390 Life (*Vita*)

Life is triple: of nature, of grace, and of glory.

Concerning the first, it is said in Gen. 2[:7]: “He breathed into his face the breath of life,” etc. In this life we ought to consider three things, namely, danger, fatigue, and passing.

Concerning the first, note that danger would be where there is an ease of falling to enemies shoving on all sides and to be despoiled by those tempting, Job 7[:1]: “The life of man upon earth is a warfare.” For in heaven is the place of joy, in hell is the place of sorrow, but upon the earth is the place of fighting and warfare. in which certainly because we can easily err, we need a rule guiding which is expressed to us.

Secondly, denying impiety and secular desires, soberly lest there be anything superfluous, justly lest anything be scattered, piously lest we live anyway inordinately in this world.

Again, soberly against the delight of the flesh, justly against the cupidity of the world, and piously against the impiousness of the devil.

¶ But I ask whence this is had, such ease of sinning and falling. Certainly, because it is easy to retire from the middle way in which consists the virtuous life of the voyagers.

¶ Secondly, we must consider the fatigue of this life which is on account of the multiplicity of troubles assaulting the one suffering, both helping and attacking. Therefore it is said in Psal. [30:11]: “My life is wasted with grief, and my years [in sighs].” Job 14[:1]: “Man born of a woman,” therefore with a rebirth, “living for a short time.” Therefore, he is filled with fear and many miseries. Therefore, with weeping (*fletu*) as if a sick flower (*flos eger*) he is said to be born perilously and ground down by laborious living and flees as a cloud continuously tending to death against that fatigue. Man lacks comforting hope, just as one accepting a purgative medicine is comforted, Job 10[:1]: “My soul is weary of my life.” Therefore, it is expedient that man suffer on account of Christ and otherwise he would suffer and thus he makes a virtue of necessity, 2 Cor. 4[:11]: “We who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake.”

Third, we ought to consider the passing of this life which continuously tends toward death, willy nilly, Psal. [88:49]: “Who is the man that shall live, and not see death?” And James 4[:15]: “What is your life? It is a vapor which appears for a little while,” etc. Wherefore Augustine,[[1]](#endnote-1) I do not know whence I came or where I go, but plainly we know that we are mortal. For nothing is more certain than death, but the hour of death nothing is more uncertain. For we do not know how or when or where we will die, because death awaits us everywhere. Because of this brief transition, death awaits man to work earnestly, just as a pilgrim earnestly at the time of vespers, the pauper of the way vies to enter before the closing of the door, Eccle. [9:10]: “Whatsoever your hand is able to do, do it earnestly.” Job 7[:7]: “Remember,” my Lord, that my life is but wind, and shall not return,” etc.

¶ Concerning the second, which is the life of grace, it is to be noted that just as the life of nature, it is examined in three ways: from sense, movement, and communication. So, the life of grace is examined in man when he uses his sense of discretion, movement of good operation, and word of healthy edification.

Concerning the first, it is a sign that man lives spiritually and by grace if he uses his sight of contemplation, Ose. 6[:3]: “He will revive us after two days.” If he uses his hearing of preaching, Deut. 8[:3]: “Not in bread alone does man live, but in every word.” if he uses his taste of love, so a burning coal is said to be alive, [1] John 3[:14]: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” If he uses the service of good opinion, just as the sick man breathing is said to be alive, 2 Cor. 2[:16]: “To the others the odor of life unto life.” If he uses a touch of mortification of the flesh, Rom. 12[:1]: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God.” For according to the Apostle, Rom. 8[:13]: “If you live according to the flesh, you shall die.”

Second, it is thought that man spiritually lives from the motive of good work, just as a tree is said to be alive when it generates and produces fruit, Prov. 16[:5]: “The beginning of a good way is to do justice.” Truly it is the beginning because it begins here and is fulfilled in the future, Psal. [68:33]: “Seek God, and your soul shall live.” For the Apostle says [Acts 17:28]: “In him we live, and move, and are.” To be persevering, wherefore he himself says, John 14[:6]: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” The life of the servant pleases the lord greatly when he lives totally for the will of the lord, [2] Cor. 5[:15]: “Christ died for all; that they also who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.”

¶ Third, man is caused to live spiritually from the healing word of edification, just as spring is said to be living which flows abundantly, Psal. [117:17]: “I shall not die,” by death of fault but life of grace, “and shall declare the works of the Lord.” In repetition and edification, Amos 5[:6]: “Seek the Lord,” for yourselves and your underlings by the word of preaching and by the example of healthiness. For just as by directing the eyes it directs other members so that they may go by the right way. So, they who by teaching direct others and direct them to eternal life. And they for the sixth way of life, the rebuke of discipline and unity, ungrateful of virtue, lest perchance the house of Joseph would be burned, that is, the Church by the fire of iniquity, but alas because now the Lord is not sought for himself, but for his goods, John 6[:26]: “You seek me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves.” Where Gregory says,[[2]](#endnote-2) this Lord is detested through the persona of those, who by sacred orders pursue not the merits of virtues but seek out the supports of the present life. Not by thinking what they ought to imitate by living, but rather what stipends they may receive. Wherefore also many who seem to live the life of grace, do not so live, Apo. 3[:1]: “I know your works, that you have the name of being alive: and you are dead.”

