It is anticipated that Grosseteste's Complete Dicta in English Translation will appear in fifteen uniform volumes over the next five or six years.

Other Translations by Gordon Jackson include:

- Robert Grosseteste: The Lyons Sermon, 1250
- Robert Grosseteste: Selected Dicta
- Alcuin: Selected Poems
- The Hymns of Bede
- Erotika, versions of the Song of Songs
- Five Griefsongs over a Fallen City, versions of the Lamentations
- Bad News for Nineveh, ( Nahum and Habakkuk)
- The Lincoln Psalter (published by Carcanet)

ROBERT GROSSETESTE: THE COMPLETE

DICTA

IN ENGLISH

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edited and translated by Gordon Jackson

asgill
11. On Almsgiving: ‘He who sows freely shall reap freely too.’

The seeds are alms distributed, because like seeds they are cast away by hand and for a time are lost to sight, yet later they are recovered with many times the increase. The soil in which they are sown are the receivers of the gifts; indeed, the poor, the naked, and those worn out or broken down with all manner of ills are like the land, harrowed and bare of grass through ploughing. Seed that is cast on such land, if the temper of the seasons be favourable, will grow to a good harvest. The temper is favourable if, while the seeds are growing and the showers are plentiful, there is mild weather and strong sunshine; and especially at the harvest and ingathering of fruits there is fair weather with hot sunshine and no heavy downpours. The watering of the rains is on behalf of the needy, for whose restoration alms are given and tears are shed; the mild weather and strong sunshine is spiritual cheerfulness in giving; the fair weather at harvest, the sun’s warmth and the freedom from downpours, is joy at the appearing of the sun of righteousness, free from tears and lamentation, in the restoration that is eternal. Scripture treats of this favourable weather where it says “They that sow in tears shall reap with joy” (Psalm 126.5), and where the Apostle says “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9.7), and in Revelation 21.4 “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

But when almsgiving is done for the sake of reputation, it’s as if the sowing were done in a parching wind, blowing all the time, and without rain or calm weather so that the seeds don’t germinate. When they are given with reluctance it’s as if they were sown in a frost that prevents their growth. Whether the weather is favourable to growth or not, the soil always takes the seed cast and hides it away in itself, though inclement weather stops it growing. In the same way the poor get the goods given them, but they do not yield a spiritual harvest that the sower of them might reap, not without the weather we’ve spoken of. Indeed the giver’s true intent, giving for an eternal fruit, is like the germinative force in the seed that has been cast; it puts out a shoot and grows in height, and in the height of that same upward intent is a hundredfold consolation for the consolation given; and so from a single grain cast on the earth a hundred grains are restored in the ear. So we read of Isaac (Gen. 26.12) that he grew crops in that land, and in the first year they yielded a hundredfold.

There will be a harvest indeed when out of the soil of poverty the grain of transitory consolation will grow no more into the ear of eternal recompense; that will be when death is swallowed up in victory, when there will be no more poverty in which it may be sown; then there will be as it were a separation of the ear from
the ground in which it has grown.
Now the ones who give to the well-off, who love their wealth, are sowing in a
field full of thorns, thistles and nettles. Those minded to give to others who are not
in need, and not at that time lovers of wealth, are like men who seek to sow in a
meadow that is green and richly flourishing. Those who give to cheats and whores
cow as it were in a cesspool, in a foul and stinking bog. The seed that is cast in
soils like these just will not grow.
What is sown in the poor for its own sake is consolation and an actual relief of
affliction. For this he will receive a proportional consolation and relief of affliction
in return.

12. On Fraud

Trickery is cloaked on the outside with all kinds of effects that make it possible
to believe something has been changed when in fact it hasn’t, as for example by
the colour of gold; a thing appears to be made gold though there is no actual
change. Fraud has the further power to present and show what it wants in these
forms, and to hide and conceal what it wants; by these means it transforms itself
into a numberless variety of forms, even its opposite, and like Proteus unexpect-
tedly changing his features there’s no holding him.
Under these resulting forms and shows, with all the appearance of being true and
unchanging, in place of bodily solidity it offers emptiness and existential theft of
the things whose forms and tokens he holds up for the eyes to see their surface, and
whose existing he feigns by these tokens. But in these empty shows and
existential thefts of what it feigns as far as the surface, there lurk all manner of
dangers, into which they run who deal with fraud’s deceitful, painted face, as if it
were an actual solid body.
The monstrous pest has also mastered all the black and cunning arts that can
induce and manifest these deceitful signs; he is himself an expert and tireless practi-
tioner of all such grammar skills, and carries in his own hand the instruments of all
those arts.

13. That profiteers are men of blood

"Your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity" (Isaiah 59.3).
The one who wrongfully sheds another’s blood is said to have bloody hands, in
that the blood on the hands of the perpetrator is the direct result of the act of blood-
she shed. In just such a way, since bodily nourishment is the cause of the blood that
sustains the body in this passing life, whoever takes away a poor man’s food from
him takes to the mainstay of his life, and his blood.
Those hands, then, that wrongfully hold back the things needed by the poor,
hands that properly ought to support them, on those very same hands we can see
the blood of the needy.
So, because he gets and hoards for himself what ought to sustain the needy,
whether by force, or by theft, or by fraud, he has hands defiled with the blood of the
poor; and whoever eats, drinks, clothes himself, or builds the walls of his house
out of such possession, in effect he eats and drinks the blood of the poor, clothes
himself in the blood of the poor, and lays the foundation of his house in the blood
of the poor.
Let such men hear this: “Whoso sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be
shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen. 9.6).
Let them hear yet again: “You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the
life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off” (Lev. 17.14).
Whoever shall eat the blood of the flesh of the poor in the manner we have just
spoken of shall doubtless be destroyed with eternal death, unless he have made
expiation.
And let them hear who are clothed with the blood of the poor: “And the gar-
mements rolled in blood shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire” (Isaiah 9.5).
And let them hear who build on the blood of the poor: “Woe to him who builds
a town with blood, and sets up a city by iniquity” (Hab. 2.12).
Let your hands, therefore, not be defiled with blood, nor your fingers with iniqu-
y.
The hand is divided in fingers, and by the fingers we understand the differentia-
tion of works and their particular character. He who considers and distinguishes in
any of his actions how he ought to behave in respect of God, how in respect of
parents and blood relations, how in respect of those allied to him by ties of friend-
ship and close association, and how to those who are neither friends nor enemies,
and how to those who are enemies, and does what sound reason discerns regarding
any of them, through this twofold division has, as it were, a hand divided into five
fingers, formed separate and straight.
Likewise a man has five fingers who considers and distinguishes in his actions to
whom his action must be directed, and why, and when, and where, and in what
manner, and if in the action he be following the straight distinction of measure and
reason.
The one on the other hand who doesn’t make this distinction in his actions has a
hand that is not divided into fingers, but a single lump with the fingers joined
together. And again, he who makes a rational distinction, but in doing it without
close attention fails to keep it, by missing out or doing it wrong, has indeed five
fingers but they are paralysed or arthritic. Words, then, are defiled with iniquity when these distinguished parts of any act are at variance with what is required of them.

14. Sermon on the ten steps of contemplation

"Mattathias and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that ever they had in the city" (1 Maccabees 2.28). Mountains in Scripture frequently signify the heights of the contemplative life; the works of sons and followers; the holy city.

Mattathias then, a zealot for the Law, exterminator of the wicked, when escaping from the ferocity of his persecutors, left everything behind he had in the city and fled with his sons to the mountains. Anyone who desires to keep the law of God more strictly will throttle evil, will shun the savagery of spiritual enemies, namely the world, the flesh and the devil, will abandon all he has in the world, and will take to the heights of the contemplative life, his good works going with him. It should be particularly noted what it says, that they left behind not just some things but everything they had in the city; because whoever hangs on to the any of the things of this world will be encumbered with the burden of what he's kept, and not be able to climb the mountain.

