118 Drunkenness (*Ebrietas*)

It consists in immoderate drinking which can happen in three ways. In one way, it is by not knowing the drink. And another way when he estimates himself strong enough to endure it and the drink would be too weak for inebriating. Thirdly, when he considers the power of the drink and he would be too strong to be inebriated. He prefers, however, to be inebriated than to abstain from the drink, such a one sins mortally, especially if he were accustomed to this because he freely exposes himself to the danger of sinning. From which, freely and knowingly, he deprives himself of the use of reason, by which he should rule himself. It would be otherwise if one were inebriated while not knowing the power of the drink, or on account being a guest, or on account of too great thirst.

¶ Wherefore Ambrose says, in the book *De patriarcha*,[[1]](#endnote-1)drunkenness is to be avoided through which we cannot avoid faults. For what we guard against (while) sober, we cannot guard against while drunk. Wherefore Jerome, in his *Epistola*,[[2]](#endnote-2) the grapes overcame the chaste Lot whom Sodom could not conquer. Wherefore it is to be known, properly speaking, that drunkenness is the stupefaction of customs and of the head, the disturbance of the senses, and a punishment of the whole body.

¶ Again, note that drunkenness makes many evils. And first because it takes away shame and embarrassment by which men abstain more from sinning than by will.

¶ The example of Alexander the Great[[3]](#endnote-3) who in his cups killed a cleric faithful to himself and very friendly. Wherefore Gregory says[[4]](#endnote-4) that drunkenness is the seductive demon, the sweet poison, which whoever has it does not have himself, which whoever does it not only does sin, but he himself is total sin. And Chrysostom, *Super Matthaeum*, homily 57,[[5]](#endnote-5) drunkenness is the mother of vices. It made the Israelites idolaters, it turned the Sodomites into ashes, and it made cattle out of men. And Jerome, *Epistle* 83,[[6]](#endnote-6) whoever follows drunkenness is dead and buried.

¶ Noah drunk for one hour bared his thigh which for 600 years he had covered up with sobriety [Gen. 9:21]. Lot through drunkenness mixed uncertainly in lust, and whom Sodom had not conquered the grapes conquered, Gen. 19[:33]. Again, Innocent, *De miseria humane conditionis*,[[7]](#endnote-7) what is more repulsive than a drunkard? To whom there is a stink in the mouth, a shaking in the body, who promises many things, who produces hidden things, to whom the mind is alienated, the face is transformed, etc. Prov. 23[:21]: “They that give themselves to drinking, and that club together shall be consumed.”

¶ The example of Baltasar the king who drinking from the vessels of the Lord with his concubines lost the kingdom and was killed. Explain there concerning *mane, thecel,* and *phares* [Dan. 5:25]. Behold therefore what evils come out of feasts and drinking bouts. The example [2 Kings 13:29] of the sons of David killed in a feast and the sons of Job [1:16]. John the Baptist was beheaded in a feast, Mark 6[:27]. Wherefore no one should invite another to drink, as is common in drinking bouts. For if one does this with the intention of subverting the senses of another, he sins mortally, because in this he takes away more from him than if he took away his temporal goods. Against which it is said in Habacuc [2:15]: “Woe to him that gives drink to his friend, and presents his gall, and makes him drunk. And seeding the reason of being drunk on account of these things, Esth. 1[:8], it is said that “he appointed over every table one of his nobles, so that neither was there any one to compel them to drink.” Therefore, it is said in Luke 21[:34]: “Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.” Note that he says here, hearts. Note however that he means bodies. And particularly clerics ought not to encourage each other for taking equal drinks, as it is treated Extra. *De vita et honestate clericorum,* c. *A crapula*.[[8]](#endnote-8)

¶ Again, drunkenness is cursed, Isai. 5[:11]: “Woe to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness,” behold it is cursed. [Isai. 5:13]: “Therefore, my people are led away captive,” behold it is punished.

¶ For this vice first introduced servitude among men, just as is evident concerning Noah who cursed Cham his son, made him a servant to his brothers [Gen. 9:26].

¶ The degrees and properties of the drunkard are noted in these verses: He is cheerful, wise, rich, afterwards foolish, and demented. He who drinks and takes another drink constructs what he will be reduced to. Therefore, the Apostle says, Eph. 5[:18]: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury.” And Prov. 20[:1]: “Wine is a luxurious thing, and drunkenness riotous.” On account of this Valerius says, in the first book, chapter 4,[[9]](#endnote-9) that formerly the use of wine was unknown among Roman women lest through that they would fall into another disgrace. Chrysostom, *Homilia* 57,[[10]](#endnote-10) all animals know how to put a limit to their sufficiency in food and drink except man.

¶ From which one concludes that man is worse than an animal, for he is rational. Wherefore, Jerome, *Epistola* 37, which is *To Nepotianum*,[[11]](#endnote-11) whatever inebriates, and turns the state of the mind, flee it just like wine. I do not say this so that a creature of God may be damned by us, accordingly also Christ himself was called a drinker of wine [Matt. 11:19], and Timothy with a fainting stomach, indulged in wine, but in drinking we need the measure of one’s age and strength for the quality of the bodies.

¶ Again, Augustine in the *Epistola ad virgines*,[[12]](#endnote-12) drunkenness is the root of crimes, confusion of the head, subversion of the senses, tempest of the tongue, storm of the body, shipwreck of chastity. In a way to make somewhat of a circle: he who drinks much, talks much, he who talks much defecates much, he who defecates much is greatly thirsty, he who thirsts much drinks much, therefore in first principle he who drinks much drinks much.

