you! Surely you would rather die than go about like that. And yet that is the penalty you have incurred.

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[1] Job 31:11–12.

§ VI. Reflections for Sodomites, Men and Women Who Commit This Crime

It is called sodomy because it was committed by the inhabitants of the city of Sodom, which God punished so terribly. Fire came down from heaven and burned them alive, and from this temporal fire they passed to the eternal fire of hell. Some authors say that our Lord Jesus Christ has such horror of this crime that on the night he was born in Bethlehem he killed all the sodomites.

For God's sake, my brother (my sister), commit so infamous a crime no more; for God would punish you even in this world, since it is one of those sins that cry to God for vengeance, and afterwards he would punish you with the eternal pains of hell. This crime is so monstrous that it is not found even among brutes. What misery, that a man or woman should become more brutish than the brutes and more irrational than irrational creatures!

§ VII. Reflections for Those Who Commit the Sin of Bestiality

What a horrible crime!… Men and women who commit this crime become worse than irrational brutes. This sin is given the same name as sinning with the devil, for both are called bestiality. God commanded that those who committed it be put to death,[1] and in some kingdoms it was ordered that they be burned alive.

Ah, my brother (my sister)! If God had sent you the punishment it deserves, where would you be now? In hell, to burn for all eternity, chained to those infernal beasts, the demons. If you do not repent and do penance for it, God will have you burned, chained to them for all eternity.

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[1] Lev 20:15–16; Ex 22:19.

§ VIII. Reflections for Onanists

This sin is so terrible that God our Lord punishes it even in this world. In Holy Scripture we read that God punished with sudden death two married men[1] who committed this crime.

I have seen with my own eyes extraordinary misfortunes in some houses that could be attributed to no other cause than manifest punishments of this crime: illnesses in the parents; illnesses and even deaths in the children, and so on.

For God's sake, my brother, do these wicked things no more, nor use these means to hinder the work of God. Remember that it was for this that you married.

Excuses. 1. "So as not to have children." What barbarity! If your father had done so, you certainly would not exist. So it is in order not to have children! That is how you kill them.

2. "So as not to have so many children." You do not want to have so many children, or more, and afterwards you will have more demons in hell to torment you.

3. "Father, we are poor; how are we to feed so many children?" You should have thought of that before you married. But do not be alarmed on that account; God will help you. Do you not know the saying: "He who gives birth gives bread"? God himself gives us his word that all we need will be added unto us,[2] if we try to be good Christians and work. How is it possible that God, so good, so powerful and provident, who is our Father, should forget his children or abandon them, when he cannot forget or abandon the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields?

4. "Father, if we have many children we won't be able to give them the education they should have." Do what you can on your part, and God will do the rest. Do not be alarmed at having many sons and daughters to

bring up and settle in life, for God will provide. The more children you have, if you do your part as you should, the more glory and reward you will merit; and since the Lord entrusts his creatures to you, take good care of them, and you will not lack your reward. Having many children is not chance; it is God's disposition. How many there are who, whatever they try, cannot have so many, and perhaps none! That God grants more children to you than to another is a sign that God places more trust in you. If a king entrusted more fortresses to one general than to another, more affairs to one minister than to another, more children to raise and educate to one than to another, would it not be a sign that he trusted this one more than the other? Well then, the Lord's granting more children to you than to another is a sign of greater trust in you. And how blameworthy would that general be if, on the pretext of taking better care of the fortresses entrusted to him, he razed them all but one or two; and if, to take better care of the king's children, he killed or smothered them all but one or two! Would the king not be deeply offended? Would he not give him a terrible punishment? Make the application, and tell me: how offended will the King of kings, who is God, not be, if he sees that by your pretexts and excuses you prevent the existence of those beings he had entrusted to you? Oh, what a terrible punishment he will send you! How you expose yourself to incurring the punishment of Her and Onan, who were at that very instant struck dead and damned!

5. "Father, we do it so as to raise better the baby, who is still very small, and not have to give him to a wet-nurse." Generally speaking, after a woman has given birth there is no danger of conceiving; but even if there were, better to give the child to a wet-nurse than your souls to the devil, as you do by committing this wickedness.

The wife's excuses. 1. "Father, I don't want it, but he wants it so." If you absolutely do not want it, and take no pleasure in that wickedness, you do not sin, but he does. Nevertheless, use kind words and prayers to Jesus and Most Holy Mary that he may desist and repent of so grave a crime, which deserves hell for him. And how is it possible for a good wife to look with indifference on her husband's damnation?

2. "We both agree on it, because I suffer so much in childbirth." You will suffer more in hell, where you will go if you do not amend. Perhaps what you suffer is a punishment for the sins of this or another kind you have committed, as happened to Eve, to whom God said, in punishment of her sin, that she would bring forth children in sorrow. But be careful, madam; for by what you do it is quite possible you will make yourself suspect to your husband. In spite of all your precautions, you cannot imagine how easy it is for you to conceive; and since your husband will think the child is not his, he will suspect you of breaking conjugal fidelity. Quarrels will begin, and you will have one of the punishments of your sin, as has often happened. And even if there were no danger of suspicion, there is another danger: that the child be born crippled, wan and thin, because the portion the Author of nature had appointed is always lacking; just as stockings will never last as long that lack the quantity of thread or yarn normally required.

Note. Aliquoties hoc fit inscio marito; mulier enim a diabolo instigata suas nefarias artes adhibet ad prolis procreationem impediendam. Aut enim seipsam aliquantulum retrahit ne seminatio penetret in matricem; aut respirationem cohibet et suam propriam seminationem; aut pannum, vel digitos immittit ad abstrahendam seminationem post coitum, vel ad mingendum surgit, aquam bibit, etc. \[Sometimes this is done without the husband's knowledge; for the woman, instigated by the devil, uses her wicked arts to prevent the procreation of offspring. Either she withdraws herself a little so that the seed may not penetrate the womb; or she holds her breath and her own emission; or she inserts a cloth or her fingers to draw out the seed after intercourse, or gets up to urinate, drinks water, etc.\] This unhappy and unfortunate woman should be warned that most of the time all these efforts are entirely useless; for if her nature is disposed, it is with her as with gunpowder, which catches with a little fire and needs no more to ignite; and once ignited there is nothing to be done. Therefore let her stop doing this to herself, for ordinarily she achieves nothing but loading herself with sins.

To the married woman who uses these evil tricks, say: You must know that by marrying you bound yourself to all the consequences that the state of marriage brings, such as *reddere debitum* \[rendering the marriage

debt\], having few or many children according to God's disposition, and bearing them in pain; *et quidquid facit ad impediendam conceptionem aut nativitatem filiorum, ad abortus crimen sacri canones referunt* \[and whatever is done to prevent the conception or birth of children, the sacred canons refer to the crime of abortion\]. Hence it is called a most grave sin, because it prevents the life of children. To prevent the fruit from being born is anticipated homicide, says Tertullian;[3] and to take a life already begun or to prevent it from beginning are two very similar crimes. Do you not see, then, what crime you commit?… Ah, these creatures will cry for vengeance against you before God's tribunal! And Sixtus V says: "What punishment do they not deserve who use poisons or any other potions to make women sterile, thereby preventing them from conceiving?"[4]

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[1] Gen 38:7–10.

[2] Mt 6:33.

[3] Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 9, 8: *Homicidii festinatio est prohibere nasci* ("To prevent birth is a hastening of homicide").

[4] Sixtus V, bull *Effraenatam* (1588).

§ IX. Reflexiones uxoratae, quae debitum negat, faciendae [Reflections to be made to a married woman who refuses the marriage debt]

Consideres oportet, carissima soror, contineri se non posse maritum, cum suam diligit sponsam, et amoris passione inflammatus est, ideoque teneri te illum admittere sub gravissimi peccati poena. Quod ut facilius comprehendas hac utar similitudine: Si tu, cum aliqua premeris corporali necessitate, quid diceres si a marito interdicta, usque mane vel ad octo usque dies attenderes, praeciperet? Imprudentem certe, rationeque destitutum hominem diceres maritum, teque nullo modo exspectare posse reponeres, atque ubivis ea projicienda oportere. Idipsum in marito, passionis aestu abrepto, evenire certissime scias velim: eadem enim tunc necessitate impellitur, qua tu in casu supposito; atque ideo si tu illum a te repellas, ea ubivis projiciet, atque tu rea illius incontinentiae peccatique evades. Oh! quoties eaedem sponsae in causa sunt perditionis maritorum! Lamentantur illae se marito exosas esse, eos cum aliis versari mulierculis, ab eisque se infectas… cum multoties, si marito conjugale debitum reddere non recusassent, ad tantum nefas non impulissent.

