9 Adversity (*Adversitas*)

Adversity comes for the good as well as the evil, but because of one or another end.

For adversity comes to the good, either for the exercise of virtue, just as it came for Job and Tobias, David and Ezekias, or lest they be boastful about the good graces granted to them, as is evident in Paul [2] Cor. 12[:7]: Who, it is said, “lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me [a sting of my flesh].”

However, to the evil adversity befalls so that, either they be corrected, or so that their torments may commence. First, it is evident in Nabuchodonosor, who through adversity recognized the Lord whom earlier he did not know, Dan. 4[:31]. Again, in the blessed Paul who was stricken with blindness for a time; from a persecutor he was made a preacher, Acts 9[:3-9]. Wherefore Augustine, *De vera innocencia*,[[1]](#endnote-1) divine goodness is therefore greatly angered in this world, lest it be angered in the future; and mercifully it exhibits timely severity, lest it justly impose an eternal vengeance.

Second, it is evident in the Pharaoh who was first overthrown here, Exod. 14[:31]. The same is evident in Saul, 1 Kings 31[:6]. Again, with king Antiochus, [1] Macc. 6[:16]. Similarly, king Agrippa “being eaten up by worms, he gave up the ghost,” [Acts 12:23].

Again, sometimes for the good, adverse things turn up because, according to Gregory,[[2]](#endnote-2) the evils which come upon us compel us therefore to God.

Again, according to Ambrose in his *Hexameron*,[[3]](#endnote-3) the eagle frequently flies to his nest where the chicks reside, and he plucks at them lest they become fat and slow, but these things stand out more, to capture the prey that they hunt for. Just so Christ does with his chicks in the church, so that they rise up and seek God, Luke 15[:14-20]: The prodigal son did not regard his father while he was in abundance, but when “he began to be in want,” then he said, “I will arise,” etc., and then he was received by his father. Therefore, it is said in Acts 14[:21]: “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” Luke 11[:15], it is said, “Which of you shall have a friend,” etc. Osee 6[:1]: “In their affliction they will rise early to me.” The figure for this, [2] Kings 14[:29-31], Absalom seeing that Joab would not come to him for a fair invitation, had his crops burned, and then he came. Thus, the son of the king, God, sends for us to do (his will), and we do not come. Therefore, he sends us tribulations which as if compel us. Men do not go to a physician unless in necessity, so neither do we to Christ, Isaiah 26[:16]: “Lord, they have sought after you in distress, in the tribulation of murmuring your instruction was with them.” The instruction in this is evident in king Manassas who after the most brutal crimes was captured in Babylon, and he cried out to the Lord and was liberated, according to the Master in the *Historiale*,[[4]](#endnote-4) and as it is treated in 2 Paralip. 33[:11]. Therefore no one should ever despair of God’s mercy.

Wherefore, Augustine says, first book, *De civitate,* chapter 9,[[5]](#endnote-5) in the likeness of the sufferings, there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers; and though exposed to the same anguish, virtue and vice are not the same thing. For as the same fire causes gold to glow brightly, and chaff to smoke; and under the same flail the straw is beaten small, while the grain is cleansed; and as the lees are not mixed with the oil, though squeezed out of the vat by the same pressure.

Again, one and the same force pressing in proves, purifies, and leaves behind the good. In truth it damns, destroys, and exterminates the evil. Jerome, *Epistola*, 72,[[6]](#endnote-6) narrates concerning some young monk who neither through abstinence nor through employment could resist the temptation of the flesh. Which being evident, the father of the monastery had one of his fellow monks harass him daily with abuse and rebukes, and when he ceased, the temptation grew silent. As it is treated in Gen 12[:17], concerning the Pharaoh whom God punished frequently lest he touch Sara, the wife of Abraham.