But among the things that are in the world that have to be left behind when the religious life is embarked on, we not only count external possessions, but also the love of such possessions, and the very will itself; and this self-will is all the more difficult to get rid of as being born of our dirt, it is rooted in us most deeply and firmly. He who enters on the religious life must renounce his inward will, so as to be in all things subject not to his own will but to the ordinate will of his superior. Yet in this he is still even more under his own inward will, since it is by that very will he has put himself under another's and not his own. Because of this renunciation of one's own will the religious are compared in the Song of Songs (4.2) to a flock of sheep that are even shorn. Commenting on this text St Bernard says in his Sermons on the Song of Songs, "Monks are compared to shorn sheep by the fact of the tonsure; to them is left neither will, nor body, nor any worldly thing in possession." If you will be shaven so by leaving whatever you have behind in the city, you will the more expeditiously be able to climb with Mattathias the mountain of religion, in other words to reach the heights of the contemplative life.

It should be noted, however, that when a man climbs a mountain he sets the foot he is putting forward above the one he has just planted; he stretches his whole body forward; he does not bend the knee he puts his weight on when he lifts the other foot; he does not incline from an upright posture. On the contrary, by raising himself on his joints his posture becomes more upright as he climbs higher. His front makes an acute angle with the mountain, his back an obtuse one; he is not likely to fall except on his face perhaps, and such a fall will hurt him less as his face is closer to the mountain's steepness before it happens.

Conversely, when a man goes down a slope he sets the foot he is putting forward below the one he has already planted; hears his whole body backwards; bends his knee in front of his shin when he puts his weight on it to move the other foot; and by bending he reduces his upright posture; instead of raising himself on his joints he weakly puts his weight on both ankles, and shakes as he lets himself down. His front makes an obtuse angle with the mountain, and his rear an acute; not being able to set his ankle firmly on a slippery spot, he will easily slide forward and fall backwards, and in such a fall being prone on his back he won't be able to use his hands to stop his falling further, or use them to help himself back up. Conditions for the man who is climbing up are more laborious, therefore, but more dangerous for the man going down.

It is no different in the case of spiritual ascent and descent. But to make the case even clearer, let us understand that the soul's foot is desire or will; a straight foot is a right will and a crooked foot a twisted will; for just as the body is moved by the foot, so the soul is moved by desire or will. Besides, as we desire nothing but what is good and useful we see these as different uses of the one head; discretion is like a foot made up of a number of separate joints. The grasp of the highest good is indeed like the sheer structure of the foot, divided as it is in working joints; but only as long as our will keeps to what is good and useful, and goes no further, for where the good is absent from our ambition and will its very absence will predetermine its outcome.

The good way, however, that the straight foot will travel on is like a street paved with smooth stones, that is they are polished by our declining to follow wicked suggestions and through our close adhering to good works; and because this very will or desire is reflected back and delights itself, love answering love, its way is indeed a street paved with precious stones, by those very desires no less to abstain from all manner of evil and to cleave to doing good; and these desires are the virtues.

But this road does not run level along the mountainside, but climbs the mountain's slope: for this is the pavement set with stone that Ezekiel saw on the slope of the mountain, that had the temple on its summit; and the road has on its left-hand side slopes that fall into evil, and on its right the uphill struggle of doing good. So the straight left foot is the will or desire to keep from evil in all its forms, and the right foot is the will to do good; and because resisting evil normally comes before doing good, then the left is the first foot forward in this life, and the right follows on.

But the road that is proper to the religious, to lead them ever upwards on the
mountain of spiritual contemplation, is like a causeway made of ten great stones. The first stone is to leave the world and to be dead to the things of the world. When a man seeks to leave the world behind, it is as if he is putting his left foot on this first stone; and when later he desires to live for God, it is as if he is placing his right foot on the second stone, a little way in front of the left he had just stood on, and higher up. On this first stone there are painted and carved in relief all the flowers of earthly glory, but fading and dying; and their withering is what the first foot firmly stands by in this life, without fuss or vexation; for the wish to leave the world seeks that every flower of joy in earthly glory shall wither and die in the heart; for every flower of earthly glory, while it thrives, is pricked and sharply barbed, like thistles or Christ’s thorn, and the one whose foot or will it flourishes under will sooner or later feel the stabbing pain of its spine, but when it withers and dies it loses all power to hurt and is harmless to the foot that treaded on it. The second stone has carved and painted on it every flower of heaven and of spiritual joy in lively and abundant bloom; but like any new blossom not yet fully open in the showing of its beauty, but neither concealing its beauty altogether, but as in all fresh and opening flowers it makes a blushing appearance, half revealing and half concealing its beauty. So this relief sculpture on the second stone is much gayer in character than the first, and is much softer to the touch. For this stone, as we have said, is to live for God, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

But whoever wishes to live for God has to recognise the rule and righteousness by means of which he is united with his Lord, and to be governed by them, and not to presume on his own wisdom or try to set up his own righteousness; for he has to relinquish his own very secure dominion and self-direction, and submit himself to the discipline, rule and direction of another, ordained and approved in that office. For that reason the third stone that the left foot should be raised to stand on is the renouncing of one’s own will and self-determination; and the fourth that follows, that the right foot needs to mount, is subjection to ordain discipline that has been approved. The third stone has inscribed on it every error of living, failing and palling. Inscribed on the fourth stone is the whole art of managing life, bursting forth at length from under obscure and difficult small-hand writing into a style that is very clear and truly bold. On this stone are inscribed as in thick characters, but well formed for their purpose, the rules of Benedict himself, sagaciously ignorant and wisely uninformed; together with these, and in characters much finer, the rules of blessed Augustine, sagaciously learned and wisely instructed.

But as it is usual, when someone else directs you and sends you off where you have no wish to go, that resentment and muttering arise and often paid to patience, the left foot needs lifting higher again to be placed on the fifth stone, which is the stilling of murmuring, and that with manly resolution; and then the right foot is put down on patience as on a sixth stone of adamant. On the front of the fifth stone in black and blue letters nearly obliterated will be written all manner of interjections of the indignant like ‘racha’ and the like; in the central part of the stone, in letters no less black but not obliterated, are written all kinds of open complainings; on the rear part of the stone are to be found all sorts of gainsayings and contumacies. All these things, as I say, are inscribed on the fifth stone, but disappearing and in part missing. For there is this difference between the sculpture set here on the left and other sculptures and pictures, in that in other works movement cannot be sculpted but only things moving or stationary. On this, however, are painted and sculpted not only things that move but the actual movement and fading of those things; the stones of this praiseworthy journey should be presented in no other way but that the evanescence and vanishing of vain and wicked things be engraved at the same time; for on the stones that depict the way of the wicked the same vain and evil things are cut in relief, but without as here the fading and recession. On the sixth stone is insculpted a victory procession in which the army of the virtues leads the enemy, worthlessness, in triumph; after that comes the peaceful possession of what has been won by the victory; and thirdly the perfection of works and undiminished integrity. For patience gets the better of malice; it alone wears down the enemy; and it alone governs the virtues; without offending or fighting it gains victories, and hears what anger has to say with decency. “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21.19). “But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1.4).

