379 Victory, To Overcome (*Victoria, Vincere*)

According to Augustine, book 29, *De civitate,* c. 12,[[1]](#endnote-1) a victory is nothing else but the subjugation of resisting enemies. However, against our three enemies: the devil, the world, and the flesh, if however, we wish to overcome the devil we should call upon the help of the Lord who cannot be overcome. Wherefore Augustine, *Super canonica Joannis*, homily 4,[[2]](#endnote-2) Adam defying the commandment of God was overcome by the devil. Job following the voice of God overcame the devil. That one was overcome in paradise; this one overcame on the dung heap. The figure for this, 1 Kings 17[:40] concerning David who conquered Goliath with his stick and five small stones, so the memory of the stick the cross of Christ and the five wounds conquered the devil, Apo. 12:7] Michael fought with the dragon and his angels and conquered them by the blood of the lamb.

Augustine, book 18, *De civitate*,[[3]](#endnote-3) treats how during the war when between [the Peloponnesians and] the Athenians, and Codrus was the king of the latter. And the Peloponnesians having received a response from Apollo that they would conquer if the king of the Athenians was not killed. And Codrus in a different garb of a farmer bearing on his neck the contentions, moving against one soldier of the adverse party he was killed. Wherefore also his people had their victory. For he chose to die while his people conquered, than to live with his people overcome. So, Christ appearing in the habit of a poor man wished to die so that his people might overcome.

¶ Just how the world is conquered teaches John in his first canonical epistle [5:4]: “This is the victory which overcomes the world, our faith.” Wherefore it is said in John 16[:33]: “Have confidence, I have overcome the world.” Where the *Gloss* of Bede says,[[4]](#endnote-4) it is a shame to be conquered by one who was himself conquered, “For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life,” [1] John 2[:16], at the end. Christ conquered avarice in the desert, he rejected vain glory on the mountain, he found himself on the pinnacle of the temple. Therefore, faith conquers all, Heb. 11[:33] the holy ones “by faith conquered kingdoms.” Because [1] John 5[:4]: “Whatsoever is born of God, overcomes the world.” Therefore, is from God that we conquer the world. Wherefore in the figure of Exod. 17[:11]: “When Moses lifted up his hands, Israel overcame against Amalec.” Therefore, while he is in the world, he cannot dismiss the world unless he confides in him who conquers the world.

¶ Concerning the victory of the flesh which is glorious and rare it is treated under the figure of Apo. 6[:2] where it is said, “I saw and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow, and there was a crown given him, and he went forth conquering that he might conquer.” These horses are the flesh upon which sits the spirit as leader, Isai. 31[:3]. Therefore, the white horse is the virginal flesh, the one who sits upon him is the bow, because he wants to live chastely. It is necessary that they resist the enemies from a distance for which the bow is ordained spiritually. And such a one went forth conquering that he might conquer. Wherefore Augustine, *Epistola* 100,[[5]](#endnote-5) it is a grave matter, that man does not conquer the one whom passion conquers, or that he is overcome by wine, who is not conquered by the sword. How can this enemy, namely, the flesh, be conquered, the commentator says upon Boethius, *De consolatione*,[[6]](#endnote-6) saying that Hercules could not overcome Antaeus the giant from Libya except by elevating him from the earth from which he took his strength as often as he touched it. So, a man ought to suspend the dog from the matters of the flesh who would subjugate it, Wis. 7[:30]:[[7]](#endnote-7) “No evil can overcome wisdom.” Wherefore the verse:[[8]](#endnote-8) If you can be subjected you should not say, I have conquered. For whoever is conquered, or conquers, is tested by the end. And he who conquers “shall thus be clothed in white garments,” Apo. 3[:5].

Wherefore Gregory,[[9]](#endnote-9) he is a feeble enemy who cannot conquer unless the willing. Therefore, it is clearly said, Rom. 12[:21]: “Be not overcome by evil,” as if saying, it is in your will to be conquered or not. Note here the history of Romans and Isidore, *Etymologiae* treats in c. *De triumphis*,[[10]](#endnote-10) one three times conquering for the republic was due a triple honor, that namely he could sit in a gilded chariot pulled by four white horses up to the capitol.

The second honor was that those conquered by him would be led with their hands bound after his chariot.

The third honor that in the capitol he would be clothed with the tunic of Jupiter. But lest he become proud of these things, he would have to undergo three insults, namely, that someone of slave status should sit with him on the chariot, give him slaps saying Notis elytos, Gnothi seauton, that is, know yourself. And third that it would be allowed to any young boy to reproach him for the victory wherever he wished, so he remained being conquered.

The third enemy he will seat on the chariot of good reputation which four horses pull, which are the love of God, the love of our neighbor, humility in prosperity, and patience in adversities.

¶ The four wheels are the four cardinal virtues.

The second honor is that the conquered enemies follow us bound because according to Origen,[[11]](#endnote-11) a demon conquered in tempting will not tempt in the future.

