257 Leisure or idleness (*Ocium siue ociositas*)

Leisure without study is a tomb for the living man, according to Seneca, *Epistula* 130.[[1]](#endnote-1) Wherefore,[[2]](#endnote-2) Ezechiel 16[:49]: “This was the iniquity of Sodom your sister, fulness of bread, and the idleness.”

Again, this *Ad fratres de Monte Dei*,[[3]](#endnote-3) the incentive of all temptations and evil thoughts is idleness. Chrysostom, *Homilia* 34,[[4]](#endnote-4) the vice of fornication is easily born from idleness. For whoever is occupied is not so easily tempted.

Again, Bernard, *Ad Eugenio*, the second book,[[5]](#endnote-5) idleness is the mother of idle speech and the stepmother of virtues. Eccli. 33[:29]: “Idleness has taught much evil.” This is evident in King David who during war remained good, during leisure he fell into adultery and homicide, 2 Kings 12[:9]. So also, Solomon occupied in building the temple remained good, but he was foolishly cruel during idleness, 3 Kings 11[:5]. Therefore, it is sufficiently true what is said in Prov. 12[:11]: “He that pursues idleness is very foolish.” And this because he has relinquished to the devil the secret place in his heart, Matt. 12[:43, 45]: “When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man,” etc., up to “the last state of that man is made worse than the first.”

¶ Again, this in what therefore is concerning fasting, the other animals are made fat by idleness, they are made thin by labor, it is otherwise concerning the human soul. For it is made thin by idleness, by labor it is made stout, Prov. 13[:4]: “The soul of them that work, shall be made fat.” Among all the philosophers and even the poets, idleness is reproved as wickedness in nature. Wherefore according to the Philosopher, book 8, *De animalibus*, c. 6,[[6]](#endnote-6) among the bees no leisure is to be found. For some make honey, some wax, some bring water, and if there is any idle, he is thrown out. And with the poet Ovid it is said,[[7]](#endnote-7) “You see how inactivity spoils an idle body, how water acquires a taint unless it is in motion.” And elsewhere, *De remediis*,[[8]](#endnote-8)“Take away leisure and Cupid’s bow is broken.”

¶ The figure against idleness is treated in Num. 32[:32] concerning the sons of Ruben and Gad who wished to die on the plains of Moab and to live delicately and leisurely around Jordan and they didn’t want to cross the Jordan with their brothers. They did not receive a share with their brothers in the promised land, so it will be with the idle because of what is said in Eccli. 7[:16]: “Hate not laborious works, nor husbandry,” that is, rural endeavors, “ordained by the Highest.” Wherefore also Christ reprehending this vice says in Matt. 20[:6-7]: “Why stand you here all day idle? Go you also into my vineyard,” etc. On this Chrysostom says, *Homilia*, 16,[[9]](#endnote-9) the day of this present life, is a day of work. However, that which follows will be a day of holidays. The same in *Homilia*, 27,[[10]](#endnote-10) the idle are not called sinners, because they are dead, but they who stand and do not produce. Wherefore Gregory in his homily *De Pentateuch*,[[11]](#endnote-11) the love of God is not for the idle. For it is a great work, if it is love. If, however one refused to work, it is not love. And Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum in imperfectum*, homily 5,[[12]](#endnote-12) they who have the spirit of God, they are not content to sit idly. But the spirit, which is in them urges them to some great work, which the devil vexes. “If for every idle word, they shall render an account for it,” Matt. 12[:36]. Much More for the idle deed. And Prov. [21:25]: “Desires kill the slothful.”[[13]](#endnote-13) And note here many matters which Jerome touches upon in his *Epistola ad Ruffinum*,[[14]](#endnote-14) and especially concerning the Greek boy tempted too much by his flesh. Whom neither vigils, nor abstinence, nor works could correct. But finally, they gave him over to the unquiet business of the brothers.

About this see above chapter [213] Lust (*Luxuria*).

1. Seneca, *Epistula* 82.4 (LCL 76:242-243): Otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepultura.

Leisure without study is death; it is a tomb for the living man. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 4.4 (8:289a): et per contrarium ignavia et otium sunt summum luxuriae nutrimentum, qui, ut dicitur in *Ezechiele: Haec fuit Sodomae iniquitas sororis tuae, superbia, saturitas, abundantia panis, et otium*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. William of St. Thierry, *Tractatus ad fratres de Monte Dei* 8.21 (PL 184:320): 21. Omnium autem tentationum et cogitationum malarum et inutilium sentina otium est. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 40 cap. 21 (PG 56:850): Ideo autem facile peccatum fornicationis incurrit, maxime quia hoc vitium facile ex vacantia et otio nascitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bernard, *De consideratione…ad Eugenium* 2.13.22 (PL 182:756): Fugienda proinde otiositas, mater nugarum, noverca virtutum. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 5.22 553b11-13 (Barnes 1:873): a fourth kind is the drone, the largest of all, but stingless and inactive. And this proportionate size of the drone explains why some bee-masters place a net-work in front of the hives; for the network is put to keep the big drones out while it lets the little bees go in. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ovid, *Ex ponto* 1.5.5 (LCL 151:290-291): cernis ut ignavum corrumpant otia corpus, ut capiant vitium, ni moveantur, aquae.

You see how inactivity spoils an idle body, how water acquires a taint unless it is in motion. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ovid, *De Remedia amoris* 139 (LCL 232:186-187): Otia si tollas, periere Cupidinis arcus,

Take away leisure and Cupid’s bow is broken. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Homilia 34 cap. 20 (PG 56:819): Dies enim iste, dies opertionis est: dies autem ille, qui sequitur, dies est feriarum. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 34 cap. 20 (PG 56:818): Videamus qui sunt otiosi. Non peccatores: illi enim mortui dicuntur, non otiosi. Sicut enim surdus apud Deum dicitur, qui non audit quae Dei sunt, se quae diaboli. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia* 2.30.2 (PL 76:1221): Nunquam est Dei amor otiosus. Operatur etenim magna, si est; si vero operari renuit, amor non est. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 5 cap. 4 (PG 56:662): Qui enim habent spiritum Dei, hi non sunt contenti sedere otiosi: sed ipse spiritus, qui est in eis urget eos ad aliquod opus apprehendendum magnum, cui diabolus adversatur, qui est in deserto. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 1.7 (8:257b): Ideo dicitur in Proverbiis: *Desideria occidunt pigrum*. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Jerome, *Epistola* secundum ordinem temporum 125.13 (PL 22:1079-1080): Graecus adolescens erat in coenobio, qui nulla abstinentia [al. continentia], nulla operis magnitudine flammam poterat carnis extinguere. Hunc periclitantem Pater monasterii hac arte servavit: imperavit cuidam viro gravi, ut jurgiis atque conviciis insectaretur hominem, et post irrogatam injuriam, primus veniret ad querimoniam. Vocati testes pro eo loquebantur, qui contumeliam fecerat. Flere ille contra mendacium, quod nullus crederet veritati: solus Pater defensionem suam callide opponere, ne abundantiori tristitia absorberetur frater. Quid multa? Ita annus ductus est: quo expleto, interrogatus adolescens [Col.1080] super cogitationibus pristinis, an adhuc molestiae aliquid sustineret: papae, inquit, vivere mihi non licet: et fornicari libeat? Hic si solus fuisset, quo adjutore superasset? [↑](#endnote-ref-14)