But as murmuring isn’t easy to put in its place, and the will of another put up with, while the flesh is strong and rebels against the spirit, the left foot should be lifted up onto the seventh step, that is, not giving the flesh the comforts and delights it asks for: and after that the right foot should be set upon the eighth step, giving to flesh the rigours and disciplines that it loathes, so that according to the Apostle’s advice (Col. 3.5) he will mortify his members which are upon the earth. On the stone of this seventh step are cut all manner of forms and colours that the eye delights in, all melodious sounds that charm the ear, all the nose’s favourite smells, all flavours that entice the taste, all feelings of mild warmth, smooth and soft sensations that please the touch, as well as all the intoxicating lures of the curiosity to know things, and again all the delights of pride’s dictating. All these pleasurable sensations, I say, are there described, like a vast crowd trying to get in through a gateway, but not allowed in by the gate-keeper. On the eighth stone prolonged fasting is portrayed and engraved, deathly pale and yet at the same time inexhaustible and vigorous, with a countenance joyful and serene, and glad in reverence. In the same place are shown as well the livid discipline of words, the rough and ruddy hairshirt, the eye-stinging vigils, and prayer that alternates between the embrace of the stars with outstretched hands, and supplications on bended knees again and again till they are as hard as those of camels.
When the flesh has been mortified, as it already happens that none of the earthly delights that used to please has still that power, and when the mind’s eye has been cleansed of the noxious humour we know as the itch for worldly possessions, in some manner God begins to be seen; because “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5.8); and because Augustine says “Believe me, in the hour that no earthly thing gives you delight, in that hour you will see God.”

Because, I say, it is so, the left foot has to be lifted a little higher onto the ninth stone, that is, to find nothing of earth delightful, and to be firmly fixed there. Yet because it is but a small matter to be delighted by no earthly thing, the right foot needs to be set firmly above the left on a tenth stone, namely on the contemplation of God, and the delight alone of this contemplation. On the ninth stone are depicted what we said were shown on the seventh stone above, but the crowd that was there described as intent on bursting in through some gate without leave and only prevented by the gate-keeper is here portrayed as fainting, dying, or even dead and about to be removed. But the tenth stone shines with a light too dazzling to approach and its engraved sculpture is unspeakable beauty; and concerning it I don’t know what I can tell you, except that it is quite beyond the power of words to declare. Its very least shining reverberates on the gazer and makes his eyes water, and its sharpness makes him avert them. On it is displayed every flower, fully open and perfectly formed, which was said to be shown on the second stone above, budding, fresh and veiled.

Oh if you will only consider that way well - no, because you will do it well seeing you’re already on it, how you must say with an urgent heart “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3.17). Once the beauty of this road has been seen, it does not permit the one who travels it to be ever tired!

So by these ten steps the ascent by the well-directed will is made of the mountain or the heights of holy religion; so that he who receives the habit of the religious will first of all wish to be dead to the world, then live for God’s sake, thirdly will wish not to be directed by his own spirit, fourthly wish to be governed by another’s will, fifthly wish not to murmur against his director over what goes against his liking, sixthly will wish to carry out all orders regularly and patiently, seventhly wish not to give way to the indulgences and appetites of the flesh, eighthly will wish to mortify the flesh discreetly in the very disappointments and pains of earthly things he dreads, ninthly will wish to have delight in no single thing of this earth, tenthly will wish to find sweet enjoyment solely in contemplating divine things.

See how in this life the two feet alternate by surpassing each other, the left fixing itself on the refusal of evil, the right on doing good; the consecrated religious perform these upward movements in their hearts while they are in this vale of tears; by such steps they climb from virtue to virtue, that the God of gods may be seen in Sion, that is to say, in the glass and highest vision of contemplation.

But as we have already drawn out this sermon beyond reasonable length, we won’t follow up the rest of the properties belonging to the man who goes up and down these steps.

15. On the sleep of sin and waking up from it

In Scripture sleep commonly signifies sin, as when the Apostle writes “Now is it high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13.11); and speaking of sleep in another passage (Eph. 5.14) he says “Awake, you who are sleeping” and goes on to add “arise from the dead.” For this sleep is death, i.e. sin, which he clearly confirms in another passage where he says “A widow that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (1 Tim. 5.6). Sin in an object is called death because death is the separation from life, and sin is nothing but the separation from life, that is from God who is himself life; hence Isaiah says (59.2) “Your iniquities have separated you and your God”; and in Wisdom (1.3) we read “Froward thoughts separate from God.”

So the sleep the Apostle urges us to awake from is sin; and not inappropriately is sin compared to sleep, because sleep is a chain that binds the senses and stops their movement. The spiritual senses of the soul are memory, and understanding, and delight in the Trinity, which is above the self; and the knowledge and orderly love of the self, and of that which is on a par with the self; and the knowledge of governing and controlling the things beneath the self, and the love of managing them rightly. So the spiritual senses of the soul are: understanding, intellect, knowledge, art, and wisdom or sound judgement.

According to the blessed Bernard the five senses of the soul are these: the pious love with which we love our parents is like the sense of touch; the joyful love we love our friends with is like Taste; the just love towards all men is like the sense of smell; the violent love towards our enemies like hearing; the holy and dedicated love we have towards God is like sight. But the chain upon these senses that keeps them in check and stops their activity is sin, and in that way sin is a kind of sleep.

But the comparison of sin to sleep might be shown even more clearly; for sleep in effect occurs when the vapour that is released from nutriment finds its way upwards to the brain, and when it has cooled there it settles and occupies the prime instrument of sensation so that it can’t function. In Scripture we are indeed said to eat the things we love most truly and take most delight in; so the nutriment of sin is the range of these temporal things in which we take delight loved above all else. The phantasms of these loved things reaching as far as the reason are like vapours released from nutriment rising to the head, which, when those things of which they are apparitions entice the mind to love them, return downwards as it were and
burden the mind; they occupy its senses, as we said before, and restrict their activity and in this way when replete with worldly things and drunk on them it is lulled to sleep.

There is also in sleep a reversion of innate warmth to the heart which is beaten back to the vapours that are occupying the prime instrument sensation; so through the phantasms of worldly things love is beaten back towards loving of self. But the first cause of this sleep is when love in itself is reflected back to phantasms of the self, and loves its own self in very pride; and through the means of itself so falls into the love of inferior things. It is from this sleep that the apostle wants us to be woken up.

But perhaps there are many gravely and deeply stupefied by this sleep who haven’t the strength to wake themselves up unless others touch their senses with severity or even violence; and so it is violent and shocking things that can or ought to rouse them from their sleep. Just note what things are usually employed to wake men from their physical sleep, and you’ll understand from them the even greater needs of the soul’s alarms.

The goad that hurts the sense of touch rouses the body from sleep, however deep; it can’t bite even a little way into the flesh without waking the sleeper. Yet there are many forms of external punishment put into execution that not only cut the skin but the flesh as well; and not just in one particular area but often all over the body; and they not only open up the natural man but penetrate even to the vital organs; they perforate the heart itself; and still the one who is so prompted will lie sound asleep. For it’s true the punishments we suffer in this mortal life, or living death, are the goads of the Lord; by their means he pricks the sleepers to arouse them, or afflicts those who are already aroused for fear they might relapse into their former sleep; for he strikes that he might heal, as both prophet and lawgiver declare.

A loud shout is also used to wake sleepers up, and especially if the shout be addressed to a person of timid disposition and easily awed. Just hear how many are shouting in your ears, as loud as they can. Paul is shouting: “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13.11); and elsewhere “Awake you who are sleeping” (Eph. 5.14). But if that besirrer seems to you of little authority, hear and heed the prince of the apostles who shouts: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walks about to seek who he may devour” (1 Pet. 5.8). But if you look down on these as youngsters, hear the veterans of the Old Testament. Hear Abraham who shouts in your ears by example louder than words, who rose at night, saddled his ass, and departed to go to a place the Lord had prepared for him. Not only he but all the other patriarchs as well shout with examples that spring readily to mind - it would take too long to number them. Isaiah shouts time and again: “Awake, shake yourself from the dust. Arise, shine; for your light, O Jerusalem, is come” (52.1-2; 60.1). And Jeremiah joins in the shouting: “Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches” (Lam. 2.19). Joel as well angrily chides those who have hitherto hidden themselves in superstition, saying: “Wake up, you drunkards” (1.15). But if all of these are not enough for you, the Lord’s dearest and the familiar of his house, at whose voices you ought to jump, or if perhaps you are indignant at being shouted at, or don’t like their tone of voice, then hear the voice of the groomsmen to the husband-to-be, full of the ointment of delight, sweetly whispering in your ear: “Blessed is he that keeps watch, and is ready clad, so that he has no need to go naked” (Rev. 16.15). But if up to now you hold all these voices in contempt, the voices of mere servants, that is, you will at least respect the voice of the Lord himself, sweetly reminding you and in his providence counselling fear: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man will come” (Mat. 25.13).

