386 Virginity (*Virginitas*)

This virtue virginity is to be preferred to marriage, and virginity to widowhood, because it is more eminent as for birth, because it was born and drawn from heaven.

Second, because it is more beautiful as for performance for its merit is always multiplied.

Third, because it is more glorious as for payment because above gold it merits the golden crown. Wherefore Jerome says in an *Epistola*,[[1]](#endnote-1)that virginity is a defense of holiness, a conquest of infamy, restraint of lascivity, victory of the soul, and goods of the heart. The same[[2]](#endnote-2) says marriage replenishes the earth, virginity replenishes paradise. The same,[[3]](#endnote-3) however much there is between the root of the tree and the fruit, just so much between marriage and the summit of virginity. Wherefore Moses[[4]](#endnote-4) dying was lamented by the people, but Josue who had neither a wife nor children is reported not to have been bewailed in death. Marriages are finished in death, virginity begins to be crowned after death, and virginity was known to the angels.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Wherefore Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*,[[6]](#endnote-6) virginity is triple: one only in the mind, another only in the body, the third in both. The first remains although the body is defiled. The second remains although the mind is defiled by thought. The third does not remain without one way or another. A person is defiled: the first is reparable if it is lost, the second not, nor the third. And therefore, according to some although John the evangelist wanted to marry, however the golden crown of the virgins was due to him, because by the virginity of the will he recouped what was lost. By the virginity of the body he was owed the golden crown, by the virginity of the mind he was owed gold, Gen. 19[:8] the daughters of Lot who were virgins escaped the peril of the Sodomites, but of another marriage not. But they perished with those others, according to Jerome, *De Hebraicarum questionibus*.[[7]](#endnote-7) Therefore, the loss of virginity ought to be for each eight great justices and this on account of three matters.

First, on account of its irrecoverability. Wherefore Jerome,[[8]](#endnote-8) when God can do other things, however he cannot repair the virgin after her fall. Which is true as for as the state, although this is possible as for the merit, just as he did concerning the Magdalene. Wherefore virginity is as if a glass vessel which once broken it cannot be repaired. Other kinds of vases by repairing are commonly improved in worth.

¶ Second, on account of utility, for fruits one hundred-fold are owed to virginity, Luke 8[:8].

Third, on account of its dignity. Wherefore Jerome *Ad Demetridem*,[[9]](#endnote-9) to live as a virgin in the flesh contrary to the flesh is not a human life but an angelic one. Therefore Apo. 14[:4]: “These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.” On account of these reasons Dina the daughter of Jacob was sad after she lost her virginity, Gen. 34[:3]. And Tamar daughter of David, 3 Kings 13[:14]. And Valerius in the little book *Ad Ruffinum*,[[10]](#endnote-10) narrates that one day the emperor Valencius spoke of his famous triumphs, the collections relate that he said he gloried in one victory only. And when asked, Which? He responded, That of his flesh which he still dominated, so that now at eighty years old he remained a virgin.

Again, according to Augustine, the first book of the *De civitate*, c. 19,[[11]](#endnote-11) Lucretia was pressed down by force, and she killed herself. Just as it is read in *Historia tripartita*, book 9, c. 9,[[12]](#endnote-12) when the Roman made a law that from twentieth year those not having wives were excluded from the privileges of those having wives so that they would render the city more populous.

Again, because they were not enriched by this statute, Constantine when he became Christian repealed this law judging that those pursuing virginity on account of God disparage very much by this. Fulgentius in his *Mithologiis*, book 21,[[13]](#endnote-13) narrates that Vulcan who is also the god of fire is said to have asked of Jove to have Minerva as his wife. Jupiter commanded Minerva that she defend her virginity with arms. Just as when a virgin is sought by one bearing lust defends herself. Where it is noted how some vestal virgin was punished as if incest because she had written one wicked verse. She had said that marriage would be happy and sweet.

Again, just as Jerome says, *Contra Jouinianum*,[[14]](#endnote-14)virginity was revered among the ancients, that the triumphant Roman magistrates, if they met virgins, they would give them honor. But if they saw non virgins it would be entirely different. Wherefore as a sign of such great excellence Christ himself a virgin wanted to be born of a virgin and to be baptized by a virgin. Therefore, specially virginity is compared to the lily, Can. 2[:2]: “As the lily among thorns, so is my love.” For the lily undefiled gives off a fragrance, crushed it reeks, so it is concerning virginity. Wherefore it is read in the *Vitae patrum*,[[15]](#endnote-15) concerning the angel and hermit coming together at the same time where there was a cadaver of one who had died. The Hermit covered his nose but the angel not. And again, meeting a certain lascivious youth the angel held his nose. Therefore, it is said in Eccli. 39[:19]: “Send forth flowers, as the lily, and yield a smell.” And just as [Can. 2:2]: “The lily,” the fighter, “among thorns, so” the virgin among the slippery things. Therefore, in virginity one ought to be honest in speaking, sober in eating, rare in playing. Wherefore Bede in a *Homilia*,[[16]](#endnote-16) it is of virgins to be fearful, and to dread every entrance and eloquence of man.