\[You must consider, dearest sister, that your husband cannot contain himself when he loves his wife and is inflamed with the passion of love, and that you are therefore bound to admit him under pain of most grave sin. That you may understand this more easily, I will use this comparison. If, when you were pressed by some bodily need, your husband forbade you and ordered you to wait until morning, or even for eight days, what would you say? You would certainly call your husband an imprudent man, devoid of reason, and reply that you could in no way wait, and must relieve yourself wherever you might. Know for certain that the very same happens in a husband carried away by the heat of passion: he is driven then by the same necessity as you in the case supposed. And so, if you repel him, he will relieve it wherever he may, and you will become guilty of his incontinence and sin. Oh, how often these same wives are the cause of their husbands' perdition! They complain that their husbands hate them, that they keep company with other women, and that they have been infected by them… when many a time, had they not refused their husbands the conjugal debt, they would never have driven them to so great a wickedness.\]

Another reflection. If you buy a glass, a plate or the like, you take possession of it and use it whenever you wish, for it is yours and not the seller's. The same must be said of marriage. When you married you made a contract with your husband: he gave you his body and you gave him yours. So your husband's body is yours and yours is your husband's, and each may use that body whenever he reasonably wishes; and to refuse it is an injustice and the cause of many quarrels and sins.[1]

Another reflection. A single man will keep chaste, if he wishes, with the grace of the Lord, which will be given him if he asks for it and does his part. But a married man, as a rule, cannot contain himself without going to his wife. Let us make a comparison. When you are not nursing, you give little thought to your milk; but when you are nursing, you must give the breast to the baby from time to time, or else you are uncomfortable. In some way the same may be said of the single and the married man. For the Author of nature has arranged this need for the husband to go to his wife from time to time, to lighten and counterbalance the very heavy burden of marriage; for if he were not under this need, almost a necessity, I believe many men would easily rid themselves of the temper, troubles and expenses of wife and family.

Another reflection. I am not unaware that there are women who, because of the discomforts and pains of pregnancy and childbirth, or on account of their ailments and years, find no pleasure in marriage, but rather much discomfort and distaste; and perhaps for this reason they sometimes say they are already old and no longer fit to have children. To which I answer that it does not matter. You must obey; for you must know that marriage is not only for having children but also for calming concupiscence. And though in you it may be entirely extinguished by years and ailments, it will not be so in your husband, however old he is; for St Philip Neri says that in some it lives as long as they can move their eyelids; and perhaps God permits it so that they may not come to loathe each other when old.

Note. The confessor should know that *cum maritus est onanita, aut seminatur extra vas* \[when the husband is an onanist, or ejaculates outside the vessel\], the wife should use the means that charity and prudence suggest to make him amend. But if he does not amend, and she fears, as is usual, his ill-treatment, *potest mulier solvere debitum, dummodo non sibi complaceat in tali crimine mariti, juxta responsum sacrae Poenitentiariae sub die XXIII aprilis anni 1832* \[the wife may render the debt, provided she takes no pleasure in such a crime of her husband, according to the reply of the Sacred Penitentiary of 23 April 1832\]. This is confirmed by the case of one who asks a usurer for money at excessive interest, and also by that of one who asks the Sacraments of a parish priest whom he knows to be in sin.

[1] Cf. 1 Cor 7:3–5.

§ X. Those Who Speak Indecently

Of indecent words, some are venial sins and others mortal. They are venial if said out of pertness, levity, anger and the like, without impure affection and without danger to oneself or to those who hear. They are mortal if there is affection or desire in oneself, or if there is scandal to others. In that case one must state how many persons were present, what their state of life was, and whether they were related.

The harm you do, my brother, with those words, conversations, songs and so on is incalculable. For the inclination to impurity that all naturally have is roused and increased; it is like sowing cockle in the field of the Church, which spoils the good wheat. I mean, sowing that hellish seed in the hearts of your hearers and making them lose chastity, devotion and the other virtues. Those indecent words and conversations are like live coals thrown into haylofts or powder magazines, which set everything ablaze and ruin it. The devil uses you as a decoy to catch souls and cast them into hell. Oh, if you knew the multitude of souls who learn to sin by hearing that hellish language! I could cite you countless facts that would horrify you. Cantimpratensis relates that a boy learned to sin from hearing his nurse speak or converse indecently. St Bernardine of Siena tells of a young woman over thirty who had always kept herself a virgin, and who, merely from hearing a brazen man speak indecently, gave herself up to a bad life so completely that not even the devil could do as much harm as that woman did. *Woe to him that scandalizes*, says Jesus Christ: it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Ah, my brother, for God’s sake speak indecently no more. If a bad word ever escapes you, make a cross on the ground with your tongue, kiss it, and pray a Hail Mary. Keep away from those who speak foully, for they

are like frogs and cicadas, which by singing make the others answer; they are like plague-stricken people, whose breath infects the healthy. And to the letter is fulfilled what the Apostle says: Evil communications corrupt good manners.[1]

[1] 1 Cor 15:33.

The Golden Key

Seventh Commandment

The seventh commandment is: Thou shalt not steal.

“Have you stolen?” — “Yes, Father.” (Here the confessor will find out what was stolen and where; whether the matter is grave or light; whether there is sacrilege; whether restitution can be made.)

Reflections. Ah, brother, do not steal, for stealing does not make you rich; it makes you poor. Do you not know the saying that ill-gotten gain makes one lose what was well acquired? Or, as another goes: “He who fills himself with others’ goods bores holes in his own ship.” It is the same as setting fire to what you own: it consumes everything. Acquiring the goods of others and adding them to your own is also like putting rotten oranges among sound ones, which spoils them. But even if it did not make you lose your own, and even increased it, what would you gain from all this if in the end you lost your soul, as Jesus Christ says? *Quid prodest homini si universum mundum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?* \[What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?\][1]

What bird would willingly fly into the fowler’s snare if it knew that death awaited it there? Well, you must know that the devil, the hunter of souls, uses this snare of death, as the Apostle calls it,[2] and with it he has caught many, and you as well. But at least, as the bird, the hare and so on struggle to escape when they find themselves caught, so you too must struggle to break this snare and escape. What laborer would be so foolish as to toil hard if he knew that the more he worked, the stronger would be the noose put on him to hang him? Yet so it is with you, my brother: the more you work to acquire unjust gain, the more surely the enemy holds you, and he will hang you with the very thing you unjustly acquired.

Ah, my brother, do not be greedy. For there is nothing more wicked than the covetous man, says Ecclesiasticus: *Avaro nihil est scelestius* \[Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man\].[3] And the Apostle says that covetousness is idolatry and the root of all evils, and that some, for gain, have erred from the faith and entangled themselves in many sorrows.[4] Jesus Christ calls riches thorns;[5] and thorns they are indeed, piercing the miser’s heart both in acquiring them and in keeping them. If you want riches, seek the true riches, which are the virtues, merits and heavenly treasures: those treasures that thieves cannot steal nor moth corrupt.[6]

Remedies. 1. First: what you do not want for yourself, do not want for anyone. Would you like what you own to be taken from you? Surely not; then neither should you like taking what belongs to others.

2. Give alms. *Qui dat pauperi non indigebit: qui despicit deprecantem sustinebit penuriam* \[He that giveth to the poor shall not want: he that despiseth his entreaty shall suffer indigence\] (Prov 28:27). The confessor may further exhort him by setting before him the praises Jesus Christ will give to almsgivers on the day of judgment, and those He gives them in the holy Gospel.[7]

A prophet says that those who practice lying, murder and theft are cursed by God (Hos 4:2). The apostle St Paul declares that neither thieves, nor the covetous, nor railers, nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10).

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[1] Mt 16:26.

[2] Cf. 1 Tim 6:9 (“the snare of the devil”).

[3] Ecclus 10:9.

[4] Col 3:5; 1 Tim 6:10.

[5] Mt 13:22; Lk 8:14.

[6] Mt 6:19–20.

[7] Mt 25:34–40.

Eighth Commandment

The eighth commandment is: Thou shalt not bear false witness nor lie.

§ I. Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness against Thy Neighbour (Ex 20:16)

Ah, my brother, never bear false witness against anyone. Would you like false witness borne against you? Then neither should you like bearing it against others. It is one of the six things God hates: a deceitful witness that uttereth lies.[1] The Holy Spirit compares the false witness to a dart, a sword and a sharp arrow (Prov 25:18). St Thomas says that false testimony has three kinds of deformity (II-II, q. 70, a. 4, corpus): first, from the perjury it commits; second, from the injustice; third, from the lie, which is always a deformed thing.

§ II. Telling Lies

Lying is a very evil, base and blameworthy thing. Liars are children of the devil. That is why St John, speaking of the devil, says that because he stood not in the truth he is a liar and the father of lies.[1]

Remedies. 1. Speak little. 2. Do not make excuses for yourself. 3. If a lie ever escapes you, retract it at once.

§ III. Detraction

Oh, what harm detraction does! It harms the one who speaks, the one who listens, and the one spoken about.

Reflection. My brother, never forget that natural principle: what you would not want for yourself, do not want for anyone. You certainly would not like people to speak evil things of you, even true ones; so neither should you like saying them of others.

Remedies. 1. Neither speak nor listen to evil of the absent. 2. Do not meddle with others, according to the saying: “What you are not going to eat, let it cook as it will.”

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[1] Prov 6:16–19.

[2] Jn 8:44.

