3 Abstinence (*Abstinencia*)

Abstinence is double: some part from food, some part from vices. But the second is more powerful. However, the first disposes one to the second. Wherefore, note that abstinence is effective for the good of nature, for the good of grace, and for the good of glory.

Concerning the first, the Philosopher says, book 17, *De animalibus*,[[1]](#endnote-1) that food well digested is sweeter and more delectable. Thus, food well digested to the body, but this happens through abstinence, Eccli. 37[:33]: “For in many meats there will be sickness.” Again, in the same place, [Eccli. 37:34]: “By surfeiting many have perished.” Again “he that is temperate, shall prolong life.”

Concerning the second, it is effective for the good of grace. Wherefore, Pope Leo states in his *Sermone*,[[2]](#endnote-2) from abstinence come forth chaste thoughts, reasonable desires, and wholesome counsels.

Again, according to the Philosopher,[[3]](#endnote-3) a moderate humor flowing from one plant to another makes the second one to grow well.

Again, the Philosopher, in the third book of *De animalibus*,[[4]](#endnote-4) says that some trees, such as the willow, do not bear fruit because of a multiplicity of foods, thus neither do the gluttonous, Wis. 15[:4], Vain is the hope of those and “a fruitless labor.”

Again, it is well when there is a movement upwards, but one abstaining is of this kind. Wherefore also, Elias by abstaining arrived at the mountain of God, and afterwards ascended into heaven, [3] Kings [19:8].

Again, the ark of Noah was made “of timber planks,” therefore it did not sink, Gen. 6[:14].

Concerning the third, abstinence is effective for the good of glory, [1] Cor. 9[:25]: “Every one that strives for the mastery, refrains from all things,” literally interpreted, those contending in a litigious contest abstain until they have completed the contest, in order that they may have their senses sharper. Thus, also we who are in a continuous contest with the three enemies, it behooves us to abstain, 2 Pet. 1[:6]: “In knowledge, abstinence.” Wherefore also the flames of the furnace of Babylon did not burn up the three boys abstaining; therefore, it is that Christ by fasting taught us to overcome the temptations of the devil. Wherefore Augustine in the first book of *De doctrina Christiana,* c. 25,[[5]](#endnote-5) says that abstinence ought to be practiced so that one may have peace of the flesh and the spirit, 1 Pet. 2[:11]: “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims.” Abstinence are the hinges which we wish to admit. For it is none other than to arm the flesh in its desires against the spirit. Wherefore Jerome, *Ad [Celantiam]*,[[6]](#endnote-6) beware lest when you begin to fast, that you do not think you are so holy. For here is a help to virtue, not the perfection of sanctity. And then abstinence of the body is famous when the soul fasts from vices.”

Certainly, the virtue of abstinence is justified in favor of the spirit to which the flesh is opposed. Wherefore Christ was tempted, that is, about the spirit after “he had fasted forty days and forty nights,” Matt. 4[:2]. Much more have we to fear his temptation, we who are only men and accustomed to vices. Wherefore Joas the king of Israel, (from the first Sunday of Lent), what is the charioteer and his chariot [4 Kings 13:14], unless the soul and the body.[[7]](#endnote-7) For when the soul is tainted, the body is implicated. If the charioteer stands well, the chariot proceeds well. When in truth the charioteer offends and cannot control the reins, the chariot crashes. So, it is in man, so long as his mind is watchful, his body does not stumble.

¶ Here note that hunters make their dogs abstain before the time of hunting, so that they might run more agilely. So also, the falconer binds his birds by the feet before they fly to their preys. So also, the church orders abstinences among the people before holy festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and some others, 1 Kings 14[:24], Saul ordered abstinence for the people when they had to pursue the enemies of God. There are however in abstinence many values and virtuosities. For also Esther fasting found grace before Assuarius, Esther 5[:6]. And the Apostles fasting received the Holy Spirit [Act. 2:4].[[8]](#endnote-8) And that abstinence is effective against gluttony, the sign is that the saliva[[9]](#endnote-9) of a fasting man is poison to a serpent. Even the serpent himself is renewed through abstinence, about which see below in the chapter [339] Serpent (*Serpens*). Nature teaches the serpent to renew by a sign and to improve its state. Much more a rational creature ought to renew himself against immoderation, as it is said below in the chapter [339] Serpent (*Serpens*).

Therefore, also abstinence is against every sin generally. And first, because sin separates one from God, Tobias 1[:3-5] taught his fellows to fear God and abstain from every sin.

Second, because sin is harmful, just as delicacies are hurtful to the poor and the weak, Eccli. [30:14].

Third, “A wise heart will abstain from sins,” because they stain, Eccli. 3[:32]. This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from every fornication.

Fourth, because sins besiege the good soul, thus fighters abstain from harmful things, 1 Pet. 4[:11]: “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires.”

Fifth, because they disgrace us, thus elders abstain from penitential clothing, [1] Thess. 5[:7]: “From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves.”