Another means of waking one from sleep is to shine a bright light in the eyes. That means of getting layabeds up is not wanting here either. For the light of the most splendid conversation of this company draws the eyes into the far distance.

And so there are these three ways to besmir us: the goads of punishment; shouting, as loud as the callers are distinguished; and the luminous clarity of those who converse in holiness.

Yet if up to now you’ve been made tired by lethal sleep pressing on you, let the fear of the thief, i.e. the hour of death, wake you and make you vigilant; at which hour you will not know your home, i.e. the dwelling place of the flesh about to be snuffed out; as well as the fear and reverence of the Lord who will come in an hour you give no thought to. Let the torment of how much the thief will make away with if he find you not watching wake you up. Let also the reward that the Lord will confer if he find you watching wake you up. Here’s the reward he promises: “Verily I say to you, he will make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12.37).

The thief is death, or the Devil, who undermines the house with the sting of death; but if you keep watch the undermining of the house will be unable to harm the one who dwells in it. He that is a soldier in the camp, on the look-out for an enemy known to be a shrewd opportunist, most cunning, most keen, whose energy is tireless and whose cruelty knows no bounds, will hardly dare to spare an hour. Isn’t our life one of warfare? Aren’t we encamped with the children of Israel in the wilderness? Aren’t we on the look-out for the enemy? Our enemy is the demon with all his angels; no courage on earth can compare with his; he is fierce as a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour; of whom it’s said “The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field” (Gen.1.3); and of whom Paul says “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor.2.11); they are the princes of Demetrius who “were appointed to come upon Jonathan in the night season.
Wherefore so soon as the sun was down, Jonathan commanded his men to watch, and to be in arms, that all the night long they might be ready to fight” (1 Maccabees 12.26-7).

For these reasons, he who dares to go to sleep, and in his sleep by physical movement (or fear) runs after delightful things or runs away from things that terrify him, which he thinks real while in his sleep, won’t he fall into unforeseen danger with his senses closed? Perhaps believing himself asleep on an ebony bed he might throw himself into a well!

But dreams are the representations of things seen in sleep that are taken for the things they represent. These fleeting things have indeed the image of happiness or misery, but not the thing itself; for true happiness, as much as true misery, is everlasting.

But those who are oppressed by the dreams we have mentioned see an image of happiness or misery in these passing things and take the image for the real thing, and thus see nothing but the very dream; and then in pursuit of that dream, or flying from it, they run into all kind of dangers, spiritual as well as physical, by their own motivation. How many who pursue riches as if they were real wealth, when real poverty comes upon them, or shipwreck, or they fall among thieves, will exhaust themselves with dramatic efforts, chasing a shadow and running away from the real thing? A proud man racing after the shadow of success trying to grab hold of it; the ambition for honour, the avid curiosity of study, the lust for wisdom, the ignorance of honesty and innocence, the craving for consumption and abundance, the gushing of liberality, the untold greed for possession - what else does it seem to you but a man in his sleep running after something he has seen in a dream? If you did see a man who was asleep running about to catch some representation seen in his dream, or desperate to get away from it, wouldn’t you be really amazed? Wouldn’t you be in the same distress as if you foresaw a neighbour of yours about to be in danger? To avoid the nearness of danger, then, and near insanity, pay heed to the Apostle when he shouts “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13.11).

Some keep watch that they might kill others: you won’t even keep a look-out to save yourself from death. Robbers will stay up all night so as to slit men’s throats; you won’t even get up to preserve your own life. If these things don’t arouse you from sleep, namely, the sting, the shouting, the bright light, the fear of the burglar, the besieging enemies, the dangers hidden all around you that you run among with your senses stupefied, then your sleep is undisturbable - despite the philosopher’s maintaining that all sleep can be disturbed.

Even during this very sermon you might be resting, not in a dream but in death. Do you want to know whether you are in a dream? Well, those who are asleep are not aware of the passing of time, and if you don’t notice the time passing you are either asleep, or suffering from some lethargy, or some other sickness. What else is this not noticing the passing of time than the failure to consider the nearing of the end?

16. On the text: ‘Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him’

In John 4.52 it says “Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him.” The seventh hour is when the grace of the sevenfold Spirit affords light to man and drives sins away. The whole day is as it were the wholeness of man, i.e. his total well-being inwardly and outwardly; and because what is animal is prior to what is spiritual, the first half of the day is to gladden the outward man, and the half that follows to gladden the inner. And as the outward man will take pleasure in worldly things and concerns, which works were completed in six days, and the pleasure of these is sixfold, there are six hours before midday. But when he begins to put the things of this world behind him, and to set before himself the duty of rejoicing in the Lord, as the Apostle tells us, he now enters into the seventh hour. So there is rejoicing in the Holy Trinity, rejoicing in the Father, rejoicing in the Son, rejoicing in the Holy Ghost, rejoicing in the good of angel, rejoicing in the good of man, these are as it were the six hours after noon. And so, after this pattern or some such the twelve hours can be distinguished, not unsuitably I believe, to show the whole day representing the pleasure of the whole man, outer and inner. The forenoon is the joy of the whole outward man, the afternoon the joy of the inner, and the beginning of that part, as in the seventh hour, is the grace of the Holy Ghost remitting sins, and the beginning of joy in receiving that remission.

In this hour the vigour in worldly works begins to faint and fade, and the body to relax into true rest, of which there now begins the hope. In this hour the shadows begin to bend back towards the east, because these transitory things, vain and like shadows, are now seen to return to the nothingness they came from. But as the sun sinks lower and lower the shadows grow, because as earthly prosperity fails and proves worthless we appreciate better the emptiness of passing things; as the sun westers the shadows merge into the shade of the earth, because as earthly pleasures pass away completely these same fleeting things are known to be completely nothing.

Likewise a fever is unnatural heat proceeding from the heart into the arteries, doing damage where it spreads; that’s the love of worldly things that isn’t curbed, that proceeds from the will as from the heart and spreads to all the limbs, while it moves the spirits of movement and sensation, and through them the limbs, to pursue things that are desired immoderately, and by its own effect injures itself by
feverish desire, or itself and others by corruptive contagion. And the shivering that
goes with the unrestrained love of transient things is like the cold shivers of fever,
is it not? And as in fevers the cold is only sensed because of unnatural heat, so
earthly fear is not felt unless caused by immoderate earthly attachment. In fear,
evertheless, even though it is a contraction of the soul and as it were a contraction of
the soul into itself from its natural propensity to give itself forth in the way that
light does, yet within the soul there are opposing inclinations, which set up a percu
sive effect like trembling. In the same way when the inordinate love of earthly
things is accompanied with the four affections, namely hope, joy, sorrow and fear,
joy dilates the soul while sorrow constricts it, hope draws the soul forwards while
fear pulls it back; whatever they strive for, any of them, do they not beat the
wretched soul roundly as with a feverish shivering?

Or imagine a fowler's snare, limed at one end and tied at the other with a slip
knot, so that when the victim tries to escape from the lime it only succeeds in
tying itself up and falling further into the trap. So the soul, limed with the love of
temporal things, is wretchedly mangled when those transient things flee away and
it tries to fly after them, and in losing them it retires into itself in sorrow, and is
contracted; and so it is, like a great reaching out, and a great recoil, had on the one
hand and lost on the other. So for want of what it had and what consequences come
of it, the poor soul quakes in its reaching and recoil, as if in horrible convulsions.