Reflections for Various Classes of Persons and on Various Matters: § I. Reflections for Those Who Have Been, or Still Are Somewhat, Unbelievers

I. To one who will not believe that there is a God.

Reflection. Ah, my brother, how is it possible that you should doubt the existence of God? Lift your eyes to the heavens; observe the multitude of planets, comets and other stars. Cast your gaze over the earth and contemplate so many animals, plants, minerals and so on. What do all these things tell us, what do they proclaim with loud voices, if not the existence of a God infinitely good and perfect?[1] Who but God could present so many and such varied prospects as are set before our eyes every day? Who but God could do it?

“It seemed to me that nature does this.”

But, my brother, do you know what “nature” means? You and many others always have that word on your lips, and surely you do not understand what you are saying when you name nature. If the word means anything, nature is the work of the hand of the Creator of all things, who is God; and if you wish to conceive it as a being, it is like the maid or servant in a lord’s house, who carries out what her master commands and arranges. And so that you may better understand the pedantry of one who attributes everything to nature and

never turns to the Creator, tell me: if a man came to a house and the master ordered the maid to serve him a sumptuous table, and if, after being thoroughly served and satisfied, the man thanked the maid a thousand times, proclaiming her generosity everywhere, and said not one word of thanks to the master, what would you think? Would it not be gross rudeness? Yet this is what those do who attribute everything to nature: they are the most foolish, stupid and ungrateful of men. But the truly wise turn to God when they need something, such as rain; and they give thanks to God when they have obtained some special favor, as a sensible man here on earth turns to his lord to obtain what he needs, and thanks his lord once he has obtained it.

You must know further, my brother, that all things are ordered in number, weight and measure,[2] and nothing happens in this world by chance with respect to God. We call it chance because of our ignorance; but it is not chance before God. To help you understand this better, suppose you have two servants. You tell the first to make a round of the city, starting from the upper part, and then you tell the second to make the round starting from the lower part. Certainly the servants will meet on their rounds. For them it will be chance; but not for you, because you knew it and arranged it.

II. To one who speaks ill of God, or denies some of His attributes.

My brother, you say that God has gone deaf; that He does not hear us; that if God were God He would not permit this; that He would do this or that; that if God does not do this you will not believe there is a God; that this makes one renounce the faith, and so on. That is, according to your way of thinking, God is not just in governing things, because He permits injustices, oppression and other evils that He could prevent if He wished, and punish at once.

In the first place I answer you: who are we to set ourselves up as judges of the conduct and government of God, the supreme Judge, all-wise and all-holy? It should be enough for us to know that God so disposes and permits, to think it the most just thing. How many things are there even here among men which, while we did not know the circumstances, intentions and so on, seemed most disproportionate and imprudent, and once we learned the motives we saw were most just and well ordered? We should think the same if we knew the ends of divine Wisdom in disposing such things. Do you perhaps claim that God must render you an account of what He does in governing the universe? What a king does not do with his subjects, nor a master with his slaves, do you want God to do with you, a worm of the earth? I tell you frankly, my brother, that when I think and consider that God has done it, that God has willed it, that God has permitted it, even if I do not understand or see the reason, I think there is every reason for doing, willing and permitting it; and so should you and every man of sound judgment think.

It seems to you that God is unjust because He does not punish the sinner at once. How mistaken you are, my brother! No one has ever said that a prince of this world is unjust because he did not punish the guilty man immediately, or perhaps pardoned him. The world does not call that prince unjust, but clement and merciful. What, then, does God do in waiting for the sinner, but use goodness and clemency with him, as we see every day? But you do not like God to be so; you would rather have Him a strict avenger. I will grant it to you; but in that case you must know that justice requires that whoever commits a crime be punished at once with the corresponding penalty. And since you want it so, let it be so, and let us begin with your own house. Tell me: if at the first sin you committed the Lord had used justice and not mercy, how many years would you have been burning in hell by now? And would you like that justice very much?

But the strongest temptation for you concerning God's justice and providence is to see so often the wicked prospering and the good unhappy, unfortunate, persecuted and slandered. This should not surprise you; rather it is very reasonable. Or else tell me: what did the God-Man choose on earth but pains, toils, poverty, slander, persecution, torments and a shameful death? And will anyone say that a man treats his friend badly when he treats him as he treats himself, when he gives him the same dish and offers him the same cup? This is what Our Lord Jesus Christ does with His friends.

But if this reflection does not satisfy you, listen to what St Augustine says: Our Lord knows that the wicked, through their obstinacy, will be condemned to eternal fire; and since no man, however wicked, has failed to perform some act of virtue, God, who is just, wishes to repay it, and repays it in this world with prosperity and temporal gifts, because in the next nothing but eternal pains awaits them. On the other hand, there is no man, however good, who has not in time committed some faults; and God wishes to purge and purify them in the fire of trials, like gold.[3] And if there were anyone without any fault at all, the Lord would only be doing him a great favor by permitting him the trials of this life, so as to give him a most beautiful opportunity to merit much and to resemble his King and Lord Jesus.

Here two comparisons may be made. The first is of a master who has a pig and a beast of burden. To the pig he gives all it wants, though it does nothing all day but grunt, root in the ground and wallow in the mire; whereas to the beast of burden he gives barely what it needs to live, makes it carry loads all day, and perhaps urges it on with spur or whip. If the beast of burden were capable of reason and complained to you, what would you say? I think you would say: "Oh, how foolish you are! Is it not better to work and live than to lead a pig's life and die before long? If you knew the fate that awaits the pig shortly, I am sure that instead of envying its lot you would pity its misfortune, and instead of complaining of your master's injustice you would thank him a thousand times for the benefit he has bestowed on you."

The second comparison is of a master who has two laborers who are friends. To the first of them he gives much work, and to the second absolutely none. I ask: which of the two does he love more? The first, you will tell me, because the more work he has, the more he will earn.

Another reflection on why the good suffer and the wicked do not. All good Christians are like priests, as the apostles St Peter and St John say: *Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium* \[But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood\] (Rev 1:6). This being so, it belongs to priests to offer sacrifices; and as Jesus Christ, the High Priest, offered himself as a victim for the glory of the eternal Father and in satisfaction for our sins, so we too, as true Christians, must be priests, and as such must offer ourselves as victims for the glory of God and in satisfaction for our faults and sins.[4] The wicked are not counted by God as priests, nor can their sacrifice be acceptable and pleasing to Him, since it is not a sacrifice of justice, which is the only one He accepts.

This sacrifice that the good make of themselves is most pleasing in God's eyes, and makes great satisfaction for their own faults and for those of the whole nation, as we read in Holy Scripture (2 Macc 7:37–38):[5] "I offer up my body and my life… that in me and in my brethren the wrath of the Almighty, which hath justly been brought upon all our nation, shall cease." And so indeed it was… *ira enim Domini in misericordiam conversa est* \[for the wrath of the Lord was turned into mercy\] (2 Macc 8:5).

On those words of the Apostle, *Adimpleo ea, quae desunt passionum Christi in carne mea pro corpore ejus, quod est Ecclesia* \[I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the church\] (Col 1:24), the sacred commentators say: although it is true that the Passion of Jesus Christ was in itself more than sufficient to appease the just indignation of the eternal Father for all the sins of the world, nevertheless the Father accepted it only on condition that adults should take their part in this same Passion in order to enjoy its fruit. Hence in public calamities and misfortunes, in which the innocent suffer as much as the guilty, and perhaps more, the condition and will of the eternal Father is thus fulfilled. The guilty suffer as culprits, and if after this punishment they are not converted, it becomes for them a cause of greater ruin and condemnation. But the good, suffering with patience and resignation, are purified more and more of their imperfections and advance in grace; they become more pleasing in God's eyes, and by their sufferings well borne they fulfil what, by divine decree, was wanting to the Passion of Jesus Christ. This is how divine justice is appeased and the divine mercies obtained. In proof of this truth one has only to read the Holy Scriptures and Church history. How many times whole nations have been pardoned through the penance and patience of the good! What blessings, what graces and conversions did the sufferings and deaths of the

Martyrs not obtain!

What do you think of what I have just said? Do you not see in it a wise disposition of divine Providence? Would it be reasonable that the innocent and the holy should suffer and die to save sinners, and that the mass of sinners should neither suffer nor contribute anything on their part? Of this mass of sinners, some are wicked, lost or obstinate; others are sinners justified, or who are to be justified. The suffering of the wicked does not serve to appease and satisfy divine justice; rather they provoke it more and more with the blasphemies they vomit forth and the sins of every kind they commit. But justified sinners, being united to God by grace, have their merits and sufferings united with those of Jesus Christ. That is why all the good are called to pains and sufferings, as St Paul says: *Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu persecutionem patientur* \[All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution\];[6] and if we suffer with Jesus, with Him we shall reign in heaven.[7] So for all who are pleasing in God's eyes it is indispensable that temptation and tribulation should prove them; for if Christ had to suffer to enter into glory, which is His own house,[8] how is it possible for us to enter without pains? Courage, then, my brother. Let us rejoice if the happy lot has fallen to us of suffering for Jesus Christ; and this Lord, accepting our sufferings and uniting them with His own, will present them together to His eternal Father, to whom they cannot fail to be acceptable.