Again, when it is not cold in winter, there is no hope of fruit in autumn, nor that men would be healthy in summer.[[7]](#endnote-7) Thus when in this present life one does not overcome adversities, there will be no hope of good works nor health in his soul. Wherefore Seneca, in the book *De providentia*,[[8]](#endnote-8) “nothing is unhappier than he to whom nothing of adversity ever visits. It is not accounted that he has experienced anything. The gods will judge evilly of him.” Wherefore also David especially came to his kingdom through adversity. And Gregory, 9, *Moralia*,[[9]](#endnote-9) “it is often a gift of grace, which man thinks is wrath, and often anger is of divine hindrance, which man thinks is grace.” And Jerome, *Epistola,* 69,[[10]](#endnote-10) it is a great anger of God, when he is not angered by sinners. Wherefore also Ezekiel [16:42], to Jerusalem it is said, “I will be angry no more, my jealousy shall depart from you.” Chrysostom in a book of his *Homilia*,[[11]](#endnote-11) what is it that is said, I will not be angry with you forever, as if saying, here I am angry with you, here I afflict you, here are the whips, because you whip and correct the one whom you love, [Heb. 12:6].

Wherefore, Augustine,[[12]](#endnote-12) a manifest sign of rejection is continuous success in fortunate things. Thus, it is read in the *Vita beati Ambrosii*,[[13]](#endnote-13) that he was a guest in the house of a certain man when he was prospering in temporal things. He went away the same night from that place, and shortly afterwards that place was swallowed up with all its contents on account of this. Bernard said in some *Sermon*,[[14]](#endnote-14) I do not want that mercy of the Lord for me, by which you always forebear to punish, but that severity by which you lash your son, according to that of the Psal. [98:8]: “You were a merciful God to them, and taking vengeance on all their inventions.” Behold the marvelous combination of propitiation and vengeance because of these things that King Ezechias said, Isaiah 38[:17]: “Behold in peace is my bitterness most bitter. But you have delivered my soul that it should not perish.” Gregory, 16, *Moralia*,[[15]](#endnote-15) says, waiting for the rewards of eternity, they gain strength from their adversities, because, as the fight grows strong, they do not doubt that a more glorious victory awaits them. Thus while the desires of the elect are kept down, they make progress by adversity; just as the fire is blown back by the blast in order that it may increase, wherein it gains strength by the means by which it appears to be extinguished.

For in this way we show with what great desire we are inflamed for God, if we pass over to him not only by the tranquil and smooth, but even through the rugged and hard paths. Hence Psal. [17:34] says, “Who has made my feet like those of deer,” namely, who do not spare on account of hard and rugged places when it climbs the mountains. Again, Gregory, 20, *Moralia*,[[16]](#endnote-16) almighty God allows the adversaries of his elect to grow in time, that life of the good may be purified by the fierceness of the evil. The life of the evil militates for the good of the innocent. Wherefore Cyprian, in his *Epistola ad Demetrianum*,[[17]](#endnote-17) that one weeps and grieves, if there is any evil for him in this world, to whom there can be no good after this world.

Wherefore, Chrysostom, *Homilia*, 13,[[18]](#endnote-18) giving a reason why God does not separate the good from the evil here under adversities, he says that therefore lest the evil thus know that they are separated, they would be entirely cast down and thus despair. And lest the good separated be glorified too much by other things. Especially, however, so that neither the good profit the evil, nor the evil harm the good, but that they profit more. Wherefore Jerome, *Epistola*, 50,[[19]](#endnote-19) seek and you will find all the saints also weighed down with adversities. Only Solomon was in delights, and therefore perhaps he was ruined.

See more about adversity below, in the chapter [369] Tribulation (*Tribulacio*).