Again, Valerius narrates in book 5,[[17]](#endnote-17) and Ambrose, *De virginibus,* book 3,[[18]](#endnote-18) that a certain handsome youth named Spurnna sensing women to be singing of his beauty, by stigmatizing himself he deformed his face. Therefore, in praise of the virgins of God, Augustine, in the book *De virginitate*,[[19]](#endnote-19) the joys proper to the virgins of Christ, are not the same as non-virgins, although of Christ. For the joys of others are other, but the like of none.

1. Jerome, cf. Cyprianus Carthaginensis, *De singularitate clericorum*, (PL 4:835): singularis castitas sola: quae munimen invictum est sanctimoniae, et expugnatio fortis infamiae; fortitudinis firmitas, et lasciviae petulantis infirmitas; probitatis praesidium, et improbitatis excidium; animae victoria, et corporis praeda; [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.16 (PL 23:235): Nuptiae terram replent, virginitas paradisum. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Jerome, *Epistola* 48.7 (PL 22:498): Ubi bonum et melius est, ibi boni et melioris non unum est praemium, et ubi non est unum praemium, ibi utique dona diversa. «Tantum igitur interest inter nuptias et virginitatem: quantum inter non peccare et benefacere: imo ut levius dicam, quantum inter bonum et melius.» [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.22 (PL 23:241): Quamobrem et Moyses moriens plangitur a populo Israel: Jesus autem quasi victurus non plangitur. Nuptiae enim finiuntur in morte, virginitas post mortem incipit coronari. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. *In commemoratione Sante Marie* Lectio 2 (Surtees Socity 71:687): Et bene angelus ad virginem mittitur: quia semper angelis est cognata virginitas. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, cf. *De sancta virginitate* 27.27 (PL 40:411): Merito eum sequimini virginitate cordis et carnis, quocumque ierit. Quid est enim sequi, nisi imitari? Quia Christus pro nobis passus est, relinquens nobis exemplum, sicut ait apostolus Petrus, ut sequamur vestigia ejus (I Petr. II, 21). Hunc in eo quisque sequitur, in quo imitatur: non in quantum ille Filius Dei est unus, per quem facta sunt omnia; sed in quantum filius hominis, quae oportebat, in se praebuit imitanda: et multa in illo ad imitandum omnibus proponuntur; virginitas autem carnis non omnibus; non enim habent quid faciant ut virgines sint, in quibus jam factum est ut virgines non sint. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Jerome, *Liber Hebraicarum queaestionum in Genesim* 19:14 (PL 23:965-966): Quia postea duae filiae Lot virgines fuisse dicuntur (de quibus et ipse dudum ad Sodomaeos dixerat: Ecce duae filiae meae, quae non cognoverunt virum), et nunc Scriptura commemorat eum habuisse generos; nonnulli arbitrantur illas, quae viros habuerunt, in Sodomis remansisse, et eas exisse cum patre, quae virgines fuerunt. Quod cum Scriptura non dicat, Hebraea veritas exponenda est, in qua scribitur: Egressus est Lot, et locutus est ad sponsos, qui accepturi erant filias ejus. Necdum igitur virgines filiae matrimonio fuerant copulatae. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Jerome, *Epistola* 22.5 (PL 22:397): Audenter loquar: Cum omnia possit Deus, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de poena, sed non vult coronare corruptam. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jerome, *Epistola* 130:19 (PL 22:1116): Sed quomodo ibi quartus speciem habens quasi filii hominis, immensos mitigavit ardores, et inter camini aestuantis incendium docuit flammas calorem amittere, et aliud oculis comminari, aliud praebere tactui, sic et in animo virginali, rore coelesti, et jejuniorum rigore [al. frigore], calor puellaris extinguitur, et in humano corpore, angelorum impetratur conversatio. Quam ob rem et vas electionis de virginibus se dicit Domini non habere praeceptum (1. Cor. 7), quia contra naturam, imo ultra naturam est, non exercere quod nata sis: interficere in te radicem tuam, et sola virginitatis poma decerpere, nescire thorum, omnem virorum horrere contactum, et in corpore vivere sine corpore. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* Dist. 4, cap. 3 Dissuasio Valaerii ad Ruffinum, in *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, ed. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 150: Valencius imperator octogenarius et adhuc uirgo, cum audisset die fati sui preconia triumphorum suorum recoli, quibus ipse fuerat frequentissimus, ait se tantum una uictoria gloriari, et requisitus 'Qua?' respondit 'Qua inimicorum nequissimum; domui carnem meam.' Amice, hic imperator inglorius migrasset a seculo, nisi ei fortiter restitisset cum qua tu familiariter assensum pepigisti. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 1.19.2 (PL 41:33): Hoc fecit illa Lucretia; illa, illa sic praedicata Lucretia innocentem, castam, vim perpessam Lucretiam insuper interemit. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Cassiodorus, *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita,* 1.9. (PL 69:893-894): Apud Romanos dudum fuit lex a vicesimo quinto anno non habentes uxores prohibens a privilegiis habentium coniuges, sed et alia multa iubens, ut nihil de testamento lucrarentur, licet generis proximitate consisterent; qui vero filios non habuissent, medietatem relictorum sibimet amittebant. Posuerunt autem has leges antiqui volentes Romam esse populosam omnemque subiectam terram et, quia non multum ante has leges plurimos in civilibus bellis amiserant.