III. Brief reflections for one who says he does not believe in heaven or hell.

"Father, I know very well that there is a supreme Being, creator of all things; but this talk of heaven and hell I cannot persuade myself of, nor can I believe in any life but the present one."

My brother, I beg you in charity to listen to me as a rational being, for I will speak to you only in the language of natural reason. I ask only one thing: that you silence your passions for a moment, and you will see how we understand each other, and you will no longer speak like Epicurus, known as the "Greek pig" for his brutish passions, because, in imitation of that unclean animal, he cared only to idle, eat and drink at his ease, saying that his soul would end with the life of his body, just like that of the brutes.

But to proceed clearly, let us take it point by point. You will surely grant me that man's soul is very different from that of the brutes, since they do not reason, nor invent, nor do the thousand other things we see men do every day. Or else tell me: what animal has invented a machine? What progress has the nightingale made in its song, or the swallow in its nests? Moreover, every animal is content with the present life, and man is not: he never counts himself happy enough. Scarcely has he enjoyed one thing than he aspires to another, and his desires reach beyond his days and the sphere of this world. And if, for love of vice, he tries to deceive himself by saying there are no pleasures but those of this world, his conscience raises its voice and insists on undeceiving him. Have you not, my brother, experienced it yourself? How many times have you believed that if you could go to such a theatre, such a dance, such a feast, or enjoy such a pleasure, you would be happy, and your heart would be wholly content and satisfied? And the reality was not so: you found that the pleasure came with more troubles than thorns come with the rose; that the delight, mixed with distaste, passed like lightning, and left you more out of sorts than you were before that momentary satisfaction. This experience can teach you that man's happiness is not to be sought in this world but in heaven, and that his soul is not like the brutes' to enjoy the pleasures of this world, but is immortal and destined to enjoy the goods of heaven.

Listen to another reflection, made by Rousseau. This philosopher, impious and immoral though he was, nevertheless speaking as a rational man, said: "I see that the Creator has placed an admirable order in all the things of the universe; I see only one disorder, which is that the good are persecuted, slandered and oppressed, and the wicked flourish and are idolized. And when will this end? When will order be put to this disorder?" And he says that this will be at the hour of death: that then the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished accordingly.

Even you, as an impartial judge, could not fail to pass very different sentences on the two parties I am about to present to you. There are in this city two men. The first fulfils his duty, cares for his family and for the public offices entrusted to him; he has compassion on the unfortunate, relieves with the greatest readiness, generosity and promptness whatever needs come before him; he is the relief of his friends and the comfort of everyone. The other, instead of caring for his family, scandalizes them by his wicked conduct; he squanders his patrimony on gambling and other vices; he helps no one, but on the contrary robs and swindles everyone he can; he is a traitor to his friends and his country; he respects neither the chastity of virgins nor the fidelity of marriage, and sacrifices everything to the brutality of his passions; in a word, he commits every crime imaginable. I now ask: would you pass the same sentence on both? Would you assign the same end to the second as to the first? Surely not. Therefore, if we see very often that in this world the one has the same end as the other, we must believe that there is, after this, another place where virtue is rewarded and vice punished.

Besides, reason dictates and experience teaches that in every well-ordered kingdom there are rewards to recompense virtue, and prisons and punishments to chastise the criminal. Now if this happens in the kingdoms of men, how much more in the kingdom of God, the source and origin of all good order? Natural reason, then, dictates that there must be a heaven for the good and a hell for the wicked. Even the pagans, guided by the light of nature alone, knew and held this truth as certain. How much more must we believe it, who besides natural reason have the Gospel, which assures us of it!

And to convince you further how foolishly unbelievers act, kindly consider: what is lost by believing these truths? Nothing; nor does one pay anything to believe them. But whoever does not believe them, ah, he exposes himself to losing heaven, losing his soul, and paying for it with eternal torments, for *qui non crediderit, condemnabitur* \[he that believeth not shall be condemned\] (Mk 16:16). A single degree of probability that there is a hell is enough to prove unbelievers mad.

Ordinarily it is with unbelievers as with thieves and murderers. While these are at liberty and go about doing as they please, they laugh at and mock the courts, prisons and gallows; but when the wretches fall into the hands of justice and see themselves condemned to die, “I never thought it would come to this,” they cry. So too unbelievers: while they enjoy health they mock God, do not believe, and even insult His justice, denying the pains and torments of hell; but when they fall into the hands of God, *ergo erravimus… nos insensati* \[therefore we have erred… we fools\], they say (Wis 5:4, 6).

“But, Father, is God not merciful? So I am not afraid of being damned.”

Ah, my brother, I know very well that God is merciful; but I also know that those who abuse His mercy will find Him a strict judge. I know that He knows very well how to punish, as He Himself says: *Ego Dominus percutiens* \[I am the Lord that strike\].[9] His mercy is so great that its like has never been seen nor ever will be. Or else, have you ever heard of any court releasing a great criminal merely because he humbled himself and asked pardon? If that happened in human courts, no culprit would be led to execution. Yet what does not happen in the courts of earth happens in the tribunal of God’s mercy: however great a sinner a man has been, if he humbles himself and truly asks pardon, God does not condemn him, but saves him, adopts him as a son, and makes him a sharer in His eternal glory. Hence what most drives the damned to despair and torments them in hell is to know and think that their damnation is the work of their own hands, and that if they are damned it is through their own fault.

This teaching can be supported with various comparisons. (The comparison of the doctor who prescribes an effective remedy, and the patient dies because he would not take it: whose is the fault? What will the doctor say?) (The comparison of a father who, while his son is sick, cares for him and does what he can to save him; but if despite this he dies, he concerns himself only with sending the body to the grave, because its stench could not be borne.) Whoever lives well neither fears nor denies hell… (The comparison of a man who lives

uprightly in a city, and would not be afraid even if there were a prison on every corner and a gallows in every square.)

IV. Reflections on purgatory.

In the world grave faults and light faults are committed. As for grave faults… (The comparison of the culprit who humbles himself and has his capital sentence commuted into a temporal one, which may be redeemed by himself or by another.) As for light faults, although they do not carry the guilt of eternal punishment, *nothing defiled shall enter heaven*, says Scripture.[10] Where, then, will one go who carries them? To hell? Justice does not allow him to be sent with those guilty of grave crimes. (The comparison of a judge who gives the offender the penalty proportioned to him.)

Why does the enemy vomit forth so many things against purgatory through the mouths of his followers? The answer is the comparison of a general besieging a fortress, who fires not only on the besieged but also on those who bring them provisions. The devil is the enemy of souls even in purgatory.

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[1] Cf. Ps 18:2 (Douay); Rom 1:20.

[2] Wis 11:21.

[3] Cf. Wis 3:5–6; 1 Pet 1:7.

[4] Cf. Rom 12:1.

[5] VIII, 5", which is the source of the Latin *ira enim Domini*….

[6] 2 Tim 3:12.

[7] Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12.

[8] Lk 24:26.

[9] Ezek 7:9.

[10] Rev 21:27.

Appendix I. Penances

Having suggested simple reflections to confessors on the commandments and so on, it will not be out of place to suggest some penances that may be applied with fruit to penitents. The assigning of penances is one of the things that demand the greatest prudence in the confessor. There are satisfactory penances, medicinal penances, and counsels.

§ I. Satisfactory Penances

I. For light matter, one of the following may be imposed, according to the matter:

1. Pray three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys to the Blessed Sacrament, called the "lesser station," in honor of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.

2. Pray three *Pater* and *Ave* to the purity of Most Holy Mary.

3. Pray five *Pater* and *Ave* to the wounds of Jesus Christ.

4. Pray six *Pater* and *Ave* to the Blessed Sacrament, or the "greater station."

5. Pray seven *Pater* and *Ave* to the sorrows of Most Holy Mary.

6. Pray three *Pater* and *Ave* to the Most Holy Trinity, and read a chapter of à Kempis.

7. One *Miserere* and *De profundis* for the faithful departed.[1]

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II. For grave matter, one of these:

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1. One, three, six or nine parts of the Most Holy Rosary[2] within fifteen days, a month, etc., warning them that if one day they cannot or forget, they may do it another day, or extend the appointed time by a day.

2. Each day, seven *Pater* and *Ave*, kneeling with hands joined, in memory of the seven sorrows of the Virgin, for seven, nine or fifteen days, or a month.

3. Each day, five *Pater*, *Ave* and *Gloria*, standing, or kneeling with arms open and stretched out in the form of a cross, to the wounds of Jesus, for five, seven, nine or fifteen days, or a month.

4. Each day, seven *Pater* and *Ave* to the sorrows of Most Holy Mary, and five to the five wounds of Jesus Christ, for eight or fifteen days, or a month.

5. That he hear so many Masses on so many days.

6. That he visit the five altars on so many days.

7. That he make the Stations of the Way of the Cross so many times or days.

8. That he pray the Penitential Psalms with the litanies so many times, especially if he is a cleric.

9. If he is a cleric, and sometimes if he is a layman, the best thing is to impose half an hour of mental prayer each day and a quarter of an hour of spiritual reading in Rodríguez[3] or another book; for if they begin it out of obligation, perhaps they will afterwards continue out of devotion and become good clerics, since without mental prayer it is beyond doubt impossible to be a good priest.