But when inordinate love, like unnatural heat, has exerted itself on the sense of
touch, which sense handles earthly things, the fever is the result of a corruption of
the earthly humour. When it affects the taste, the fever is a disorder of the watery
humour. When it attacks the hearing and smell, it is like a fever of the corrupt
humour of air. And when it affects the sight, it is like a fever from the corruption of
the fiery humour.

The nobleman in the account (John 4.46ff) is a humble prelate, or the higher
face of reason. The son represents the prelate's subjects, or the lower powers of
the soul. He is debilitated by a fever at Capernaum, i.e. in the field or breadth of this
wide world, where the rich have their consolation; to whom it is said in Luke 6.24
"Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation." By Caperna
num is understood a field or farm of consolation. To the coming Christ, in the
sacrament of the altar, the aforesaid nobleman runs with desire and devotion, and
praying there for his son in need, he is often heard.

17. On contempt for the world

The things of this world should be held in little regard because of their swift pas
sing, in which they fly their pursuers lest they be caught, and even if caught they

still slip out of the hand's grasp. Not only do they elude us by flight, but even if
they remained as ours we would desert them. What then could be more like mad
ness than to want to join two together in stable union when each is running away
from the other as fast as they can? Or if perhaps they both run together in the
same direction and at the same speed, the world and its lover, that is, so that run
ning in time together they don't actually separate, yet each would be running to its
own annihilation. And indeed annihilation, whether only of one of them or of both,
is separation; they are running, therefore, towards separation from each other. So in
whatever manner they rush towards separation they are each disyoked from the
other, in fact, the faster they run the quicker they will be separated. Make light of
the world, then, because as John says (1 John 2,17) "The world passes away, and
the lust of it; but he that does the will of God will abide forever."

Over this swift passing the damned will make lament as they go into the fire,
doing penance, though it's a waste of time, and groaning endlessly out of anguish
they will say "What has pride profited us? or what good has riches with our vaunting
brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that
hasted by; and as a ship that passes over the waves of the water, which when it is
gone by, no trace of it can be found, nor the pathway of its keel in the waves; or as
when a bird has flown through the air, there is no token of its way to be found,
but the light air being beaten with the stroke of its wings, and parted with the violent
motion of them, is passed through, and afterwards no sign of where it went is to be
found; or just as when an arrow is shot at a mark, it pierces the air, which imme
diately comes together again so that a man cannot say where it went through; even
so we in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw to our end, and had
no sign of virtue to show. Such is the lament of sinners, there in the world
beneath. For the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the
wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm; like the smoke which
is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passes away as the remembrance of
a guest that tarries but a day" (Wisdom 5.3 and 8-15). And note in this guest's re
membrance the voicing of a grievance, that the things of this world have no less
swift a passing than the prosperity a man loves, and the man himself that loves it.
Of this swift passing of those who love the passing world, Job says "Brief are a
man's days" (Job 14.5 Knox), and again "Man that is born of woman is of few
days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down; he flees as
a shadow, and continues not" (14.1-2). On that swift passing Isaiah says (40.6-8)
"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass
withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever."

In commenting on these words blessed Ambrose says: "All flesh is grass, and so it
is, for the glory of man blooms in flesh and he is thought of as exalted and
handsome; like spare grass it is premature, as the flower is ready to fall, as the hay
that germinates greenness in hope but not in the solid fruits of a happier life, like the flower stretching its joy upwards for a brief while before it is cut down; like the flower of the grass that withers before it is gathered. For what firmness can there be, what health in flesh that shall last? Today you will see a young man, strong and agile, coming of age, in the prime of manhood, handsome of face and of good complexion: tomorrow you find him changed in face and address; the one who the day before was so elegant to see, favoured with beauty and poise, shall some day be a sight for pity, brought down by some wasting sickness; toil wears out most, or poverty enfeebles them, or cruelty distorts, or vices corrupt, or old age cripples, or delight in chambering makes them unmanny, or lechery takes away their colour. Is it not indeed true that the grass withers and its flower falls? Some other man, of noble ancestry up to the present, with all the distinctions of great honour and renown, esteemed for the wisdom of a veteran, with famous friends and contacts always on hand, surrounded with hangers on, framed with body-guards, being the head and restorer of the greatest household; unexpectedly beset by some weighty catastrophe he is made destitute and deserted by all his former friends, and even attacked by his neighbours. See our wretchedness, and see how true that the life of man like grass withers away before it is gathered. Here is one who a little while ago was teeming with the signs of wealth, flying to extremities for fame of liberality, loaded with honours above all others, elevated with tribunal powers, secure in his seat of office, the envy of the populace; now, even while he is being cheered in a triumphal procession, by sudden turnabout he is thrown into the same prison he used to throw others into, and among those same prisoners cowers before the stress of his impending doom. How great a crowd the day before had accompanied the procession, applauding, attentive to every word of his flattering supporters, and just one voice put silence to the splendour of that glorious procession, and with those immoderate joys sudden sorrow has mixed the mournful sequel of bitter weeping. In such a way then the glory of man is like a flower of the grass which is a waste of time even to gather, in which there is no fruit to be got, and when it blossoms it withers away."

It is sufficiently clear from these words of blessed Ambrose how quickly the things men glory in pass away, such as the flower of age, the vigour of health, the strength of courage, the charm of beauty, the pride of power in worldly business, nobility of birth, ostentation of wealth, celebrity of fame, dignity and the applause of favour if fortune smiles. Yet if you don’t wish to be caught up and swept away on the torrent of transitory things, listen to this, and listen with the ear that hears: "He that does the will of God will live forever" (1 John 2.17). And lest this river carry you into the sea, listen to what Augustine says in his commentary on those words of John: "What do you wish for? Will you love the things of time, and pass away with time; or not love the world, and live to eternity with God? The river of

timely things hurries one along, but like a tree sprung up beside that river is our Lord Jesus Christ. He assumed flesh, died, rose again, ascended into heaven. It was his will to plant himself, in a way, beside the river of the things of time. Are you rushing downstream headlong to the deep? Grab hold of the tree. Is love of this world dragging you on? Hold fast to Christ" (Homilies on St John). Such is the profitable counsel of blessed Augustine to save us from being carried on the river of temporal things to the sea; take hold of Christ, hang on to the tree planted by the river.

These passing things should also be held cheap because no matter how one clings to them they are unreliable, that is, one can’t say at what hour they will be lost; as Paul says (1 Tim. 6.17) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches." For what surety of tenure is there in things that a thief can steal, a robber plunder, rust corrode, moths eat up, rottenness decay, fire burn, water dissolve, earthquakes throw down, that time will at length consume? So we are not to put our trust in these things, but, as Paul says in many places, "in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."

Again they should be despised because they are vain and deceitful: vain because they lead to some other end from what was purposed by them; deceitful or lying because they do not pay in happiness what they promised. Of their emptiness Solomon says "Vanity of vanities... etc." (Ecclus. 1:2); and Jeremiah (4.17) "As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help." And David in Psalm 4: "How long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood?" where he touches on lies as well as vanity, saying to them "O you sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame?" And Hosea 12.1: "Ephraim feeds on wind and follows after the east wind: he daily increases lies and desolation." For what is conceivably more deceptive and vain than to promise sound health to one who will shortly be gravely ill, long life to one who will die tomorrow, teeming wealth to one who will be a beggar tomorrow, and high honours to one who by tomorrow will be in prison?

These things are also to be despised because they afflict us when we love them, which is why they are called thorns in the gospel; for they prick us with eagerness to get them, with anxiety to keep them, and with sadness when we lose them. But this same sprinkling of bitterness comes of the dew of God’s mercy, so that finding bitterness everywhere outside him we might the better seek sweetness within him. As Augustine says in Confessions Bk 2, 2: "You were always present, angrily sowing and mercifully spraying the pangs of bitterness over all our lawless joys, that we might seek out others that were painfree, and to help us to find them nowhere but in you you taught us with stripes of pain, sickened us to heal us, and you kill us that we might not die outside of you."

