175 To Weaken or Infirmity (*Infirmare uel Infirmitas*)

Note here there are as many varieties of feebleness as so many kinds of vices. Wherefore some suffer pains, some tumors, some heats, or some madness. Pain of the heart is hate, Psal. [7:15]: “He has conceived sorrow and brought forth iniquity.” A tumor is pride, 1 Cor. [8:1]:

¶ “Knowledge puffs up” and this is grave because the beginning of every sin is pride. Infirmity should seek three things. For consolation in affliction, Lamen. 1[:21]: “They have heard that I sigh, and there is none to comfort me.”

Second for liberation from affliction, Psal. [17:18]: “Deliver me from my enemies.”

Third, recompense for affliction, 1 Cor. 9[:25]: “Every one that strives for the mastery, refrains himself from all things.” Sometimes the strong one falls into sickness with God thus allowing, Psal. [15:4]: “Their infirmities were multiplied: afterwards they made haste.”

The naturalists say,[[1]](#endnote-1) that with the blowing of the north wind dolphins hear the voices of men, but with the blowing of the south wind they are stopped. Thus, many with the blowing of adversity hear men calling to penitence, Isai. 26[:16]: “Lord, they have sought after you in distress.” But with the blowing of prosperity they do not hear, rather therefore they return to their sins. Wherefore the Lord is conquered, Jer. 22[:21]: “I spoke to you in your prosperity: and you said: I will not hear.” Wherefore the verse:[[2]](#endnote-2) When I feel languor, I feel the love of religion. With the languor taken away then I am deprived of his love. Wherefore Augustine,[[3]](#endnote-3) if God straightens us, we seek time for repenting, thus if one examines his mercy, we exhaust the patience which he affords us. The figure for this is 2 Macch. 9[:8-9, 12] concerning the proud Antiochus who after his pride became ill as far as worms and stench said, “It is just that a mortal man be subject to God.”

Again, infirmity tames the lascivious, just as the master tames his disciples with the rod and just as boys cut away feathers from birds which they capture lest they fly away, so God formerly took away the feathers of the rich through poverty and when he took away the feathers of power through infirmity. If the king making war on a city spares the walls lest they be knocked to the ground it would be a sign that he loves the city, so God does not immediately destroy the body of the sinner, but sends a languor so that thus as if through hunger he might acquire the soul. Is it not therefore against numbering with the whip if the master sees the boy to cry excessively after the whip to be provoked more? Therefore, the Apostle said 2 Cor. [12:9]: “Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities.” The soul and the body are partners in gain and in loss. Therefore, if they are delinquent it is not just that the soul withdraws freely until the body makes satisfaction. Therefore, according to James 1[:12]: “Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he hath been proved,” etc. But I fear that it is concerning many just as concerning the sailors playing at dice during tranquil weather who forget the peril previously when they were compelled to make their vows. Likewise, it happened concerning the Welshman who in peril vowed to make a waxen offering to Blessed Mary in proportion to the magnitude of the evil, but when the tempest was passed, he said the man might have a candle sufficient for reading.

Again, note that inflicted infirmity makes a man to put aside temporal matters and seek heavenly, just as boys beaten in school hope to return home. In this way they act like boys who would have their vows dismissed without beatings. Wherefore Gregory,[[4]](#endnote-4) the saints consider temporal pain as gain because through this they do not fear to escape eternal pain. And this is the reason why springs are cool in the exterior heat of summer. They draw out the heat from the earth and then remain cool as in the depth of fountains. But it is opposite in winter because then the outward coldness drives back the intrinsic heat of the earth to the interior of the earth. Wherefore then are fountains, so morally the exterior heat retains for itself the heat of the human heart which ought to be directed to God, but in the winter of adversity man retains the heat of charity in his own possession.