When penances are to last several days, the penitent should always be told that if on some day they are not fulfilled, he does not sin thereby: it is enough to fulfil them another day, doing two days' worth, or to extend the appointed number of days.

To the rich, and even to those who are not rich if they are greedy, almsgiving will be imposed as a penance, and, according to the persons, visits to the sick or other works of mercy.

§ II. Medicinal Penances for the Amendment of Some Vice

1. One who has the vice of bad language may, each time a bad word escapes him, do one of the following, which I arrange in four degrees, to be applied according to the gravity of the word and the disposition of the person:

1. Say: *Ave Maria purísima* \[Hail Mary most pure\].

2. Pray a Hail Mary.

3. Kneel and kiss the ground, and say a Hail Mary.

4. Kneel and kiss the ground, after making a cross on it with the tongue, and pray a Hail Mary or *Salve*, when alone. This remedy, well practiced, has a sure effect.

2. The liar: let him retract as soon as he notices the lie.

3. The miser: let him give so much in alms each time.

4. The glutton: let him abstain so many times from the object of his gluttony for each sin.

5. The lustful: let him fast so many times, or abstain from wine, etc.

6. One vain in dress: let him wear ordinary clothes on a feast day, or go without combing his hair or shaving, without on that account giving up his walk so as not to be seen. If he is vain in other things, let the contrary be applied in the same manner.

§ III. Penances of Counsel

With these the penitent is to be told that he does not sin if he does not fulfil them, since they are not commanded but only counselled, and that their fulfilment would be pleasing to God.

1. That each day he make the acts of a Christian, as they are found in our *Camino recto* or another book.

2. That every day he say at least once, with all devotion, the prayer "O Virgin and Mother of God" (*Camino recto*, p. 23), attending to the words said to Most Holy Mary, and taking care that the Virgin need not tell him afterwards that he is a liar who breaks the word he gave her. For to say to her "I offer myself as your child," and not to act as befits a child of Most Holy Mary, is to lie; and the same holds for the other words. The penitent may be made to reflect that if someone offered him something and, after he had accepted it, did not keep his promise, he would certainly be much displeased. How displeased, then, must the Most Holy Virgin be when, after one has offered her, in honor of her purity, one's eyes to imitate her modesty, one's ears not to listen to detraction or other evil things, one's tongue to speak only good things, one's hands not to do indecent things, one's feet not to go to the dance, the theatre and so on, one's whole body to commit no sin, and then one's soul to be used only in knowing and loving God, she sees that one does the very opposite!

3. That every day he pray a *Pater* and *Ave* to his Guardian Angel, considering him always present, as did St Frances of Rome, who almost always saw him: now with a joyful face, now turning away, now sad and weeping. And as we would not do a bad or less good thing before a friend or a respectable person, much less should we do so before this true friend; nor should we sadden this our protector, defender and advocate. Let him end with the short prayer: "Angel of God," etc. (*Camino recto*, p. 24).

4. That every day he pray the Most Holy Rosary of the Virgin with attention and devotion, as if the Most Holy Virgin were there listening to him.

5. That he hear Holy Mass every day if he can, and if not, unite himself in spirit with those who hear it, to share in its effects.

6. That at least on Fridays or Sundays he make the Way of the Cross.

7. One who has the fault of sinning with the tongue may, every time a bad word escapes him, practice one of the following four things:

1. Say *Ave Maria purísima*.

2. Pray a Hail Mary.

3. Kneel, kiss the ground and pray a Hail Mary.

4. Kneeling, make a cross on the floor with the tongue, kiss it, and pray a Hail Mary or *Salve Regina*, fixing the attention on the words: "To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears."

- Any of these means is most effective for the amendment of any vice or fault; but the fourth, well practiced, is the best. There are some who have taken it up so earnestly that as soon as they fail they withdraw to a secluded place and practice it. "If a bodily need came upon me," they say, "would I not go and attend to it? Why, then, should I not do so with this spiritual need?" And in this way they have very soon achieved their amendment.

8. That every day he read a chapter of some spiritual book.

9. That likewise every day he have a period of mental prayer. If he can read, let him use some book; if not, he may use the four last things, death, judgment, hell and glory; or the mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary, or the sorrows of Most Holy Mary.

- He will use the last things by taking one for each week of the month, and doing the same the following month. In the first week he will say slowly, and repeat while reflecting on it, ten or more times a day: “I must die.” Second week: “I must be judged,” likewise. Third week: “Woe is me if I am damned! All the world will have profited me nothing,” likewise. Fourth week, looking at the sky: “Ah, happy homeland! Who knows whether I shall reach you?” likewise. Fifth week: “Cost what it may, I want to be saved,” likewise.

He will use the mysteries of the Rosary, especially the Sorrowful ones. He will make the application of the senses;[4] that is, he will act as if he saw, heard and so on, in each mystery, what takes place, and ask himself: Who suffers? What does He suffer? For whom does He suffer? He will apply what God inspires him to his own conduct, or to what he himself does, and try to reform himself. He will ask graces for himself and for others; especially he will pray for the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just, and the relief of the souls in purgatory.

§ IV. Other Penances

1. When walking in the streets, he may keep his eyes modest and fixed on the ground, without bowing his head on that account.

2. Deprive himself each day of one, two or more hours of talking; and if questioned, answer with all modesty but in few words, without prolonging the conversation on his part, and refraining during that time from asking questions.

3. At meals, deprive himself of what he likes most, or take less of it, and take more of the things he likes less.

4. Abstain from some fruit, sweet, etc.

5. Abstain from drinking wine, liquors, etc., or add more water.

6. Never complain if the food is not good.

7. Fast on some day, Saturdays for example, and the vigils of the Virgin.

8. Put a small pebble in his shoe.

9. Take the discipline with cords, not with chains. The discipline causes much pain and no harm if taken on the arms from the elbow to the hand, and on the backs of the hands.

10. Wear a small chain.

11. Wear a hair shirt.

The confessor will try to suggest these penances with great discretion; and he will not grant them, especially fasts, disciplines and the like, except by making them much desired; that is, he will make the penitent desire them greatly, and be very prudent in granting them.

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[1] Ps 50 and Ps 129 (Douay numbering).

[2] *parte*.

[3] Alonso Rodríguez SJ, *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas* (1609).

[4] \[A technique from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius (nn. 121–126).

Appendix II. Authors Suited to a Moralist Who Would Become a Good Confessor and Director

Moral authors to study.

- Scavini: very good for a course of study.

- Larraga: a good handbook for presenting oneself for examinations.

- *Homo apostolicus* of St Liguori: good for forming a practical confessor.

- Neyraguet.

- For consultation: the great work of St Liguori; Roncaglia; Billuart.

Authors of ascetical and mystical theology.

- *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *The Spirit of St Francis de Sales*.

- Castelvetere.

- Scaramelli.

- Rodríguez.

- Works of the Venerable Fr Granada.

- Works of St Teresa.

- Works of St John of the Cross.

Appendix III. Conferences Priests Should Hold in Order to Discharge Well the Ministry of Hearing Confessions Entrusted to Them by Jesus Christ

All priests should be thoroughly convinced of how useful and necessary it is for them to confer about confessions with their brethren. The very nature of things requires that matters of such importance be discussed with others: for the sake of uniformity; to correct, by the experience of others, the faults one falls into; and finally because experience in all the liberal and mechanical arts teaches how useful such conferences are for progress.

I say, first, that nature requires it, because no one comes into the world instructed or trained; and although instruction in moral matters is found in books, conferences with other confessors teach them how to proceed in practice, the experience of others making up for their own defects.

I say, further, that experience in all the liberal and mechanical arts teaches it. For if we observe what happens with all who wish to become accomplished in any of them, we see that first they are given rules, and then, and sometimes at the same time, they are made to carry out what they have been taught: so in reading, writing, painting, sculpture, mathematics and so on. To become a good craftsman one needs practice, according to the old proverb: *Fabricando fit faber* \[By working at the forge one becomes a smith\].

The same happens in the army. Soldiers are taught in writing and by word of mouth, but that is not enough: they have their academies and drills, and so they become practiced, well instructed and disciplined, so that it is a pleasure to watch them maneuver, and the victories they win over their enemies are admirable. How long, then, shall the children of this world be wiser in their affairs than the priests of the Lord in fulfilling their sacred ministry?[1] If speculative and practical knowledge is necessary for all the arts, acquired not by one’s own lights alone but with those of others, why should priests not likewise seek it in order to exercise well the art of directing souls, which is the *Ars artium* \[art of arts\]?[2] If soldiers have their academies and drills to subdue rebels and conquer enemies, why should priests not likewise have their conferences and exercises in moral, ascetical and mystical theology, to subdue the rebellious passions of the people and conquer the enemies, the WORLD, the DEVIL and the FLESH?