Sixth, because they cause death, thus a bird perceiving the net, or the noose abstains from food, Eccli. 37[:34]: “He that is temperate, shall prolong life.” Note even that there are diverse reasons for abstaining. Wherefore the verse:[[10]](#endnote-10)

¶ The sick, the needy, the avaricious, the gluttonous, the ape, and the virtuous abstain.

The sick abstains either because he cannot eat or because of medicine.

The needy abstains because he does not have what he would eat, Mark 8[:2]: “I have compassion on the multitude, because,” etc.

The avaricious abstains so that he may get more, Eccle. 5[:18]: “And every man to whom God has given riches, and substance, and has given him power to eat thereof.”

The gluttonous abstains so that afterwards he might consume more avidly, Isai. [58:4]: “Do not fast as you have done until this day.”

¶ The ape, that is, the hypocrite, fasts so that he may be praised; Luke 18[:12]: “I fast twice in a week.” Against whom, Matt. 6[:16]: “And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites.”

The virtuous, that is, the good, abstains so that he may have merit, and this sole intention is meritorious, 2 Pet. 1[:5]: “Minister in your faith, virtue,” etc.[[11]](#endnote-11) The example in Moses and fasting, but for you, namely, the penalty of sustenance, the age of infancy, and the delectability of eating are accustomed to make abstinence to be declined.

¶ Therefore one ought to abstain from three things: from the superfluity of food, from the society of the wicked, and from the filth of sins. Concerning the first, Eccli. [37:32]: “you should not act with excess toward any food.” And Eccli. 37[:34]: “By surfeiting many have perished.”

Concerning the second, Eccli. [13:1]: “He that touches pitch, shall be defiled with it.”

Concerning the third, Eccli. 3[:32]: “A wise heart, and which has understanding, will abstain from sins.” Where the *Gloss* upon that of [1] Tim. 5[:22]: “Keep yourself chaste,” God wants himself to be served prudently, lest we be made weak by too much abstinence, and then require the assistance of the medics.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Wherefore, Bernard, he makes a burnt offering of pillaged goods, who afflicts his body immoderately, either by lack of necessary nourishment or sleeping too little.[[13]](#endnote-13) Wherefore, Seneca,[[14]](#endnote-14) “Observe this rule for a healthy life: that you grant your body as much as it needs for its well-being.” For as Gregory says, “When our flesh is held in too strict bonds, it grows too weak to carry out its good work.”[[15]](#endnote-15) This rule is prefigured by what is said in Num. 30[:14]: “If a woman afflicts herself or her soul in fasting or by another means, it shall depend on the will of her husband.” Similarly, a penitent must subject himself to the judgment of a discriminating priest, so that he may not be burdened too much, or it may be explained thus, because the flesh directed by the judgment of the spirit neither grows wanton, nor succumbs.[[16]](#endnote-16)

1. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.50, 632b1-2 (Barnes 1:982): All animals that ruminate derive profit and pleasure from the process of rumination, as they do from the process of eating.

Cf. Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale* 22.1 (Venice: Apud Dominicum Nicolinum, 1591), 4:fol. 274rb: De potu et cibo animalium. Aritoteles ubi supra. Igitur omne animal habet appetitum gustus saporis cibi: et appetitus non est nisi ad dulce et delectabile: ac perdigestum valde. Quod enim digestum est in omnibus rebus dulcius est et delectabilius. Quod autem modicum est: cito digeritur. Necessarium quidem est: ut cibetur omne quod crescit: et hoc a sicco et humido.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3, q. 74, a. 5, ad 3: Mustum autem iam habet speciem vini: nam eius dulcedo attestatur digestioni, quae est completio a naturali calore, ut dicitur in IV Meteor (C. 2 n. 4 (Bk 379b12): S. Th., lect. 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Leo I, *Sermo* 13. Synopsis (PL 54:172): De abstinentia prodeunt castae cogitationes, rationabiles voluntates, salubriora consilia. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Aristotle, *On Plants* 2.8 828a20 (Barnes 2:1269): But in plants the first concoction and maturation takes place in the nutritive material. Every tree continues to grow up, until its growth is completed and it dies. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aristotle, *History of Animals*, cf. On Plants 2.9 828b9 (Barnes 2:1269): Plants which are of the nature of water bear fruit with difficulty on account of the predominance of moisture in them, and the wideness of their ducts and the tendency of their roots to fall off.... [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 2.16.25 (PL 34.48): A temporum autem delectatione dum in temporibus vivimus, propter aeternitatem in qua vivere volumus, abstinendum et jejunandum est: quamvis temporum cursibus ipsa nobis insinuetur doctrina contemnendorum temporum et appetendorum aeternorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Jerome, *Epistola* 148.22 (PL 22.1214-1215): Cave ne si jejunare aut abstinere coeperis, te putes jam esse sanctam. Haec enim virtus adjumentum est, non perfectio sanctitatis. Magisque id providendum est, ne tibi hoc, cum licita contemnas, securitatem quamdam illicitorum faciat. Quicquid supra justitiam offertur Deo, non debet impedire justitiam, sed adjuvare. Quid autem prodest tenuari abstinentia corpus, si animus intumescat superbia? Quam laudem merebimur de pallore jejunii, si invidia lividi simus? Quid virtutis habet vinum non bibere, et ira atque odio inebriari? Tunc, inquam, praeclara est abstinentia, tunc pulchra atque magnifica castigatio corporis, cum est animus jejunus a vitiis. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Peter Cantor, *Verbum abbreviatum* 58 (PL 205:181): Hinc est quod bonus discipulus, magistrum in aere tolli videns, clamat: «Pater mi, pater mi, currus Israel, et auriga ejus (IV Reg. II.) Quid est quod [Col.0181C] currus et auriga dicitur, nisi quod auriga agitat, currus portat? Doctor ergo qui mores populi per patientiam sustinet, et sacri eloquii verbis docet, et «currus» dicitur et «auriga.» «Currus,» quia mala tolerando portat; «auriga,» quia exhortando agitat et excitat. «Currus,» quia mala sustinet; «auriga» quia populum bonis admonitionibus exercet. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. *Fasciculus morum: a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook* 6.6, ed. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1989), p. 646-64. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* 5.2.5 ed. Herman Stadler (Munich: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916), (1:552): Adhuc morsus serpentum magnam secundum loca accipit diversitatem.... Econtra autem saliva hominis ieiuni quando diu ieiunavit et in praecedenti sero abstinuit, contrariatur omnibus venenosis.