Cf. *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*, 1.9.16-17 (CSEL 71:28) [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Fulgentius, *Mitologiarum* 2.11, ed Rudolfus Helm (Lipsiae: In Aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1898), pp. 51-52: Vulcanus cum Ioui fulmen efficeret, ab Ioue promissum accepit ut quidquid uellet praesumeret. Ille Mineruam in coniugium petiuit; Iuppiter imperauit ut Minerua armis uirginitatem defendisset. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.41 (PL 23:271): Certe Romanus populus quanto honore virgines semper habuerit, hinc apparet, quod consules et imperatores, et in curribus triumphantes, qui de superatis gentibus trophaea referebant, et omnis dignitatis gradus, eis de via cedere solitus sit. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *Vitae patrum* 6.3.18 (PL 73:1014): Dicebant Patres de aliquo sene magno, quia cum ambularet in eremo, vidit duos angelos comitantes secum, unum a dextris, et alium a sinistris [Col.1014C] suis. Dum vero ambularent, invenerunt cadaver in via jacens. Et cooperuit ille senex nares suas propter fetorem: fecerunt autem et angeli similiter. Et profecti pusillum, dixit senex: Et vos hoc odorastis? Qui dixerunt ei: Nequaquam, sed propter te cooperuimus et nos; nam immunditiam mundi hujus non odoramus nos, neque appropiat nobis; sed animas, quae fetorem peccatorum habent, ipsarum odorem nos odoramus. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Bede, *Homiliae* 3.27 (PL 94:325): Trepidare virginum est, et ad omnes viri ingressus pavere, omnes viri affatus vereri. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.5.ext. 1 (LCL 492:400-401): Quod sequitur externis adnectam, quia ante gestum est quam Etruriae civitas daretur. excellentis in ea regione pulchritudinis adulescens nomine Spurinna, cum mira specie complurium feminarum illustrium sollicitaret oculos, ideoque viris ac parentibus earum se suspectum esse sentiret, oris decorem vulneribus confudit, deformitatemque sanctitatis suae fidem quam formam irritamentum alienae libidinis esse maluit.

I shall attach the following item to external examples because it happened before citizenship was given to Etruria. An exceptionally handsome young man in that region named Spurinna attracted the eyes of many ladies of high station by his marvellous appearance. Feeling himself suspect on that account to their husbands and parents, he blurred the beauty of his face with wounds, preferring that ugliness prove his innocence rather than good looks excite the lust of strangers.

cf. Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain* (London: Routledge, 2004). p. 52: External beauty was a source of sin, and was only rarely accompanied by modesty.62 [Vincent de Beauvais, Speculum naturale, L. 31, C. 86, cols. 2359-60] This was the moral of the exempla about young men and women who not only tamed their bodies by ascetic means but actually disfigured their own beauty in order to avoid succumbing to their own sinfulness, or to prevent others from sinning, in thought or act. There were stories about a handsome youth who disfigured his face by scarring it with a knife, a young woman who cut off her lovely hair, a nun who put out her beautiful eyes which had aroused a king’s lust. The young man who disfigured his face was said to have wished to be ugly in body so that his soul should become more beautiful.63 [R. E. Marsan, *Itineraire espagnol de conte medieval VIIIe-Xve siecles* (Paris, 1974), pp. 227-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ambrose, *De virginibus* 3.7.38 (PL 16:232): Qui enim fieri posset ut sancta Sotheris tibi non esset mentis auctor, cui auctor est generis? Quae persecutionis aetate, servilibus quoque contumeliis ad fastigium passionis evecta, etiam vultum ipsum qui inter cruciatus totius corporis liber esse consuevit injuriae, et spectare potius tormenta quam perpeti, carnifici dedit: tam fortis et patiens, ut cum teneras poenae offerret genas, prius carnifex caedendo defecerit, quam martyr injuriae cederet. [Col.0232B] Non vultum inflexit, non ora convertit: non gemitum, non lacrymam dedit. Denique cum caetera poenarum genera vicisset, gladium quem quaerebat, invenit

Schaff, p. 387, 39. For how could it come to pass that holy Sotheris should not have been the originator of your purpose, who is an ancestor of your race? Who, in an age of persecution, borne to the heights of suffering by the insults of slaves, gave to the executioner even her face, which is usually free from injury when the whole body is tortured, and rather beholds than suffers torments; so brave and patient that when she offered her tender cheeks to punishment, the executioner failed in striking before the martyr yielded under the injuries. She moved not her face, she turned not away her countenance, she uttered not a groan or a tear. Lastly, when she had overcome other kinds of punishment, she found the sword which she desired. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* 27.27 (PL 40:411): Gaudia propria virginum Christi, non sunt eadem non virginum, quamvis Christi. Nam sunt aliis alia, sed nullis talia. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)