11 Bitterness (*Amaritudo*)

According to the Philosopher, in the book *De sensu et sensato*,[[1]](#endnote-1) bitterness comes forth from the subtraction of the natural humor without which nothing is sweet. Thus, when grace is subtracted from the soul it is bitter, and then it can be said that of Job 23[:2]: “Now also my words are in bitterness.”

Therefore, according to Jer. 2[:19]: “Know you, and see that it is an evil,” namely, damnable, “and a bitter thing,” as for the penalty, “for you, to have left the Lord.” For, because one who is ill of a fever has a bitter mouth, and this one ignores the sign who is a picker of fruit lacking the sun while it is on the tree, as it is necessarily bitter, thus a work done without God or contrary to God renders the heart bitter. But just as the physician administers medicine against the bitterness of the mouth, thus God cures bitterness, 1 [Kings 1:10]: “As Anna had her heart full of grief, she prayed to the Lord, shedding many tears,” and the Lord gave her a son.

Again, 1 Kings 22[:2]: “And all that were under affliction of mind” gathered themselves unto David, and he became their prince. The prudent physician has his eye on the predominant humor in a sick man, but in the penitent greater is the bitterness of dissatisfaction than is the delight in sin. Again, a vine planted anywhere takes to itself the humor of the earth, and makes it in the beginning bitter, but in the end sweet. Thus, Christ who says, John 15[:1]: “I am the true vine.” At first, he generates in us the humor of devotion which makes us bitter, but afterwards it is sweet.

¶ Again, according to Aristotle, 8, *De animalibus*,[[2]](#endnote-2) he says that goats in Crete when they are pierced with an arrow eat pennyroyal, which is a bitter herb, and they draw out the iron. Thus, ought the sinner do when he has been shot by the arrow from the devil, suddenly have bitterness for sin, Prov. 14[:10]: “The heart that knows the bitterness of his own soul, in his joy the stranger shall not intermeddle.” Because of this Ezekias, Isaiah 38[:15, 17]: “I will recount to you all my years in the bitterness of my soul,” and it follows, “Behold in peace is my bitterness most bitter”; De penitencia, Dist. 3, c. *Sicut Achab*.[[3]](#endnote-3) “Have you not seen Achab humbled before me?” [3 Reg. 21:29]. Where it follows, however much piety pleases in the elect, the grief of bitterness if it is thus, in the reprobate penitence pleases.

Immature fruit, however good in its matter, is bitter, but when it is mature, the bitterness recedes. Thus the joy of the penitent is here always with some bitterness because it is not the time of maturity, but in the future life when every bitterness is blotted out. According to the Philosopher,[[4]](#endnote-4) all superfluities are bitter, as is evident in feces, the cause of which is because in the mixture of any measure nature draws to itself in every digestion that which is sweet and that which is pure and leaves the impure. But death is the ultimate digestion of everything living. Therefore, when then the sweet must be separated from the bitter, what is impure alone remains for the evil, both among the penitents and consequently the bitterness which is considered impure because of which it is said in Eccli. 41[:1]: “O death, how bitter is your remembrance to an unjust man,” and 1 Kings 15[:32]: “Doth bitter death separate in this manner?” A small worm in an apple not yet ripe renders the whole bitter, thus the worm of conscience in the soul.

Where note qualitatively it is in mixtures of whatever elements when they are reduced to any medium, however, one is drawn out in which it is released in what remains, it is in this fashion that in any sin there is a certain mixture of delight and bitterness, but corrupted delight remains as the bitterness which is drawn out.

1. Aristotle, *Sense and Sensibilia* 4, 442a26-28 (Barnes 1:702): Again, as Black is a privation of White in the Translucent, so Saline or Bitter is a privation of Sweet in the Nutrient Moist. This explains why the ash of all burnt things is bitter; for the potable [sc. the sweet] moisture has been exuded from them. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.6, 612a3-5 (Barnes 1:954): Wild goats in Crete are said, when wounded by arrows, to go in search of dittany, which is supposed to have the property of ejecting arrows in the body. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *De penitencia*, D. 3, c. 29 *Sicut Achab*: Nonne vidisti Achab humiliatum coram me? Quia igitur mei causa humiliatus est, non inducam malum in diebus ejus. In quibus Domini verbis pensandum est, quomodo ei in electis suis moeror amaritudinis placeat, qui amittere timent Deum, si sic ei et reprobi poenitentia placuit, qui timebat perdere praesens saeculum;

Cf. Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem* 1.10.44 (PL 76.904-905): Sic Achab (De poen., dist. 3, c. Sicut Achab), rex iniquus, a propheta reprehensus, cum contra se divinam sententiam audisset, pertimuit, et magno moerore depressus est, ita ut prophetae suo Dominus diceret: Nonne vidisti humiliatum Achab coram me? Quia igitur humiliatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus (III Reg. XXI, 29). In quibus Domini verbis pensandum est quomodo ei in electis suis moeror amaritudinis placeat qui amittere timent Dominum, si sic ei et in reprobo poenitentia placuit qui timebat perdere praesens saeculum? Aut quomodo ei grata sit spontanea afflictio pro culpis in eis qui placent, si haec ad tempus placuit et in illo qui displicebat? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aristotle, Sense and Sensibilia 4, 442a13-18 (Barnes, 1:702):

As the intermediate colours arise from the mixture of white and black, so the intermediate savours arise from the Sweet and Bitter; and these savours, too, severally involve either a definite ratio, or else an indefinite relation of degree, between their components, either having certain integral numbers at the basis of their mixture, and, consequently, of their stimulative effect, or else being mixed in proportions not

arithmetically expressible. The tastes which give pleasure in their combination are those which have their components joined in a definite ratio.

Cf. Pseudo-Chrysostom, Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum Homilia 3 ex cap. 3:8 (PG 56:650-651\*): confessionem puta esse digestionem impuritas et spurcitiae quae intus erat inclusa, baptismum esse lotionem sordium egressarum: numquid facta digestione impuritas, jam statim sanus factus es? [↑](#endnote-ref-4)