We have always seen that new priests, before approaching the altar to celebrate Holy Mass, take care to learn the rubrics well and practice celebrating in simulation, so as to do it well and omit nothing when they come to do it really and truly. The same should be done by priests before sitting in the confessional to hear confessions. Before all else the priest must be instructed in moral, ascetical and mystical theology, for moral

theology alone is not enough; and after this he should practice, under the guidance of a learned, pious and experienced confessor, by hearing simulated confessions from people of every state of life, so that, well trained, he may discharge his sacred ministry perfectly. If this is done for the Mass, how much greater need is there to do it to become a good confessor and spiritual director? Besides, if the priest commits some fault against the rubrics when he celebrates, he can be seen by another and, once warned, will correct himself; but if the confessor commits a fault in his most delicate ministry, who will point it out? At least it is very difficult, since the administration of this Sacrament is so secret a matter.

That is why I have thought to set down some examples here, to sketch a little the course new confessors should follow in learning to hear confessions well. I will give the thing here already done; but in the conferences the director or another experienced priest will play the penitent, feigning some state of life, and the new priest will play the confessor. The director will observe how his new confessor conducts himself: whether he asks about what the penitent does not explain sufficiently; what judgment he forms of the things he hears; whether he counts it as one sin or many, grave or light, or whether it must be taken *ut sunt coram Deo* \[as they are before God\]; whether he finds out the causes of the falls, their duration, whether the penitents are relapsing, habitual, in the occasion of sin, etc.;[3] what means he uses to heal and not frighten the penitents; what remedies he prescribes; what penances he imposes; what reflections he makes; when he absolves them, when he defers or refuses absolution, and what words he says to them so that they will return and amend.

Before undertaking the practice of the conferences, I think it will be most useful to know the admirable encyclical of our Most Holy Father Leo XII, and so I will give the following extract.

Extract from the Encyclical of His Holiness Pope Leo XII to All the Patriarchs, etc., on the Occasion of the Jubilee of 1826[4]

“Take every care that those whom you choose to hear confessions know and practice what our predecessor Innocent III commanded concerning the minister of Penance: namely, that he be discreet and cautious, and, like a good physician, know how to pour wine and oil together into the wounds of the sick,[5] inquiring diligently into the circumstances of the sin and of the sinner, by which he may prudently understand what counsel he ought to give and what remedies to apply, using those means most suited to heal the sick man. Let the confessor never lose sight of those instructions of the Roman Ritual: ‘Let the priest diligently consider when, and to whom, absolution is to be granted, refused or deferred, so that he may not absolve those unworthy of this benefit: such as those who give no sign of sorrow; those who will not lay aside hatred and enmity; those who will not restore what belongs to another when they can; those who will not leave the voluntary proximate occasions of sin, or will not abstain from sin and amend their lives; or those who have given public scandal, unless they make public satisfaction and remove the scandal.’

“From this it is clear how far from following these instructions are those who, as soon as they hear some grave sin, or someone infected with some vice, say at once that they cannot absolve him: they flee from healing precisely those for whom they were appointed physicians by the Lord who said: *Non est opus valentibus medico, sed male habentibus* \[They that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick\].[6] Nor do they follow these holy instructions who think they can absolve everything on the spot, without stopping to examine the conscience, or whether the penitent brings sorrow and purpose of amendment. Finally, they depart from that right course who think the wisest thing is to defer absolution for everyone.

“Therefore if a just mean is to be observed in anything, it is in this of hearing confessions; for if one absolves too easily, one gives occasion for sin; if one absolves with difficulty, one draws penitents away from confession and drives them into a state of despair. It cannot be denied that many penitents approach the sacrament of Penance indisposed; but it is also most certain that many pass from indisposed to disposed and

worthy of absolution if the priest puts on the bowels of mercy of Jesus Christ, who said: *Non veni vocare justos sed peccatores* \[I came not to call the just, but sinners\].[7] Let the minister of Penance, then, strive to behave with love, patience and gentleness toward poor sinners, and he will see how he succeeds; and let him understand that if he does not behave so, he himself is more indisposed to hear confessions than the penitents are to receive absolution.

"Indeed, penitents are not to be judged indisposed because they have committed many and most grievous sins, or because they have gone many years without confession; for the minister must know that *misericordiae Domini non est numerus, et bonitatis infinitus est thesaurus* \[of the mercies of the Lord there is no number, and the treasure of His goodness is infinite\]. Nor are those poor country folk, or those slow of wit, who do not come well examined, to be held unworthy of absolution; for the minister must know that however much the poor man does on his part, he will not get out of the labyrinth of his conscience unless the confessor gives him a hand. But if some, after the minister has used every necessary means (we do not mean that he should burden them beyond measure), after he has been diligent in examining them, exhausted every device of charity to stir them to repentance for their sins, and also commended them to God with great fervor, nevertheless show no sign of sorrow or repentance to dispose them to obtain God's grace through the Sacrament, then indeed he must consider them indisposed for the Sacrament and unworthy of absolution.

"However, whatever those who approach the minister of Penance may be like, the confessor should fear nothing more than this: that through his fault anyone should come to distrust God's goodness, or turn away from the sacrament of Penance in disgust. Therefore, if for some just cause he must defer absolution for some, he will persuade them with the most courteous and kindly words, and show them the need he has to act so, not only to fulfil his ministry but also because their spiritual good requires it. With all gentleness he will try to persuade them to return as soon as possible, so that, having faithfully fulfilled what has been salutarily enjoined and prescribed for them, they may be absolved of all their sins and enjoy the sweetness of heavenly grace.

"A very good example of this charity, among others, is St Raymond of Peñafort, whom the Church calls a distinguished minister of the sacrament of Penance. This Saint says: 'Once the sins are known, let the confessor be benevolent to his penitent, ready to lift him up and help him carry the burden; let him have sweetness in affection, compassion in his troubles, discretion in the truth; let him help the penitent with his prayers, giving alms and doing other good works on his behalf; he will treat the penitent gently, consoling him, encouraging him and, if need be, rebuking him.'"

Thus far the Saint and the Encyclical.

As for imposing penances, one must likewise proceed with great prudence and charity. Here is what St Thomas says on the matter: "It is better that the priest indicate the penance he ought to impose in view of the sins, and then impose one that is bearable and that the penitent will fulfil." St John Chrysostom tells us: "I could cite many who have given themselves up to every wickedness to the utmost, for no other reason than that a penance was imposed on them proportioned to the sins they had committed."

Sole Section. A Practical Method, Proposed in the Conferences, of Hearing Confessions Briefly and with Great Profit

I. Examples of different states of life. Examples of boys and girls.

In these examples I follow various authors, but the chief ones are Calatayud, Lohner, Arsdekin, Reuter, St Liguori and others.

Before treating of the practical way of hearing the confessions of boys and girls, I must give some advice, answering the questions that have been put to me.

Question 1. Are boys and girls of seven years and upward, and perhaps younger, whom parents and sometimes teachers bring, to be admitted to the tribunal of Penance?

Answer. Yes. St Charles Borromeo says so; for even if they are not fit to receive the sacrament of Penance,[8] they begin to be drawn from childhood to that sacred pool, and afterwards they do not have so much of the shame in approaching that the devil tries to instil in them to their misfortune. Moreover, since that age is the most docile for good and the readiest for the things of God, good things are easily impressed on them. People will say they have no sins… All the better! Because they have no sins, are we to abandon them? Are sinners perhaps to be preferred to saints? Must we not strive *ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant* \[that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly\];[9] that those in sin be converted, and those in grace be preserved and perfected in it? Is it not better to forestall them and preserve them from falling into sin than to lift them up after they have fallen? And if they have begun to stray a little, is it not better to remedy it at once than to let them grow up in vice?

It is something I have never been able to understand, that some confessors treat boys and girls in the confessional with coldness and annoyance. It can only be that they are not ministers of Christ, and perhaps have never read the holy Gospel; for if they had read it, especially chapter 10 of St Mark, they would remember that when some children were brought to Jesus Christ for Him to touch and bless them, the disciples rebuked those who brought them. When Jesus saw this, He was much displeased and said to them: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, *talium est enim regnum caelorum* \[for of such is the kingdom of heaven\]"; and embracing them and laying his hands upon them, he blessed them.[10]

What will those who complain and grumble because children are brought to them answer to these words of Jesus Christ? It seems impossible to me that they should behave so; for to me they are the kind of people I like best, and on them, as on soft wax, the seal of divine truths is impressed. Therefore I beg you, esteemed confessor, not to turn boys and girls away. Treat them with kindness and gentleness, so that they may not have a horror of the holy sacrament of Penance, but rather come to like and love it. Imitate the zeal and care that the Venerable Ávila had for boys and girls; behave toward them like the celebrated Gerson, chancellor of Paris, whose care for boys and girls was so great that he earned the criticism of others less zealous; but he answered them that they were not seeking the things of Jesus Christ, but their own convenience.

Question 2. How are boys and girls to be examined, to accuse themselves or confess?