Temporal things should be despised furthermore because they are treasured they blind the soul’s discernment, and smear its desire with lime to stop it soaring
Augustine shows us that they blind the mind by turning it from the light of truth in this passage: “No one is very secure in the things he can lose against his will. No one loses truth and wisdom against his will, for no physical thing can be taken away from it; but what separates from wisdom and truth is the perverse will that follows after things that are inferior.”

On the disquiet regarding this timing and blinding Augustine says “Whilst we operate in this body we must be exceedingly on our guard lest we are caught with our feathers limed with things of the senses, for we need them whole and entire if we are to fly away out of this darkness up to the light; which design not even to show itself to those shut up in the cage of this body unless they have been such that whether it were broken through or dissolved they would escape into air which was theirs. So when your condition is such that nothing in the world delights you, believe me, in that instant, in that point of time, you will see your heart’s desire” (Soliloquies 1.14).

But these things governed by time are not only to be shunned but loathed, because we contract sickness from them. As Augustine says in On the Trinity: “Man seeks refuge from intelligible things in things of the senses, and looking for rest in them finds only infirmity.”

They are also to be despised because otherwise we can’t make good use of them. As Augustine says in On Conjugal Good: “Thus have perfect souls used earthly goods that are necessary for something else through this habit of continence, so as, by it, not to be bound by them, and so as by it to have power not to use them when there were no need. Nor does any use them well but he who has power also not to use them. Many indeed practise abstinence with more ease, so as not to use, than do temperance, so as to use well. But no one can wisely use them save he who can also continently not use them.” Paul also used to say of this custom “I know how to abound, and to suffer need” (Phil. 4.12). To suffer need is common to all men, but knowing how to suffer need is the province of the great. And anyone may abound, but to know how to abound without it corrupting, that’s the true measure.

The things that are vain should in the long run be despised because when loved improperly they stifle love and so make him who loves them an enemy of God: as John says (1 John 2.15) “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;” and James says (4.4) “The friendship of this world is enmity with God.”

So count these things as nothing lest they sweep you along into the sea; lest when they are suddenly taken away that your hope rested on you go to pieces; lest you are deceived in them; lest you take their emptiness for reality; lest they become thorns in your side; lest their mist blinds your understanding; lest their lime holds you down in the depths; so that you might know how to make good use of them; and lest when they have stifled love they make you God’s enemy.

18. On patience

Patience is the soul’s inflexibility in face of everything that would upset it; for a patient man is he whom troubles do not deflect from an upright will, nor depress his soul from the blessing of peace of mind. What is patience indeed but a kind of strength of mind, its unbreakable bone as it were, or impenetrable shield, or wall of adamant that nothing can weaken, or rather the very essence of invincibility that can’t be overcome by any adverse force at all? However, I believe this invincibility or inflexibility we have spoken of is no other than the very energy of the desire for an upright will, and for the deep tranquillity that goes with it.

But as righteousness is the love of an upright will observed for its own sake, the purpose of righteousness, or righteousness in action, inasmuch as it is not to be broken or overcome by obstacles or trials, is patience. Nor should it be understood, because I said that patience was the rectitude of love or the strength or purpose of righteousness, that there might be some righteousness so slack that it didn’t need the support of patience; but it should be assumed that all justice or righteousness is the love of rectitude, purposed with all vehemence, by which earnest purpose any just man is proof against every kind of trouble or assault. For no man is broken by troubles who has not first dropped the shield of patience by his own will.

But that patience, by means of which a man is not broken by adversities, but rather spurns and laughs at them, is indeed the vehemence, or intensity, or sublimity of love can be clearly shown from Augustine’s first book of the Confessions where he says: “O Lord, throughout the world men pray you to save them from the rack and the hook and similar torments that terrorize them. Some people are just callous, but if someone clings to you with earnest piety, how can that devotion be met with a heart that makes light of the such torments, when he loves the ones who so fearfully dread them? Yet this is how our parents poked fun at the beatings we suffered as boys at the hands of our schoolmasters.”

That patience is the inflexibility of the soul or the unmovability of the mind, by means of which the soul is not upset from its spiritual peace, can be gathered from the book of Tobias (2.12-14 Knaž) where we read: “This was but a trial which the Lord allowed to baffal him, so that to later ages he might leave a document of patience, as God’s servant Job did. Here was a man that feared God and obeyed his commandments from infancy; he was smitten with blindness; did he thereupon complain God was using him ill? No; he remained as stout-hearted a worshipper of God as before.”

But this immovableness and inflexibility remains within the soul by a clinging to inflexible and immutable truth. For any virtue can be described by reference to the work that proceeds from it, and again by reference to one who is a good example or model of the virtue; and when it is defined with reference to the virtue of the
model himself, the pattern that is in the soul is contained within its definition; as for example, patience is the clinging to supersubstantial form, to inflexibility and immutability itself, from which actual inflexibility and immutability flow into the soul; and justice or righteousness is the clinging to supersubstantial right itself, from which just dealing flows into the soul, which becomes the soul's quality and justice, and from that quality proceeds the operation that renders to any man whatever is his due. So as we see, any virtue might be described in three different ways: by reference to a model of the virtue, by a self-evident instance of its essence, and by reference to the works that result from it.

And so, though patience gets its name from the character of passive suffering, it is in fact an active power that sustains the soul, lest it fall or break up under the stress of the passions; and what work is more perfect than to fortify the soul in this way, so it might easily repel any intended injuries, as easily as a wall of adamant is proof against the little pebbles thrown at it? At any rate, the soul with its virtues is mutilated by intended injuries as if they were so many limbs; it is patience that preserves the soul's integrity against this mutilation. In much the same way if it's patience that keeps the soul unbroken amid tribulations, tribulations at least occasionally stretch the virtues. Patience increases the other virtues, and draws them to perfection.

However, the soul's integrity in the number of virtues is the perfecting of them in their increase; just as the wholeness of outward man consists in the number of his limbs, their perfection lies in their being the size they should be. Therefore, as James says (1.4) "Let patience have her perfect work, then you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing;" so that we be perfect by size of virtues and by their whole number, not one of them lacking, that is, not in any one individual virtue, nor in the extent of any of them.

O how worthy of esteem is patience, which is, as we said, the soul's unbreakable bone, the impenetrable shield, the wall of indissoluble adamant, the vigour that will never tire. What so needful to keep between us and the enemy's slings and arrows? Indeed, it not only repels all buffets but also keeps the soul from tiring in actions where the enemy is attacked. But if anything were to give bodily preservation to a fighting man, not only from injury by the enemy but also from tiring in attacking him, wouldn't the completing or perfecting the work be most properly ascribed to the one proofed against fatigue? Not only then does patience have a work perfect and entire, by the number and extension of virtues, but also by bringing a good work to its full and final consummation; it renders the soul lacking in nothing, neither in size nor in number nor in the power to endure and last.

By no means then is patience ineffectual; in place of a slight and momentary evil that is endured, a good compensation is gained, counted out not with passing trifles but with the solid weight of eternal glory. This may be weighed in those words of David where he says (2 Sam. 16.11-12) "Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has hidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." And Ecclesiasticus (1.29 Knox, 1.23 AV) "Patience bides her time, and with time, content comes back to her."

But just as a rod that's hard to bend is made even harder to bend when it's bound to another that's stronger and still more difficult to bend, so that together they're almost as hard to bend as stone is, a man can make his own patience unbendable if he binds himself to the patience that the saints and holy fathers have; it will make him as strong as they are.

But particularly we ought to bind ourselves to that powerful patience of our Lord Jesus Christ; for, as Augustine says in his treatise On Music, "By a wonderful and unspeakable sacrament he has deemed it worthy to put on the plague of our mortality and guiltiness, taking on the condition of sinner man, though himself without sin. For it was his will to be born, to suffer, and to die, after the manner of men, not for their deserving but through his most excellent goodness. And so that we might the more beware of pride that caused us to fall from our most worthy place, he took on our disgrace that he was by no means worthy of. And so that we might face our due death with equanimity, he faced it, though it was not his due at all."