1. Augustine, Prosper of Aquitane, *Sententiae ex Augustino* 5 (PL 45:1859): Divina bonitas ideo maxime irascitur in hoc saeculo, ne irascatur in futuro; et misericorditer adhibet temporalem severitatem, ne aeternam juste inferat ultionem. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 35.1 (PL 76.1259): Ultima tribulatio multis tribulationibus praevenitur, et per crebra mala quae praeveniunt indicantur mala perpetua quae subsequentur. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 18.60 (PL 14.232): Semper enim fertur probare quos genuit; ne generis sui inter omnes aves quoddam regale fastigium degeneris partus deformitas decoloret. Itaque asseritur quod pullos suos radiis solis objiciat, atque in aeris medio parvulos ungue suspendat; ac si quis repercusso solis lumine, intrepidam oculorum aciem inoffenso tuendi vigore servaverit, is probatur, quod veritatem naturae sinceri obtutus constantia demonstraverit: sin vero lumina sua praestrictus radio solis inflexerit, quasi degener et tanta indignus parente rejicitur; nec aestimatur educatione dignus, qui fuit indignus susceptione. Non ergo eum acerbitate naturae, sed judicii integritate condemnat; nec quasi suum abdicat, sed quasi alienum recusat. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Libri IV Regum, cap. 33 (PL 198:1415): Immisit ergo Dominus adversus Manassen regem Babyloniorum, qui depopulatus est Judam; et Manassen dolo captum traxit in Babylonem, et pluribus afflixit tormentis (II Psal. XXXIII). Et intelligens Manasses hanc esse manum Domini, egit poenitentiam, et intente oravit ad Dominum, et misertus Dominus reduxit eum in regnum suum. Qui cum venisset Jerosolymam delevit idola, lucos, et aras, quae fecerat, ita ut in memoriam priorum nihil superesset. Et restituit cultum Domini, sicut prius, et populum idipsum docuit; et sic a priori conversatione mutatus est, ut non sine grandi admiratione [Col.1415B] vitam ageret beatam. Muros quoque civitatis, et turres, et antemuralia multa munitione firmavit. «Et mortuus est Manasses, et sepultus est in horto domus suae in horto Azam,

Cf. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*, 2.106 (Douay, 1:81b). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 1.7.2 (PL 41.21): Manet enim dissimilitudo passorum etiam in similitudine passionum; et licet sub eodem tormento, non est idem virtus et vitium. Nam sicut sub uno igne aurum rutilat, palea fumat; et sub eadem tribula stipulae comminuuntur, frumenta purgantur; nec ideo cum oleo amurca confunditur, quia eodem preli pondere exprimitur: [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Jerome, *Epistola* 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-6)
7. Cf. Hildegard of Bingen, *Subtilitatum Diversarum Naturarum Creaturarum* 3.38 (PL 197:1240): Folbaum nec rectum calorem nec rectum frigus habet, et ad nullam medicinam valet, nec ad ullam utilitatem valet, nec fructus ejus; sed est velut quoddam unkrut absque utilitate. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Seneca, *De Providentia* 3.3 in *Moral Essays* (LCL 214:16): 'nihil' inquit 'mihi uidetur infelicius eo, cui nihil umquam euenit aduersi.' Non licuit enim illi se experiri. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Gregory, *Moralia* 9.13.20 (PL 75.870): Saepe enim donum gratiae est, quod iram deputat, et saepe divinae districtionis ira est, quod gratiam putat. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Jerome, *Epistola* 86.1 (PL 22.652): Magna ira est, quando peccantibus non irascitur Deus. Unde et in Ezechiele ad Jerusalem, Jam, inquit, non irascar tibi, zelus meus recessit a te (Ezech. 16, 42). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homelia* on Psalm 84[:6], 4th homily (*Oper omnia*), (Amsterdam: Marci Huguetan, 1687): 1:396a: Quid est hoc quod dicebat: *Non in aeternum iraceris nobis, vel extendas iram tuma a generatione in generationem*. Quid est hoc quod dicebat: *non in aeternum inracaris nobis?* Quasi diceret: Hic nobis iracere, hic non afflige, hic non emenda, in isto saeculo flagella: quia quem diligis, flagellas et emendas *Flagellas autem omnem filium quem recipis.* [Heb. 12].