22.1.5 (2:1355): Et si saliva hominis diu ieiuni cuius saliva bene est subtiliata a cibi viscositate, cadit in os vel vulnus scorpionis ver serpentis vel alterius venenati animalis ita quod ad interiora penetret, interficit ipsum animal.

Cf. *Bestiary*: Albertus Magnus, De animalibus 22.12): If the saliva of a man who has fasted for a long time falls into the mouth of a snake, the creature dies immediately.

<http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast264.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Note on Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa de paenitentia* 3.39 in (Avenione: Franc Mallard, et al, 1715), p. 687: De diversis intentionibus jejunantium nota veresus: Abstinet aeger, egens, cupidus, gula, simia, virtus. Aeger abstinet, quia non potest comedere, vel propter Medicinam; egens, quia non habet, quod comedat; cupidus, ne expendat; gula, id est gulosus, ut postea avidus comedat; simia, id est hypocrita, ut laudetur; virtus, id est virtuosus, ut mereatur.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=J3VMAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA687&lpg=PA687&dq=Egens+abstinet,+quia+non+habet+quod+comedat&source=bl&ots=ceyYDoDxmm&sig=ACfU3U055-M7c3_Q0AcCsgIQkKYKtfxHsQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiOwKyViIzqAhUOO60KHTFgBxYQ6AEwBHoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=Egens%20abstinet%2C%20quia%20non%20habet%20quod%20comedat&f=false>

Cf. *Luxemburgensia.bnl.lu MS No. 23* (p. 43): Fol. 103 Verso: Abstinet eger, egens, cupidus gula simia virtus, / Est virtus licitis abstinuisse bonis.

<https://luxemburgensia.bnl.lu/cgi/getPdf1_3.pl?mode=page&id=21861&option=> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. *Fasciculus morum: a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook* 6.5, ed. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1989), p. 642-645. Here the supporting citations from scripture are included. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. Peter Lombard, *Collectaneorum in Paulum Continuatio*: In Epistolam I at Timothaeum 5 (PL 192.355): Prudenter enim Deus sibi serviri vult, non ut nimietate debiles fiant, et post medicorum suffragia requirant.

Cf. *Fasciculus Morum: a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook* 6.4, ed. Siegfried Wenzel, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 640-641. Here following Peter Lombard. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Bernard, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2-2, q. 147, a. 1, ad 2: Non tamen ratio recta tantum de cibo subtrahit ut natura conservari non possit, quia, ut Hieronymus dicit, non differt utrum magno vel parvo tempore te interimas; et quod de rapina holocaustum offert qui vel ciborum nimia egestate, vel manducandi vel somni penuria, immoderate corpus affligit. Cf. De consecratone, D. 5, c. 24, Non mediocriter. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Seneca, *Epistula* 8.5 in Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales, trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library 75 (London: Heineman, 1918-1925), 1:37: Hanc ergo sanam ac salubrem formam vitae tenete, ut corpori tantum indulgeatis, quantum bonae valitudini satis est.

Hold fast, then, to this sound and wholesome rule of life; that you indulge the body only so far as is needful for good health.

Cf. *Fasciculus morum: a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook* ed. Siegfried Wenzel, p. 640-641. Here citing Bernard and Seneca. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Gregory, *Expositio in librum Job* 30.18.63 (PL 76.558): Nam plerumque dum plus justo caro restringitur, etiam ab exercitatione boni operis enervatur, ut ad orationem quoque vel praedicationem non sufficiat, dum incentiva vitiorum in se funditus suffocare festinat. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. *Fasciculus morum: a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook* ed. Siegfried Wenzel, p. 640-643: Sic penitens in arbitrio discreti sacerdotis, ut per se tantam penitenciam aut tam asperam accipiat, aut eciam ipse sacerdos iniugat, quod desperando illam non deserat.... [↑](#endnote-ref-16)