And John Chrysostom lends support to our patience in his treatise on the subject that no one is hurt save by himself, which he shows by the examples of the holy fathers as well as by the word of Scripture; he says "If all your faculties are taken away from you, say 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there.'" And add that saying of the Apostle (1 Tim. 6.7) "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Do you hear yourself abused and defamed by men of ill-will? Remember the words of the Lord in Luke 6.26, keep them before your eyes: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you;" and again "When men shall cast out your name as evil, rejoice in that day and leap for joy" (Luke 6.22-3). Are you exiled from home and country? Remember that "we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13.14). Why should you think that you have lost your country when it is your condition to be a wanderer throughout the whole earth? Are you a victim of the gravest of illnesses or handicaps? Apply that sermon of the Apostle that tells us "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4.16). Are you shut up in prison, under sentence of a most atrocious death, and that imminent? Set before your eyes John Baptist in prison, cut at the neck, and his head, the head of so mighty a prophet, given to a dancing-girl in transaction for lust. - 24 -

- 25 -
Any individual hardships that you find inflicted on you unfairly should not be regarded as injuries, but as occasions for giving glory. And by binding ourselves to the saints and fathers, in the desire to be one with them, in imitating them, in bringing to fulfillment what the Scriptures prescribe, we shall strengthen in ourselves not only patience, but all the other virtues as well.

19 On Ezekiel 2:9-10: ‘And when I looked, behold, a hand was sent unto me; and lo, a scroll was in it: and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without.’

That book is the Holy Scripture, which shows its prerogative over other writings at once by the marvellous manner of its composition, the books of other writings being written in an outward dimension only. And this book is like the others written outwardly where we take the sense literally, the voices of the words expressing what we call the historic sense. But beyond what it has in common with other works is its prerogative of inward dimensions, where the literal sense and significations in addition to itself points beyond to further matters needing to be understood. It is written inwardly when tropology is signified by the historic sense; yet more inwardly when the allegorical sense is understood; and most inwardly of all when analogy, the means of the highest contemplation, is offered. So, they are comparable with other writings on account of their letters and meanings, and are thus of the same species of creatures; yet a man who sets himself to read this book without a sound understanding of the writing’s inward dimensions is a bit like one who gives himself the labour of reading any normal kind of writing who hasn’t yet acquired a basic understanding of letters, syllables and words.

By so remarkable a work then, Scripture excites us to consider the wonderful things of God, so that what we see outwardly with our eyes we might approach inwardly to the knowledge of truth: so the psalmist says, as if calling to mind some great things that God had done, declaring them present, and what he promises to do in the future: “I will remember the works of the Lord, surely I will remember your works of old. I will meditate also on all your work, and talk of what you have done” (Psa. 77:11-12). And in Psalm 143:5 he says “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your works; I muse of the work of your hands.”

Since no one one is endowed with so much knowledge that what he knows regarding the wonders of God’s creation is more than what he doesn’t know, there’s no one who can not admit with the blessed Augustine that there is more he does not understand of Scripture than what he does, especially when he is ignorant of elementary things. Anyone professing this knowledge, therefore, even if he is an expert in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, can say with Moses: “All my life I have been a man of little eloquence, and now that you, my Master, have spoken to me, I am more faltering, more tongue-tied than ever” (Ex. 10: Knox). He can say with Jeremiah (1:6 Knox) “Alas, alas, Lord God, I am but a child that has never learned to speak.” For the simple reason “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it” (Psa. 139:6).

But since, as was said, the whole sum of other writings are as it were elements of the Scripture, it seems that Augustine was right to say, even though it may stagger us, that what a man learnt outside of Scripture would either condemn him if it were harmful, or profit him if it were useful; and though he would find in Scripture whatever he found elsewhere that was of use, he would find there fully the things that can be learnt nowhere else than in the wonderful height and amazing humility of Holy Writ.

But perhaps that fine thought of Augustine’s may astonish some who come to read over the pages of Holy Scripture after they have made a study of secular literature and science, and find nowhere in them many of the things they have learnt from other sources. For where can you find in the pages of Holy Scripture that the diameter is incommensurate with the costa, or any other theorems of geometry? Or where in it will you find the laws that will allow you to calculate an eclipse of the sun and moon without a mistake, and numberless conclusions from the other arts? Yet who, though he did as many wells as Isaac, did ever dig out whether most of the things taught in the sciences are perhaps, even though true, of no profit? And that’s why Scripture has no mention of them?

But how can a true thing, especially what is true of a creature’s being, not its deficiency, ever be of no use, since every creature, as Christ’s own words testify, carry some exemplary value to an honest man; and as Augustine says, we need to grasp the mystical signification of each and every creature. Every creature is good, and thereby useful, for God saw everything that he had made, and beheld, it was good (Gen. 1:31). Since if God makes good use of whatever is evil, much more will what is good be set by him to a good purpose, and that good purpose is its very usefulness. There is therefore no thing that is true, especially of a creature’s being, that is not also useful, as truth and being are one and the same. Any truth then concerning the being of creatures, particularly what is learnt in the various sciences, is useful; it must be useful to learn it, unless perhaps the man were to misuse as much truth as he managed to amass. But if learning is to be called useless for its misuse, then there can be no truth in theology either; which knowledge clearly can’t be called useless.

It seems then, according to what we’ve said above and to what Augustine says, that the Scriptures contain the truths of the other sciences as some elements, and impart some of their own in addition. For Scripture is that bread of heaven that has in it all delights and savours suited to every taste. According to what John has said
(1 John 2:21) "No lie is of the truth;" for it contains within itself the very essence of logic, that from the true the false does not follow; and it adds to that the very foundations of moral conduct. Likewise that statement in Genesis 1.4 "God divided the light from the darkness"; and that of the Apostle (2 Cor. 6:14) "What communion has light with darkness?" contain in themselves the principle that contraries do not agree in the same thing, that one of the two will be according to the nature of light and finding out, and the other after the nature of darkness and deficiency; but the same passage tells us something further, that pertains to the very beginning of creation, something that advances the light of faith and the fervour of love.

But in this way of reading can one find anywhere in the pages of Holy Scripture that the diameter is asymmetrical to the costa, or any like conclusions of the other liberal arts? The denial of this seems to contradict Augustine; the assertion of it is more than opinion would run to or scrutiny would attain. But since the whole of Scripture when faithfully expounded either instructs faith or builds up love, it isn't likely that all truth be contained in it in the foresaid way; unless perhaps one might say that in the way nature makes any member in a body, strictly according to some necessity, and moreover adds the use of some assistance; so also Scripture by any of its words enlarges faith or love; and besides this in many a place it contains the whole truth with some assistance from all the other sciences. For who'd be so bold to say the Scripture is not a book of sufficiency, and that in that sense all truth is contained in it, of whatever science, whether in the way we spoke of regarding the law of logic in John's statement, or as the consequent in the antecedent, or the particular in the universal, or as in its like or something proportional to it; even though it would be very hard to elic all these things from the words of Scripture; even though Cassiodorus seems to consent to searching the Scriptures in this way in his comments on the psalm that, in the words of Augustine, asserts that all the diverse schemata of secular letters may be found in sacred letters, and are the special modes in divine speech that grammarians and rhetoricians can never attain to. But should this seem to be said from his own private interpretation, he adds "Some of the most learned fathers have declared these very things before us, namely Jerome, Ambrose and Hilary, so by no means can we be seen as propagators of a new teaching but rather following in their footsteps.

But someone might say that the parts of syllogisms, the names of the figures, the terms of various disciplines are mentioned nowhere in the psalms; surely they are to be found in virtue of the senses, not in the performing of words; for so we can contemplate wine in the grapevine, harvests in the seed, leaves in roots, fruits in branches and even trees in their nuclei in this sense. And we even catch from the deepest depths delicious fishes that were in no way visible to the human eye before their capture. Anyway, I leave this controversy to the wise to settle, and come back to the point and the text of my sermon.