Again, Augustine says,[[3]](#endnote-3) here each ought to live well, so that it may be given to him always to live. For if it is not given to you to live forever, what good is it to live well? Therefore, they are said not to live well, who neither know the end of living well or despise it.

¶ Again, note that the active life in as much as one strives to be a soldier of Christ for the salvation of our neighbors is more useful than the contemplative life, but it is not more worthy. But the active life when it is ordered for oneself only is neither more useful nor more worthy.

¶ Again, the states of the good and evil seem to proceed by a backward step, because the evil proceed by honors by which now they are elevated, and by words by which now they are loved, and by delights by which now they are made fat for the suitability, need, and straitness of hell, according to that of Job [21:13]: “They spend their days in wealth.” But the good on the contrary proceed by the humility of life, by the poverty of substance, by the austerity of penance to the honor, fertility of substance, and to the delights of paradise. The example in the rich man and Lazarus, John [16:20]: “Your sorrow shall be turned [into joy].” Wherefore also the life of the worldly is well compared to the line whose extremes are two points, namely, to be born and to die. Therefore, whatever man receives between these two points is divisible, but not beyond. So, it is for the life of the sinner.

¶ Again, the life of man is like a balance when it is moved, one part of which is elevated, and the other parts are depressed and the reverse. So, tyrants in the present life are elevated, the others the poor and the just are depressed. but it will be the reverse in the future because with the just elevated, the tyrants will be depressed. The example is in Susanna and the elders, Dan. 13[:5]. In Peter and Herod, Acts 12[:1]. In Domitian and John.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Concerning the third, which is the life of glory, note that it is acquired by three periods.

First, by faith, Tob. 2[:18]: “We are the children of the saints, and look for that life, which God will give to those that never change their faith from him.” Truly because “faith without works is dead,” James 2[:20]. Therefore, commonly the life of glory is acquired by good work, Matt. 19[:17]: “If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Third, it is acquired by participation of the sacraments. For just as by bodily nutrition the life of the animal is continued, so by this spiritual and sacramental food it is preserved and the spiritual life is continued, John 6[:55]: “He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has everlasting life.” Wherefore the marvelous bond of this sacrament is evident, for it binds brother to brother, the fighter to his attendant, as they have each other in some distance, but it is not between this food and fodder. Wherefore Augustine in his *Confessiones*,[[5]](#endnote-5) you will not change me into you, just like the food of your flesh, but you will be changed into me, etc. John 6[:41]: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven.” Wherefore Seneca, *Epistula* 64 to Lucilius,[[6]](#endnote-6) they live badly, who always are beginning to live, when it is about leaving off. And they leave off living before they begin to live. And Augustine, *De verbis Domini*, sermon 28,[[7]](#endnote-7) consider, brothers, how much that life is to be loved, where you never come to the end of that life. Here you labor, you pant, and hardly enumerate the necessities of this life. Learn, therefore, to seek eternal life, where these things will not be endured. Wherefore Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*,[[8]](#endnote-8) learn how to be victorious always. But live as if you would die tomorrow. In this land there are many against you, because here frequently a man dies saying with the Apostle, 2 Cor. 11[:23]: “In deaths often.” Therefore, it is said in the Psal. [62:4]: “Your mercy is better than lives.” Because if we need the mercies of God, we are in several lives more than in one life. Therefore, Augustine says, *Epistola* 27,[[9]](#endnote-9) if life is loved, let it be acquired there where no death ends it. Because how did Daniel live so that he could not be harmed by the lions, Dan. 14[:30]. Because Noah was a just man the animals obeyed him, Gen 7 [:14]. The sun was obedient to Josue 10[:13]. The fire from heaven obeyed Elias and devoured the fifty, 4 Kings 1[:10]. Wherefore Gregory, *Super Ezechiel,* book 2, c. 10,[[10]](#endnote-10) to live for God is everything that we do, not for us, but to do it for the love of God. In these things that we do for ourselves rather we minister them than the Lord. And Tully,[[11]](#endnote-11) it is permitted not to know some things, do not be ashamed. But not to know how to live well is shameful.

Again, Jerome, *Epistola* 78,[[12]](#endnote-12) nothing else deceives humans, just as they are ignorant of the space of life, they promised themselves a longer life. There is no one so old that to this extent he would not undertake one extra year.

Again, Gregory, *Homilia* 2,[[13]](#endnote-13) what is this present mortal life, if not a certain road. But what kind of road weigh carefully, in the labor of the road we are exhausted. And however, we do not wish to finish this same road.