Answer. St Liguori, Reuter and Lohner say that they should examine and accuse themselves on their own; and Lohner says that in this way they grow accustomed to accusing themselves. Nevertheless the same author and the others cited say that afterwards the confessor should help them to confess the things he sees they have not hit upon, going through the commandments in order. In these questions three things must be avoided. First, do not ask too much, but only those things in which they regularly tend to fail, and how often they fall into those faults. Second, do not become annoyed or upset at anything they do or say, but treat them with all affability and gentleness; for boys and girls are like fish in ponds, which come up if you throw them bread and hide if you throw stones; I mean that they hide their faults. Third, do not teach them what they ought not to know, and therefore be cautious in your questions.

Nevertheless, when one sees that they have kept something back out of shame, be cautious and patient, taking what was denied as granted: for example, "How many times have you done it? Six? Twenty?" Or else tell them some example of someone who was damned for having concealed his sins.

Question 3. What penance is to be imposed on boys and girls?

Answer. St Liguori, Reuter and Lohner say it should be light and such as can be fulfilled, and that it should be fulfilled before they leave the church, because otherwise they forget and do not fulfil it.

Question 4. How are children to be stirred up and disposed for absolution?

Answer. With the acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition and attrition, using some little examples, comparisons and likenesses.

Question 5. How are they to be absolved?

Answer. If they have not reached the use of reason, or, even if they have, if no venial sin can be found, they are to be given the holy blessing. If they have reached the use of reason and sins are found in them, whether mortal or venial, and it is otherwise evident that they are moved and disposed, they are to be absolved absolutely, like adults. But they are to be absolved *sub conditione* \[conditionally\] if it is doubtful whether they have reached the use of reason and things are seen in them that are sins by their matter, although their formal guilt is doubtful.

If they have already reached the use of reason and have committed venial sins, they should also be absolved *sub conditione*; for sometimes they make venial sins grave through an erroneous conscience and do not mention it to the confessor. Sometimes, too, they sin in grave matter, as when they put themselves in danger of missing Mass and realize it at that moment, but afterwards forget it. Hence Reuter says that if in these cases they are not absolved, at least conditionally, they remain in a bad state. And St Liguori says that even those doubtfully disposed may be absolved *sub conditione* (at least after two or three months), even if they bring only venial sins, so that they may not go deprived of sacramental grace, and perhaps even of sanctifying grace, as would happen if they had some hidden grave sin.

Example I. How a child confesses or accuses himself on his own, according to the celebrated Calatayud.

He kneels, makes the sign of the cross and says the *Confiteor*: "I, a sinner…" etc. If he is so small that he does not reach the grille, he stands up. Then he begins:

"Father, it is fifteen days (or a month) since I went to confession. I did (or did not) do the penance the confessor gave me. In the first commandment I accuse myself of not having loved God as I ought. In the second, I swore so many times, saying 'By this cross' or 'The devil take me,' falsely or truly; I said 'Curse it,' or named the devil so many times. In the third, I heard Mass (or did not) on the day of obligation or feast, but I turned my head round or played about with another boy. In the fourth, I did not do what my mother told me, or I made trouble at home, or answered the maid or my elders proudly. In the fifth, I quarrelled with another boy, or pulled his hair. In the sixth, I played about with a boy or girl, and said a dirty word (or I have nothing). In the seventh, I stole a coin from my mother, or fruit from the maid, or things to eat. In the eighth, I told so many lies, and told on another boy. From my past life I accuse myself of some lies I told and of having disobeyed my parents. I also accuse myself, Father, of all the mortal and venial sins of my whole life, for which I again ask pardon of God our Lord, with a firm purpose of amendment; and of you, Father, penance and absolution if I am worthy of it."

The confessor's exhortation.

My child, never sin again. Do not say bad words, especially oaths. Do you not know the saying? "In the house of one who swears, misfortune will never be lacking." You would be unlucky; so do not swear any oath at all.

"Father, I said it because they wouldn't believe me."

My child, whoever will not believe you can go and see for himself. Your words must be "yea, yea; no, no," as the Gospel says.[11]

At Mass you must be very still, reading some book that has the parts of the Mass or the Passion of the Lord; you can also pray the holy Rosary.

"Father, I haven't any beads."

Tell your mother to buy you some.

“Father, I don’t dare, in case she punishes me, because I lose all the ones she buys me.”

Then count on your fingers; you never lose those.

“Father, I don’t know how to pray the Rosary by myself.”

Then pray five Our Fathers with five Hail Marys, counting on your fingers, to the five wounds of Jesus; when you have finished these, begin another five, and keep on like that as long as Mass lasts.

“Father, I will.”

You must also try to obey your parents and your other superiors. Ah, my child, learn from Jesus, of whom the Gospel tells us that He was subject to St Joseph and His Mother and obeyed them.[12] So you must obey your mother, and the Lord will give you heaven; otherwise He would not want you there, but would send you to the prison of purgatory, and if the disobedience were grave He would cast you into hell. Listen, my child, to what St Liguori relates. There was a son, he says, who did not obey his mother; and one night five devils came to his room, and the biggest of them seized him by the feet, pulled him out of the bed where he lay between his brother and a friend, stretched him on the floor, and with a great knife slit him open from top to bottom and cut him in pieces, so that he was in four quarters; and each of the other four enemies took a quarter and carried it off to hell. Ah, my child, never fail in obedience to your parents, so that no such misfortune may happen to you. Oh, how terrified you would be if one night you found yourself seized by the feet and carried off to hell!

Nor should you quarrel with anyone; try to love everyone as brothers.

“Father, he came to hit me, and that’s why I slapped him and pulled his hair.”

He did wrong to strike you; but you also did wrong to take revenge. Learn, my child, from Jesus, to be meek and humble of heart.[13] So if you ever come across some unruly, ill-mannered boy, keep away from him; do not quarrel with him or with anyone. If he insults you, you may get away and defend yourself, but not take revenge, nor bear or keep a grudge, hatred or ill will. What you should do is commend him to God, that he may be converted.

In the sixth, you told me you had played about with a boy?

“Yes, Father.”

Many times?

“Only three or four, because I didn’t want to, and those times it was only to give in to his pestering, because he kept urging me to indecent things and led me on to do them.”

For God’s sake, my child, keep away from that bad friend and companion; flee from him as from the sight of a serpent. Would you dare to walk beside a serpent that could bite you, or beside a wolf that could devour you? Certainly not. Then much less should you go about with that bad companion, who can do you more harm than all the serpents and wolves; for they can only take away the life of your body, but he is going to take away the life of your body and soul and cast you into hell!… Ah, my child, you must know that that boy is one of those the devil uses to catch children for hell. The devil does what the fowler does, who uses caged birds to catch the innocent ones flying through the air. So this boy, like a bird caged in vice, wants by his hellish suggestions to make you fall into Satan’s nets. Flee from him, then, as from the devil himself, for no devil can do you the harm he can; and never do anything bad, either with him or with anyone else, or with yourself, because you could die and be damned.

Listen to what Siniscalchi relates. There was a boy, a very good lad, who had never in his life committed a mortal sin. One day, unhappily, he came across a bad companion who talked to him of wicked things.

Afterwards, when the boy was alone in his house, he remembered what that bad companion had told him, and did something wicked with himself; and at that moment he fell dead, and his soul was buried in hell. In the morning, his parents, seeing that their son did not get up, went to call him, but he did not answer. His father went up to him and found him dead… What grief! What sorrow!… At once they went to tell his confessor, who consoled them, telling them not to be alarmed; for although it was true that he had died suddenly and without the Sacraments, he thought he could not be damned, since in his whole life he had never committed any mortal sin. "Nevertheless," he said, "since I still have to say Mass, I will celebrate it for his soul, so that if he is in purgatory the Lord may give him glory." He went, prepared himself and vested; and as he was about to leave the sacristy, he felt someone pulling him from behind. Since he knew no one had remained in the sacristy, he was terrified. He turned and saw behind him the soul of that boy, all ablaze with living fire, telling him not to celebrate the Mass for him, because he was damned. "But how?" the confessor asked him. "Did you not tell me the truth when you went to confession?" "Yes, I always told it." "Then how were you damned, if you never in your life committed a mortal sin?" "In truth I had never committed a mortal sin; but yesterday a bad companion, with his perverse talk, taught me to do something wicked, and at night I chose to do myself what he had told me, and at that moment I fell dead and was damned."

Ah, my child, you see what bad companions bring. Keep away from them and never do bad things. What you would not dare to do in front of your father or mother, you must never do before God, who is your Father and Judge, and who can strike you dead in an instant, like this young man, and cast you into hell.

Be very careful, too, not to take anything. If you need something, ask your mother and she will give it to you. Nor should you tell lies, for it is very ugly for boys to be liars.

"Father, I said it so they wouldn't scold me."

No matter. We read of St Francis de Sales that as a boy he never lied; if he was ever reprimanded, he kept his mouth shut and bore the correction with all humility. That is what you must do.

Nor should you tell other people's faults. Keep in mind the saying: what you do not want for yourself, do not want for anyone. And as you would not like your faults to be told, neither should you like to tell those of others.

Come, then, my child: sin no more, because by sins you offend God. Offend Him no more, and love Him with all your heart. Do you love God, who is so great and so good a Lord, who has created, preserved and redeemed you?

"Yes, Father."