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12. Augustine, cf. Gregory, *Moralia* 34.23.56 (PL 76.750): Evidentissimum reprobationis signum, superbia; electionis, humilitas. --Quia igitur Redemptor noster corda regit humilium, et Leviathan iste rex dicitur superborum, aperte cognoscimus quod evidentissimum reproborum signum superbia est, at contra humilitas electorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *Vita beati Ambrosii*, cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* 57, (Granger, 1:233): The story is told that once when blessed Ambrose was on his way to Rome, he found hospitality in a Tuscan villa, the home of an exceedingly wealthy man. Ambrose asked him solicitously how things were with him, and he answered: “Everything has always gone well, even famously, with me. As you see, I have riches galore. I have more slaves and servants than I need. I have always had everything to my liking, nothing untoward has ever happened to me, nor anything to be sad about.” Ambrose, taken aback at hearing this, said to his traveling companions: “On your feet and away from here as fast as we can go, because the Lord is not in this place. Quick, my sons, hurry! We must lose no time getting away, or the divine vengeance may catch us here and involve us also in the sins of these people.” So, he and his company fled, and when they had gone some distance, the earth suddenly opened behind them and swallowed that man and all that belonged to him so completely that not a trace remained. Observing this, Ambrose said: “See, brothers, how mercifully God spares those to whom he sends adversity, and how severe his anger can be against those who always enjoy prosperity.” It is said that in that same place there is a very deep ravine, which stands as a reminder of what happend there. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Bernard, Cf. Anselm*, Oratio* 67 (PL 158:987): O vos misericordes amici Dei, miseremini tam indigenti, per illam misericordiam quam fecit vobis Deus. Succurrite, ne me obvolvat ira Dei cum inimicis ejus. Nolo, detestor, exsecror esse vel dici inimicus ejus; licet confitear me peccatorem ejus. Succurrite, vel aliquis. [Col.0987B] Tu ille, discipule, quem diligebat Jesus, si agnoscis signum tuum, rogo te per hanc dilectionem ipsam, agnoscam in tanta necessitate auxilium tuum. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Gregory, *Moralia* 26.14.24 (PL 76.361): Aeternitatis quippe praemia praestolantes vires ex adversitatibus sumunt, quia crescente pugna gloriosiorem sibi non ambigunt manere victoriam. Sic itaque electorum desideria dum praemuntur, adversitate proficiunt, sicut ignis flatu premitur ut crescat; et unde quasi extingui cernitur, inde roboratur. In eo namque ostendimus quanta ad Dominum cupiditate flagramus, si non solum ad eum per tranquilla et mollia, sed etiam per aspera et dura transimus. Hinc namque propheta ait: Qui perfecit pedes meos quasi cervi (Psal. XVII, 34). Cervus enim cum montium juga conscendit, quaeque aspicit aspera, quaeque se objiciunt sentibus illigata, dato saltu transgreditur, et absque ullo cursus sui obstaculo in superiora elevatur [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Gregory, *Moralia* 20.24.51-52 (PL 76.168): Et omnipotens Deus electorum suorum adversarios temporaliter permittit excrescere, ut per malorum saevitiam purgetur vita bonorum. Utilitati justorum militat etiam potestas pravorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 18 (PL 4:558): Ille moeret et deflet, si sibi male sit in saeculo, cui bene non potest esse post saeculum. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum*, Homilia 13 ex cap. 5:48 (PG 56:703-704\*): Nam quemadmodum in bonis non separat peccatores a justis: sic nec in malis separat justos a peccatoribus. In bonis peccatores a justis non separat, ne separati cognoscant se abjectos esse et desperent: in malis justos a peccatoribus non separat, ne separati cognoscant se electos, et glorientur: maxime cum nec malis bona prosint, sed noceant magis, nec bonis mala noceant, sed prosint magis. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Jerome, *Epistola* 22.39 (PL 22.423): quaere et invenies singulos adversa perpessos. Solus in deliciis Salomon fuit, et forsitan ideo corruit. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)