93 Debt (*Debitum*)

Debt is found to be double, legal and moral. In the first place, one owes as in Rom. 13[:8]: “Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” The first debt ceases when once it has been discharged. The second debt always remains. Therefore, man owes many things, because some things to God, some to himself, and some to his neighbor. To God certainly he owes many things both on account of creation and on account redemption and on account of generosity of the benefactors.

¶ However, to God he owes spiritually three things. Because a certain correction for an offence, 1 Cor. 7[:3], what you owe repay for the offence. But this happens through the works of penance. Second one owes indulgence for a benefice, Joshua 24[:15]: “Choose this day that which pleases you, whom you would rather serve.” Third, one owes a reckoning for things accepted and spent, Luke 16[:5]: “How much do you owe my lord?” But, alas, because Matt. 12[:58-59] it is said, “Cast him into prison, till he paid the whole debt.”

¶ Again, man owes three things to himself. They are according to those three which he has in himself: flesh, soul, and his composite self. Therefore, he owes to the flesh mortification just as to live purged, Rom. 8[:12]: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” Second, to the soul purity just as cleanness to a temple, 4 Kings 5[:13]: “If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, surely you should have done it: how much rather what he now has said to you: Wash.” Third, he owes humility to the composite just as the sick man humiliates himself before the doctor, Rom. 15[:1]: “We that are stronger, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.”

¶ Again, third, man owes love of heart to his neighbor, just as member to member, Rom. 13[:8]: “Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” Second, he owes instruction of the mouth just as the sun spreads its rays over the good and the evil, Rom. 1[:14]: “To the wise and to the unwise, I am a debtor.” Third, we owe assistance of work just as the noble birds help in the more powerful of their kind, John 13[:14]: “If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s.” It is a marvel that that one who owes so many things can rest. Wherefore, Macrobius narrates in the *Saturnalia*,[[1]](#endnote-1) that a certain emperor to whom it was narrated the multitude of debts in which a certain Roman soldier recently died was held accountable. He commanded to that one, Buy the bed on which that soldier was accustomed to sleep, saying he would lay down there to rest. Therefore, let us see, whether we who have more debts than others in this that we may receive something heavier for me from the authority of the world. Thence we judge that the rich man has an account to render for everything borrowed which he received from God of the goods of nature, fortune, and grace. But behold the false reasoning of the world, for it imitates that rich man who loves the chains that hold him until he renders the whole to the last fourth part.

¶ For the rich man about to die has many creditors to whom often that answer is made. Wherefore, he has nothing if the world dismisses the poor man to go away free, whom before it seemed to hate. Wherefore Seneca,[[2]](#endnote-2) he alone is free who does not care in whose hand the world lies. Therefore, pay what you owe.

1. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4.16-17 (LCL 510:352-353): Cui Caesar: Non miror, inquit: dies aliquanto sunt longiores. 17 Relata ad se magnitudine aeris alieni, quam quidam eques Romanus dum vixit excedentem ducenties celaverat, culcitam emi cubicularem in eius auctione sibi iussit, et praeceptum mirantibus hanc rationem reddidit: Habenda est ad somnum culcita in qua ille, cum tantum deberet, dormire potuit. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Seneca, cf. *Commentaria in Sacrm Scripturam*, Cornelio Cornelii a Lapide (Naples: apud L Nagar Editorem, 1856) Commentaria in Baruch Prophetam, cap. 3:25 (col. 767a): Et Ptolemaeus, ut habetur in Praefatione Almagesti, dictitabat non esse mirandum si regna ab uno in alium transferatur: *Ille*, inquit, inter homines altior est mundo, qui non curat in cuius manu sit mundus. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)