Then you must know that by sinning you have offended this God. But see how good He is: instead of punishing you, He wants to forgive you, and you must hope that He will forgive you through the merits of Jesus Christ. But it is indispensable that you repent of having sinned. What do you say: are you sorry and does it grieve you to have sinned and offended so good a God, and to have wronged so loving a Father?

"Yes, Father."

You must know that by these offenses against God you have deserved the pains of the other world: if not those of hell, those of purgatory, which you know are more terrible than if they put you inside an oven blazing with living flames. Oh, if they took you now because you have committed these faults, and carried you to prison, and tied you there in an oven full of fire, how you would weep! Well, you should weep more for having deserved those pains by these faults. Repent, then, with a firm purpose of never sinning again. Afterwards you will go before the Virgin and pray seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys as penance, so that through her seven sorrows she may obtain for you a great sorrow for having sinned and the grace never to sin again. And now, kneeling with your hands joined and bowing deeply, say: "My Lord Jesus Christ," etc.

Example II. How to hear the confession of a child who cannot accuse himself on his own and needs the confessor to question him.

Tell me, child, when did you last go to confession?

“A month ago” (for example).

Did you do your penance?

“Yes, Father.”

What sins have you committed, my child?… Don’t be afraid; tell me everything, and you will see how I absolve you of it all.

(Here the child falls silent and says “I don’t know”; so the confessor will question him.)

Can’t you explain yourself?

“No, Father.”

Then I will ask you, going through the commandments. In the first, you accuse yourself of how little you have loved and served God.

“Yes, Father.”

In the second, tell me, have you sworn falsely, saying “By this cross” or “The devil take me”?

“Yes, Father, three times, so they wouldn’t scold me.”

In the third, have you heard Mass on feast days and days of obligation?

“One day I didn’t; I missed it to go and play with some other boys.”

At Mass, have you talked or played about?

“Yes, Father.”

And so he will go on questioning him through the ten commandments.

If the child is timid, the confessor should not scold him until he has gone through all the commandments and the child has said everything there is to say; otherwise he would keep his sins back. If he is not timid, the confessor may point out the ugliness of the sins as he goes, in the same order of the commandments. Finally, when the confession is finished, he should paint vice as ugly and horrible, and virtue as lovable, with the rewards and punishments of this life and the next. He will tell him that the Lord loves the child who lives well, fills him with blessings and graces, and finally gives him heaven; but that the one who lives badly is hated by God, is unhappy and unfortunate in this world, and in the end is so for all eternity in the other, etc., etc.

The same examples given for boys can serve for girls with little difference. One need only note, as practice and experience have taught me, that while they are very small, girls fall more easily into impurity than boys; but when they are older it is entirely the reverse, for lascivious youths and men are more numerous than girls and women. The reason for this, in my view, is the very nature of woman. When she is small she is soon inclined to make dolls and the like, and these things serve as her toys in childhood. If she gets together with other girls or boys, they sometimes play at being fathers and mothers, as they say, and perhaps at giving birth, etc., etc. Hence, if one of them is perverse, she teaches them what they ought not to know; and since in nature *ubi est stimulus, ibi est fluxus* \[where there is a stimulus, there is a flow\], nature responds at once, and in girls much earlier than in boys. So once nature has been awakened, the child easily becomes habituated to this brutish pleasure, to the very grave harm of her health; for experience teaches that it leads children to fall ill and even to die, sometimes without anyone being able to discover the cause that produces

such fatal effects. Sometimes girls are habituated to this cursed vice by their own wet-nurses or nursemaids, who, to quiet them when they cry, do most indecent things to them to excite them to pleasure; and this pleasure makes them forget the cause of their crying, and they are quiet at once. When they are older, the modesty natural to their sex keeps them from giving themselves to these excesses.

Sometimes it is none of these causes that habituates them so, but their own natural curiosity to know, as happened to Eve, whose idleness and curiosity were the cause of her fall. The confessor will be very cautious in hearing the confessions of girls, lest his questions teach them what they ought not to know; but he must also try, with skill, to get them to confess what they have done, for girls are naturally timid, and are afraid and ashamed to confess these weaknesses. And although it is true that very often, even when they commit some impure acts, these do not go beyond venial sin, as Calatayud says, because of their levity, fickleness or ignorance, the enemy nonetheless uses his stratagems to make them keep it back in confession. So they go on confessing in this way, and afterwards, when they receive Communion, they pile up sacrileges by the thousand, until a mission rouses them from their lethargy and they get out of this labyrinth.

I will set down here the sins that girls sometimes commit, so that the confessor may be forewarned.

\[At this point Claret gives, in Latin, a detailed catalogue of the sins "which girls are accustomed to commit in this matter," for the confessor's private information; it is not translated here. It is arranged under four heads: (1) solitary acts; (2) acts with other girls, including sisters sharing a bed; (3) acts with a boy; (4) acts involving animals.\]

All these ways are of one and the same species, and there is no need for the girls to explain whether it was in this way or in another; for besides being of no necessity, as has been said, they would run the risk of not telling the truth out of shame, and of being left afterwards with the remorse of having made a bad confession on that account.

I do not mean that all girls do these things, for some are very chaste and have a great horror of such filth. So the confessor will be very cautious in his questions; and if he finds that there is nothing of this kind on her conscience, he should not dwell long on this matter. He will only tell her never to do anything bad: what she would not dare to do in front of her father or mother she must not do in their absence either, because she would be doing it before God, who is her Father and her Lord, and who could in that very instant take her life and cast her into the deep dungeons of hell. But if through this holy fear she refrains from sin, she will be like the chaste Susanna:[14] she will be happy in this world and loved by all, and afterwards happy for all eternity in the next. He will tell her that if she is a good girl, the Lord will give her such good things in heaven, He will give her the wedding garment of glory,[15] that not even queens in this world go so well dressed as good girls go in heaven, however poor they may have been.

Example III.

Tell me, child, how long is it since you went to confession?

"A month."

Did you do your penance?

"Yes, Father."

What sins have you, child?

"Father, once I didn't do what my mother told me; other times I answered back."

What else have you, child? Tell me everything; don't keep anything back.

"Father, I told three lies."

What else?

“I can’t remember anything else.”

Tell me, child, do you go to Mass on days of obligation?

“And on the other days too, because my mother takes me every day.”

Try to be very still, thinking that you are in the house of the Lord and of Most Holy Mary. To hear holy Mass it is a very good practice to pray the Our Father and Hail Mary seven times in memory of the seven sorrows, and five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys to the five wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Never fail to do what your mother tells you, and do not answer back when she tells you something. Imitate the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who was always so obedient. And what I urge on you most is not to tell lies; for if you were a liar, God would not want you as His daughter, because He is the God of truth. Ah!… If you tell lies it would be a sign that you want to follow the enemy, who is the father of lies.[16] Try, then, from now on to be a good girl. Never sin again. You will pray three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys to the Most Holy Virgin in front of her image on that altar; and when you are home, you will kiss your mother’s hand. Be sorry, child, for these faults, for fear that God could punish you with the pains of purgatory. You lied so that your mother would not punish you, and by lying you have deserved pains and punishments far greater; for in purgatory they would have put you in those ovens of burning fire, and besides, the Lord would have deprived you of glory, which is the house and palace of good girls.

Tell me, child: if in the afternoon or at nightfall, when you went home, you found the doors shut, and your mother said to you from the balcony, “Daughter, since you have not done what I told you, since you have answered back, since you have told lies, today the door will not be opened to you: you will have to spend the night in the street, out in the night air,” oh, how you would cry! How you would say: “Mother, for God’s sake open the door for me; I am sorry now for having done wrong, and I give you my word that I will never upset you again.” Well, let us make the application. You must know, child, that with these words you do wrong, and because of them He does not want you in heaven for now; so that if you died, He would shut the doors of glory on you and say to you: “For now I do not want you; go away, go away, go to purgatory.” What, then, should you do? Repent, and say that, helped by divine grace, you will never sin again. Is it not true that you are now truly sorry, and that it grieves you to have offended so good a God, and also because He could deprive you of heaven and cast you into the terrible pains of purgatory? Say from your heart: “My Lord Jesus Christ…”

End of the Golden Key.

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[1] Cf. Lk 16:8.

[2] St Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* I.1: *ars est artium regimen animarum* (“the government of souls is the art of arts”).

[3] \[Technical terms of the moral manuals: *reincidentes* (relapsing sinners), *consuetudinarios* (habitual sinners), *ocasionarios* (those living in a proximate occasion of sin).

[4] Leo XII, encyclical letter announcing the extension of the Jubilee of 1825 to the whole Church (*Charitate Christi*, 25 December 1825).

[5] Lk 10:34.

[6] Mt 9:12.

[7] Mt 9:13.

[8] and the later decree *Quam singulari* (1910) on the age of discretion.

[9] Jn 10:10.

[10] Mk 10:14, 16.

[11] Mt 5:37.

[12] Lk 2:51.

[13] Mt 11:29.

[14] Dan 13.

[15] Cf. Mt 22:11–12; Rev 19:8.

[16] Jn 8:44.