¶ Exactly this custom of drinking induces necessity whence many evils come forth.

¶ For example, someone contracted himself to serve the devil for the expedition of some business. Wherefore the devil said to him, Choose one of four: whether you wish to sleep with your mother, whether to kill your father, whether to be hanged, whether once and for all to be perfectly drunk. But that one chose to be drunk. Wherefore also that drunken one returning from the tavern raped his mother by force, which the father seeing and reprehending he was killed by him, for this reason he was captured and hung. Again, Augustine,[[13]](#endnote-13) if you exceed the measure in drinking however much praise is permitted, your tongue resounds, your life blasphemes.

1. Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.6.57 (PL 14:441): Sane discimus vitandam ebrietatem (15, q. 1, c. Sane discimus), per quam crimina cavere non possumus. Nam quae sobrii cavemus, per ebrietatem ignorantes committimus. Cf. C. 15, q. 1, c. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jerome, *Epistola* 69.9 (PL 22:663): Lot per temulentiam, nesciens libidini miscet incestum: et quem Sodoma non vicerat, vina vicerunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* 8.1.51-52 (LCL 369:246-247): Eminebat etiam in voce sceleris quod parabat

atrocitas. Et ille iam non suae, sed regis irae memor,

Clitum esse et de convivio exire respondit. Haec dicentis latus hasta transfixit morientisque sanguine aspersus: “I nunc,” inquit, “ad Philippum et Parmenionem et Attalum.”

And Clitus, no longer mindful of his own anger, but remembering that of the king, replied that it was Clitus and that he was leaving the banquet. As he was saying this the king ran the lance into his side, and bespattered with the blood of the dying man, cried: “Go nowa to Philip and Parmenion and Attalus!” [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gregory, Cf. Augustine, *Sermones ad fratres in eremo commoranteso* 33 (PL 40:1295): ebrietas tu mentem caecas, judicio recto cares, consilium nullum habes, blandus daemon es, venenum dulce es, peccatum suave es.

Cf. cited as Gregory in *Fasciculus morum* 6.3 (638-639): Unde Gregorius: “Ebrietas, [inquit,] est blandus demon, dulce venenum suave peccatum, quam qui habet, se non habet; quam qui facit, non tantum facit peccatum set totum est peccatum, quia attrahit sibi omnia peccata.”

Hence Gregory says: “Drunkenness is a smiling fiend, a sweet poison, a soft sin; who has it loses himself; who engages in it does not only commit a sin but becomes completely sinful, becaue it draws all other sins to itself.”

Cf. Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., et al., *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe,* Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., “Gregory the Great in Medieval Frisia: What is and what might have been,” (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 239-254, particularly p. 247, n. 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. John Chrysostom, *In Mattheum homiliae interpretatione Burgundio,* 57 (PG 58:563): Etenim nichil ita illi demoni est amicum, ut ebrietas et lasciuia. Quia et mater est omnium malorum.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIª-IIae, q. 150 a. 3 arg. 1: Dicit enim Chrysostomus quod nihil ita est Daemoni amicum sicut ebrietas et lascivia, quae est mater omnium vitiorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Jerome, *Epistola* 69.9 (PL 22:663): qui inebriatur, et mortuus et sepultus est. Noe ad unius horae ebrietatem nudat femora sua (Gen. 9. 21), quae per sexcentos annos sobrietate contexerat. Lot per temulentiam, nesciens libidini miscet incestum: et quem Sodoma non vicerat, vina vicerunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Innocent III, *De contemptu mundi* 2.19 (PL 217:724): Quid turpius ebrioso? cui fetor in ore, tremor in corpore, qui promittit multa, prodit occulta, cui mens alienatur, facies transformatur? [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Decretales, X.3.1.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 2.1.5b (LCL 492:130): Vini usus olim Romanis feminis ignotus fuit, ne scilicet in aliquod dedecus prolaberentur, [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Gospel of Matthew Commentary* 3:1-2: [Isaiah 11:6](http://www.newadvent.org/bible/isa011.htm#verse6) For like as here by the hills and valleys, he meant that incongruities of character are blended into one and the same evenness of self-restraint, so also there, by the characters of the brute animals indicating the different dispositions of [men](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm), he again spoke of their being linked in one and the same harmony of godliness.

<https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/matthew-commentary/st-john-chrysostom-on-matthew/chapter-1/chapter-2/chapter-3> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Jerome, *Epistola* 52.11 (PL 22:537): Quidquid inebriat, et statum mentis evertit, fuge similiter ut vinum. Nec hoc dico, quod Dei a nobis creatura damnetur (siquidem et Dominus vini potator est appellatus (Matth. 11): et Timotheo dolenti stomachum, modica vini sorbitio relaxata est (1. Tim. 5), sed modum pro aetatis, et valetudinis et corporum qualitate exigimus in potando. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Augustine, *De sobrietate et castitate* 1 (PL 40:1106): E contra ebrietas ab animae injuria incipit, et flagitiorum omnium mater est, culparum materia, radix criminum, origo omnium vitiorum, turbatio capitis, subversio sensus, tempestas linguae, procella corporis, naufragium castitatis. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Augustine, *Sermones ad populum* 9.11.18 (PL 38:88): In ipsis alimentis, quae utique concessa sunt, si forte excedis modum, et amplius accipis quam necesse est, peccas. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)