Again, concerning that vice, the third honor that the victor ought to be clothed with the tunic of Jupiter, that is, the compassion of Christ, but lest he become proud in these, let him sit with that one, [Gal. 5:17]: “The flesh lusts against the spirit,” and our unconfessed sins will rise up against us.

1. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.12.1 (PL 41:637): Nam quid est aliud victoria, nisi subjectio repugnantium? [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *In epistolam Joannis at Parthos* 4.3 (PL 35:2007): Adam in paradiso positus praeceptum Dei, et erexit cervicem veluti in potestate sua esse cupiens, et nolens subdi voluntati Dei, et lapsus est ab illa immortalitate, ab illa beatitudine (Gen. III, 6). Homo autem quidam jam exercitatus, natus mortalis, cum sederet in stercore putris vermibus, diabolum vicit: vicit et ipse Adam, et in Job ipse; quia de genere ipsius, Job. Ergo Adam victus in paradiso, vicit in stercore. In paradiso cum esset, audivit persuasionem mulieris, quam illi immiserat diabolus: in stercore autem cum esset, ait Evae, Tanquam una ex insipientibus mulieribus locuta es (Job. II, 10). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *De civitatge Dei* 18.19 (PL 41:576): Per idem tempus Codrus, rex Atheniensium, Peloponnensibus ejusdem hostibus civitatis se interficiendum ignotus objecit: et factum est. Hoc modo eum praedicant patriam liberasse. Responsum enim acceperant Peloponnenses tum demum se superaturos, si eorum regem non occidissent. Fefellit ergo eos habitu pauperis apparendo, et in suam necem per jurgium provocando.

At this same time Codrus king of the Athenians exposed himself in disguise to the Peloponnesians, the enemies of his city, to be slain by them; and he gained his end. In this way they declare that he won his country’s freedom. For the Peloponnesians had received an oracle to the effect that they would win a final victory only if they had not killed the king of the Athenians. Accordingly, he tricked them by appearing in the guise of a poor man and provoking them by taunts to slay him. Hence Virgil says: “And the taunts of Codrus.” [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bede, *Proverbia* (PL 90:1112): Victus ab uno quolibet vitio cito labitur in alia. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *Epistolae* 189.7 (PL 33:856): valde enim turpe est, ut quem non vincit homo, vincat libido; et obruatur vino, qui non vincitur ferro. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae (with commentary ascribred to Thomas Aquinas* 4 Met 7.25 (Lyons: Guillaume Le Roy, 1486): Strauit Antheum libicis arenis. Hic ponit nonum laborem dicens Hercules stravit id est occidit Antheum illum gigantem arenis Libics, id est, in arenis Libie regionis. Ubi notandum quod Antheus erat gigas de terra progenitus cuius erat talis virtus quod si aliquando ex sagitatione de fatigaretur tactu terre statim recuperabat vires. Qui cum exerceret magnam tyrannidem in Libia aduenit Hercules et congressus cum eo diu simul luctabantur. Cum autem Antheus sentiret se debilitari sponte cecidit in terram et sic resumpsit vires quod Hercules cognoscens ipsum a terra eleuauit et supra pectus suum ipsum tenendo oppressit quousque spiritum exalaret.

<https://archive.org/details/deconsolationeph00boet_0/page/n275> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Vulgate: Wisdom 7:30: sapientiam autem non vincit malitia. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Hildebertus Cenomanensis, *Incipit Vita Beatae Mariae Aegyptiacae* (PL 171:1323): Cumque potes subjici, non debes dicere: Vici.

Nam quis vincatur, vel vincat, fine probatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Gregory, cf. Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem* Epistola 1.25 (PL 30:40): Infirmus hostis est qui non potest vincere nisi volentem. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 18.2.3-5 (PL 82:641): Tranquillus autem triumphum Latine dicit potius appellatum, quod is qui triumphans urbem [Col.0642A] ingrederetur tripertito judicio honoraretur. Nam primum de triumpho duci concedendo exercitum judicare solitum erat; secundo senatum, tertio populum. Erat autem apud Romanos mos ut triumphantes quadrigis veherentur, ex illo quod soliti sint priores duces hoc habitu bella inire. Quicunque autem in conflictu vicisset, palma aurea coronabatur, quia palma stimulos habet. Qui vero sine conflictu fugientem prostrasset, laurea, eo quod haec arbor sine spinis est. Namque et purpuream et palmatam togam triumphantes induebantur, et scipionem cum sceptro in manu gerebant ad imitationem victoriae Scipionis, licet et scipio baculus sit, quo homines innituntur. Unde et ille primus Cornelius Scipio appellatus est, quia [Col.0642B] in foro pater ejus caecus innixus eo ambulabat. Super scipionem autem aquila sedebat, ob indicium quod per victoriam quasi ad supernam magnitudinem accederent. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Origen, cf. Luke 4:1-13. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)