So, the book we are speaking of here is written inwardly and outwardly, not only in the way we have mentioned so far, but in an even more excellent way: for Scripture is more excellent in the living heart than on dead skin, and the word is more true that speaks among its fellows and stands to what it says before all then that which makes a loud noise outwardly but ends up changing its tone to majority opinion. And that book is the human heart with the enduring knowledge of Holy Scripture written on it, in which book the particular sayings inscribed there are as it were images of images impressed on the heart. For every soul has been named, together with some or other notice in a book, according to the prophet: "The judgment was set and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10). And this opening of the books is itself the revealing of the judgments, concerning which the Apostle says (1 Cor. 4:5) "Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

However, there are two aspects of the soul, the part that sees and the part that consents; the seeing is as it were external, because nothing comes to be longed for that has not been present to the sight; for nothing comes to be loved that isn't first known. What then is described by knowledge at a glance is as it were painted on the outside. But if that depiction had penetrated as far as desire, and had sealed itself in love in the person of the perceiver, then the book is written inside and out.

In such a way the knowledge of Holy Writ is to be inscribed in the human heart, that through understanding it will deepen itself into the inner parts of love, and be a book written not only outside but inside as well; for it's this love deep inside, deeply inscribed there, that conforms man to God, making him godly and restoring him his lost honour. Because the real honour of man is the recovery of the image of his Maker.

But as this inward writing shows forth in evidence through the light of works, and will cause itself to be read by force of outward works as if they were written letters, what is that but a third way in which the whole man is a book written on the inside and outside? So this writing of the book is as it were a returning from the same into the same, because it reaches from a sight seen from outside into desire, and from that it bursts into the light of works again seen from outside. In the same way the light of works gives a fuller, clearer light to see by and its form inscribes what was inscribed before; and perhaps because of this turning back into itself the Scripture is compared to wheels; and not just to any wheels, but such as have the spirit of life; and not of lowly stature but of supreme height; because doubtless life is itself so vivified and is turned in motion by vivifying spirit. And though philosophers define life as an ebbing and flowing breath, when we define life in terms of these wheels it sufficiently includes that ebbing and flowing.

There's yet a further way to show how Scripture is far superior to other kinds of
writing, for no other kind ought in this way to engrave itself deep into the innermost parts of the will and desire to configure the whole man to itself; because no other orders the will perfectly and conforms it to the highest beauty. Indeed if any other does penetrate in this way from the understanding into the will, it won’t light up the sight but darken it, and not beautify the will but deform it.

And as this writing alone, so written on the heart, lifts man above himself even up to God, and makes him cling to God as one in spirit, and causes man to live his life according to God, and as all other writing can’t either lift man up to himself so that he might at least live as a man should, inasmuch as to live according to God is more than to live according to man, and also as the Deiformity of new-creation exceeds the image of the first creation, it’s obvious that Scripture is superior to any other, of a much higher order, and so might be compared to wheels of very great height.

Besides the ways of inner and outer writing we’ve so far considered, the book written inside and out may be taken, not unreasonably, to be the Word and Wisdom himself of God the Father: “In your book they are all written” as the psalmist says (Psa.139.6Vulg.). It’s written inwardly when it’s the image of the Father and figure of his substance, and outwardly as he’s the exemplar and beauty of what is created; into whose uncircumcised light the eyes that look may not see what they look at directly for dazzle.

Before the book was shown for him to see the prophet intimates that his sight had been purged. What does he say he’s seen but, once the will is separated from the love of fickle things and the understanding lifted above the clouds of bodily fantasies into clear air, that which is above all? And this lights up the understanding of the mind that has been liberated.

“And behold a hand was sent to me.” What is the hand that is sent but the Word of the Father by which all things were made; the Word, I reckon, is called the hand by the Father because the Father works all things by him. It’s well said there is a book in this hand since in the Word by which all things were made are described the eternal laws of all things made.

The scroll, however, is rolled up in that the not-made laws of things made are hidden in this secret Word of the Father; and the same scroll is opened out when the exemplars of eternal laws are revealed in the faces and acts of the saints as if in patterns. Hear the voice of one who sees the book rolled-up; it is Job who says “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? It is not found in the land of the living” (28. 12-13). And hear one who sees the same book unrolled; it is the philosopher Solomon who says (Wisdom 6.12-16) “Wisdom is glorious and never fades away; yea, she is easily seen of those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She anticipates those who desire her in making herself first known to them; whoever looks for her early shall have no great trouble for he shall find her sitting at his door. To think of her therefore is the height of wisdom; whoever stays for her shall soon be without cares. For she goes about seeking such as are worthy of her, shows herself favourable to them in the street, and meets with them in every thought.” As Augustine says in commenting on this passage, “Wherever you turn she hints to you in signs and traces of her works. Wisdom speaks to you, calling you back inwardly from the outward things you were backsliding into. What delights you in corporeal objects and entices you with appeal to the bodily senses you can see is harmonious, and when you ask how it is then you turn it over in your mind and know that you could neither approve nor disapprove of things of sense unless you had laws of beauty as it were within you by which you are able to judge the beauty of things outside by what you feel inwardly” (On Free Will xvi 41).

In yet another way was this rolled-up scroll opened when the Word that was in the beginning with God was made manifest in the flesh. Of the closed character of this book Isaiah says (45.15) “Truly, you are a God who hide yourself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” Of its opening Baruch says (3.37) “Afterwards did he show himself upon earth, and conversed with men.”

The book of Holy Scripture is sent held in a hand because the consummation of all Scripture is in the incarnate Word, for, as Augustine says “The many pages of Scripture have this message in short, that it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead on the third day.”

This book is concealed in the Old Testament under the shadows of figures. In the New, however, it is opened up by the shining light of truth. It is veiled indeed in all its allegorical words and opened up in naked words that are spoken without the drapery of allegory; as Augustine claims, “Almost nothing is lost through allegorical obscurities that is not repeated elsewhere with true clarity.”

The contrary features of this book that yet agree so well, containing perhaps at one and the same time open and secret senses and written within and without, when we consider them and give them exercise, we feed the soul, and when wearied by the hunger and thirst of vain curiosity, and ridden with doubt, we are refreshed even as if by sumptuous dishes borne on phantom wings, and to be satisfied even when hungry. For this book is the milk of the very young, the bread of the grown-up, the water cooling the heated, the wine in sober action making the unemployed merry, the sight to the blind in contemplation, the renewal to the seeing, the flooding of light to the bodily cold, to those already aflame as fire to tinder, as oil to fire, and to keep this sermon brief, it restores to possession what was lost, to completeness what was diminished, and sustains what is complete lest it turn itself towards loss.
p 10  Christ’s thorn (*paliurus aculeatus*) is commonly claimed to be the plant from which our Lord’s crown was woven. A deciduous shrub with pliable branches and long sharp spines, it is native to the Mediterranean region and is used for hedging in Italy.

p 26  Alexandrian teachers of rhetoric developed a fourfold interpretation of both sacred and secular writing. The literal, or historic, sense supported three figurative senses: the allegorical, relating to the life of Christ and the Church militant; the tropological, relating to the individual soul and its moral sense and conduct; and the anagogical, relating to the divine scheme and Church triumphant, and presenting a mystical understanding of the afterlife.

p 27  The incommensurability of the diameter of a circle and the arc or costa resulting from a triangle based on it is from Aristotle’s Topics (8, 13); simply an example of unquestionable truth nowhere present in the pages of Holy Writ.

p 28  Nucleus, literally the kernel of a nut.

p 29  The Grosseteste manuscripts used for this translation are written on parchment, the dried and treated dead skin of calves, kids or lambs. It is signally tough, but does have a tendency to curl at the corners.