1. Augustine, *De spiritu et anima* 31 (PL 40:800): quoniam nescio finem meum. Hoc plane scio, quod mortales sumus; et velimus nolimus, omnes moriemur. Nihil enim morte certius, et nihil hora mortis incertius. Nam nescimus quando, aut quomodo, aut ubi moriemur; quoniam mors ubique nos exspectat. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Gregory, *Moralia* 23.25.49 (PL 76:282): Et per eorum personam Dominus illos intra sanctam Ecclesiam detestatur, qui per sacros ordines ad Dominum propinquantes, non in eisdem ordinibus virtutum merita, sed subsidia vitae praesentis exquirunt; nec cogitant quid vivendo imitari debeant, sed quae compendia percipiendo satientur. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *In Joannis evangelius* 45.2 (PL 35:1720): Ad hoc enim debet unicuique prodesse bene vivere, ut detur illi semper vivere: nam cui non datur semper vivere, quid prodest bene vivere? Quia nec bene vivere dicendi sunt, qui finem bene vivendi vel caecitate nesciunt, vel inflatione contemnunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* 69 (Ryan 1:284): In this time Domitian was Emperor of Rome, which made right great persecutions unto christian men, and did do take S. John, and did him to be brought to Rome and made him to be cast into a vat or a ton full of hot oil in the presence of the senators, of which he issued out, by the help of God, more pure and more fair, without feeling of any more heat or chauffing, than he entered in. After this that emperor saw that he ceased not to preach the christian faith, he sent him into exile unto an isle called Patmos. There was S. John alone, and was visited of angels and governed; there wrote he by the revelation of our Lord the Apocalypse, which contained the secrets of holy church and of the world to come. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *Confessiones* 7.10.16 (PL 32:742): Nec tu me in te mutabis, sicut cibum carnis tuae; sed tu mutaberis in me. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Seneca, *Epistulae* 23.10-11 (LCL 75:164-165): “Male vivunt, qui semper vivere incipiunt.” “Quare?” inquis, desiderat enim explanationem ista vox. Quia semper illis inperfecta vita est. Non potest autem stare paratus ad mortem, qui modo incipit vivere. Id agendum est, ut satis vixerimus. Nemo hoc putat, qui orditur cum maxime vitam. Non est quod existimes paucos esse hos; propemodum omnes sunt. Quidam vero tunc incipiunt, cum desinendum est. Si hoc iudicas mirum, adiciam quod magis admireris: quidam ante vivere desierunt quam inciperent.

“They live ill who are always beginning to live.” You are right in asking why; the saying certainly stands in need of a commentary. It is because the life of such persons is always incomplete. But a man cannot stand prepared for the approach of death if he has just begun to live. We must make it our aim already to have lived long enough. No one deems that he has done so, if he is just on the point of planning his life. You need not think that there are few of this kind; practically everyone is of such a stamp. Some men, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some men have left off living before they have begun. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine, *De Scripturis* 84.1 (PL 38:519): Considerate, fratres, quantum amanda sit vita, ubi nunquam finias vitam. Amas ergo istam vitam, ubi tantum laboras, curris, satagis, anhelas; et vix enumerantur quae necessaria sunt in misera vita; seminare, arare, novellare, navigare, molere, coquere, texere: et post haec omnia finire habes vitam. Ecce quae pateris in misera ista quam diligis vita: et putas te semper victurum, et nunquam moriturum? Templa, saxa, marmora, ferro plumboque consolidata, tamen cadunt: et homo nunquam se putat moriturum? Discite ergo, fratres, quaerere aeternam vitam, ubi ista non tolerabitis, sed in aeternum cum Deo regnabitis. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Seneca, cf. Alanus de Insulis, *Summa de arte praedicatoria* 36 (PL 210:179): Sic disce, quasi semper victurus; sic vive, quasi cras moriturus. Item Apostolus: Libros lege. Et affer tecum libros (II Tim. IV). Item Seneca: «Vita sine litteris mors est, et vivi hominis sepultura.» [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Augustine, *Epistola* 127.5 (PL 33:486): Vita si diligitur, ibi acquiratur ubi nulla morte finitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem* 2.10.16 (PL 76:1067): quatenus omne quod facimus, non nostro, sed Domini zelo faciamus, ne in his quae agimus nobis potius quam Domino ministremus. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Tullius (Cicero), cf. Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis* 21.6-22.1 (LCL 534:390-391): licet tibi nescire, nec pudet. Enimvero dic, sodes: “nescio bene vivere, ut Socrates, ut Plato, ut Pythagoras vixerunt, nec pudet me nescire bene vivere”;

you can be ignorant of them and not feel ashamed of being so. On the other hand, just try to say, “I do not know how to live the virtuous life as Socrates, Plato, or Pythagoras lived it, but I am not ashamed not to know how to live it” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jerome, *Epistola* 140.16 (PL 22:1177): Nihil enim ita decipit humanum genus, quam dum ignorant spatia vitae suae, longiorem sibi saeculi hujus possessionem repromittunt. Unde et illud egregie dictum est: Nullum tam senem esse et sic decrepitae aetatis, ut non se adhuc uno plus anno vivere suspicetur. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia* 1.1.3 (PL 76:1079): Quid est vita mortalis, nisi via? Et quale sit, fratres mei, perpendite, in labore viae lassescere, et tamen eamdem viam nolle finiri. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)