¶ Here also note that formerly “This sickness is not unto death,” as Christ said, John 11[:4], concerning Lazarus. The reason can be because when the prudent physician sees someone to be sick with a grave and dangerous illness, he is inclined to lead him into another less dangerous illness so that thus the more dangerous may be cured. For example, from an acute fever he conducts him into a simple tertian, so God that he may free us from a grave infirmity of sin which causes death leads us to a bodily sickness. Therefore, says the Psal. [6:3]: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak.” In nature they ordain that the lion[[5]](#endnote-5) be as if over the quartanarian, that is, suffering the quartan fever in order that through this his ferocity may be subjugated. Wherefore he says, for example, God knowing in advance who can sin, he whips them by an infirmity lest they perish because it is better to be broken by sorrows for salvation than to remain unimpaired for damnation.

Again, the prudent physician seeing that without a greater danger of the one more gravely ill he cannot satisfy the infirm one totally, he permits him some conservative labor by appointing a mitigating preservative from a greater evil, thus God permits us to be vexed by temptations and infirmities that he may preserve us from eternal death.

¶ It is read in Leu. 15[:19-32] that almost at the altar to those outside of the house of that woman who was healed of a flow of blood. At the touch of the hem of Christ’s garment she was made whole, [Matt. 9:20-22]. The image of Eve and Christ and that woman under whose image a certain herb grows which with growing touches the hem of that image receives the power for curing every infirmity, if therefore this can happen why not more when Christ himself is touched by devout prayer. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Homilia* 21,[[6]](#endnote-6) infirmity of the body is to be pitied, not hated. Because it is not in our power whether it comes or goes.

¶ In truth infirmity of the soul is not to be pitied but hated because it is in our power that it comes or goes.

Again, infirmity of the body properly speaking holds us, but it is not held by us; truly infirmity of the soul does not hold us, but it is held by us. Therefore, the former is to be pitied, but the latter is to be hated.

Again, note that formerly infirmities were so easy that by one’s own powers of nature they were cured, and such are venial sins that by the daily suffering of the Church are taken away. Others are infirmities which are not cured without the application of medication, of such kind are mortal sins which are taken away by contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Some are infirmities which are cured by no medication, of such kind are final despair, impenitence, and apostasy from the faith about which Lamen. 2[:13]: “Great as the sea is your destruction: who shall heal you?” as if saying, no one on account of the impossibility of remedy.

About which see below, c. [225] Physician (*Medicus*).

1. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.6.11 (PL 82:451): Delphines certum habent vocabulum, quod [Col.0451C] voces hominum sequantur, vel quod ad symphoniam gregatim conveniant. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Les fabulises latins depuis le siecle d’Auguste jusqu’a la fin du moyen age*, Leopold Hervieux Vers Cites par eudes dans ses sermons (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1896), 4:352: Dum fero langorem, fero religionis amorem. Expers langoris, non sum memor hujus amoris. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, cf. Anselm, *Orationes* oratio 7 (PL 158:875): Si angustia veniat, tempus petimus poenitendi; si misericordia nos respexit, abutimur patientia quae pepercit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gregorius, *Moralia* 26.3 (PL 76:350): et temporalem iram super se lucrum computant, per quam se aeternam posse evadere non ignorant. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 156. St. Luke, (Ryan 2.248): the lion is a noble animal, being the king of beasts, is crafty, since when he flees he sweeps away his tracks with his tail, and also suffers from the quartan fever. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Homilia 21 ex capite 8.2 (PG 56.749): Nam infirmitas corporis miseranda est, non odienda: infirmitas autem animae non est miseranda, sed odienda: quia infirmitas corporis non est in nostra potestate, ut aut non veniat super nos, aut recedat a nobis: infirmitas autem animae in nostra est potestate, ut aut non veniat super nos, aut recedat a nobis. Infirmitas enim corporis tenet nos, nec tenetur a nobis; infirmitas autem animae non tenet nos, sed tenetur a nobis. Ideo illa infirmitas miseranda est, haec odienda. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)