90 Guard or To Guard (*Custodia uel custodire*)

A guard is triple: human, angelic, and divine. Of which, the first is also triple, because man ought to guard himself, his neighbor, and God. Himself, however, as far as three: heart, mouth, and work.

¶ Therefore, in the first place there ought to be a guard of the heart in man, just as a serpent[[1]](#endnote-1) as a guard of its head exposes his body. Thus, anyone for the guard of his soul ought to lay down his exterior things, Prov. 4[:23]: “With all watchfulness keep your heart, because life issues out from it.” Just as a bear from its keeper, Deut. 4[:9]: “Keep yourself therefore, and your soul carefully.” The reason is because God loves it greatly. The devil seeks it greatly. Man neglects nothing other more dangerously. Therefore, man ought to guard his soul through a fortification of good works; just as good wine is guarded better in the wine jar bound well and fast. Thus, the heart of man and his will through regular observances, Eccli. 1[:18]: “Religiousness shall keep and justify the heart.” For just as fire needs the kindling of oil or wood, so undertakings of the heart or will need the kindling of good works, Matt. 19[:20]: “All these I have kept from my youth.” And Eccle. 4[:17]: “Keep your foot, when you go into the house of God.” According to Augustine, in his *Confessiones*,[[2]](#endnote-2) my foot is my love; I bear it wherever I go.

¶ This foot of love ought to be guarded from the mire of the carnal will, from the dust of worldly cupidity.

¶ The second guard in man is of the mouth which ought to be guarded just as the gate of a city besieged. For often it happens that the devil thrown out of the heart re-enters through the mouth, just as the rascal enters through the tavern if the door is open. Thus, the traveler guards himself in the slippery place lest he fall, but the tongue of man is always in a slippery state because it is in moisture, Eccli. 22[:33]: “Who will set a guard before my mouth, and a sure seal upon my lips, that I fall not by them.” This tongue ought to be guarded in two ways: in taste and speech. In guarding is abstinence, just as diet for the weak, as just measure for the merchant.

¶ For each one naturally when he comes to a determined quantity according to nature grows quiet and guards the proper measure, Prov. 21[:23]: “He that keeps his mouth from superfluities, keeps his soul from distress.” There is no animal of such a great body that has so moderate a mouth as man in sign that he ought to be of greater abstinence.

¶ Second, the tongue ought to be guarded in speaking, just as notes in singing, so that neither more nor less is the voice elevated than owed, and thus custody, concord, etc., are served. Thus, the grannies observe the time of singing, Psal. [38:2]: “I said: I will take heed to my ways: that I sin not with my tongue.” Nature obviously gave the mouth the possibility for closing and opening, but the ears are always left open, so that according to custom we are more for listening than for talking, Prov. 13[:3]: “He that keeps his mouth, keeps his soul: but he that has no guard on his speech shall meet with evils.”

¶ The third guard is of work, just as arms are guarded for defense, Psal. [105:3]: “Blessed are they that keep judgment and do justice at all times.” Psal. [16:4]: “For the sake of the words of thy lips, I have kept hard ways,” namely, of penance and obedience.

¶ For custody of holiness ought to be had in action, just as an apple is guarded against an injury, Job 9[:28]: “I feared all my works, knowing that you did not spare the offender.” And well he says “all,” for he who offends in one part is made liable for every part.

¶ Again, honesty ought to be had in conversation, just as clothing is carefully guarded, so that it may adorn well, Apo. 16[:15]: “Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked.”

Second, man ought to guard Christ, particularly the superior the subordinate, just as the shepherd the flock, namely, Isai. 62[:6]: “Upon your walls, I have appointed watchmen all day, and all the night.” But some guard the Church, just as an owl on account of the oil, Psal. [78:1]: “God, the heathens are come into your inheritance, they have defiled your holy temple: they have made” Israel.

¶ Third, man ought to guard God, just as a servant his lord, the hungry his food, Prov. 27[:18]: “he that is the keeper of his master, shall be glorified.” [1] Kings 26[:16]: “You are the sons of death, who have not kept your master,” the king.

¶ Note, therefore, that our heart is of the best guard because in it is the treasure of virtues, Luke 11[:21]: “When a strong man armed keeps his court, those things are in peace.” Wherefore to this custody the Apostle encourages, [2] Tim. 1[:4]: “[Keep] the good thing committed to [your trust],” according to the laws. Whoever negligently loses the thing committed is to be held or punished. If, therefore, through our lack of care a soul is lost we cannot restore it since it is the house of God. Therefore, don’t stand back except to be punished. Therefore, he who does not guard his home is worthy of death. Wherefore, David, 1 Kings 26[:11], after the cup of water was stolen and the spear of the king which was at his head, said [1 Kings 26:16]: “As the Lord lives, you are the sons of death, who have not kept your master,” the king, so he who does not guard your lord the king, so he, who does not guard the cup of water of devotion and the spear of the Lord’s passion which are always at the head of Christ, is worthy of death.

¶ The moving example for this custody is concerning the bees, according to the Philosopher, book 9, *De animalibus,* c. 6,[[3]](#endnote-3) that with the greatest diligence they guard their king, to the point that if their king dies, then they themselves die. According to Augustine, *Super Genesem,* book 8, chapter 16,[[4]](#endnote-4) man was placed in paradise so that he might work through agriculture easily not laboriously and keep that for himself so as not to admit sin. Finally, he received the precept that he thus takes care so that with it well guarded he would not be thrown out from thence. Rightly one is said not to have guarded his business, who thus performed so that he lost it, even if it would be saved for another, who either found it or merited to receive it. Luke 11[:21]: “When a strong man armed keeps his court, those things are in peace (which he possesses).” If, therefore, I might obtain for God what the Romans cultivated, because through the clamor (of the geese) the capitol was saved.[[5]](#endnote-5) Much more we ought to worship God who guards us, Gen. 28[:20-21], as Jacob said, “If God … shall keep me in the way by which I walk … the Lord shall be my God.”

1. Bonaventure, *Diaetae salutis* 5.4 (8:300a): Et nota quod quinque astutiis utitur serpens quas vir prudens imitatur. Prima astutia sapientis est custodia capitis nam summe custodit pro quo servando totum cor exponit sic sancti Christum qui est nostrum summe custodiunt et pro ipso omnia exponunt sicut Apostolus qui dicebat: *mihi fuerunt lucra hæc arbitratus sum prop ter Christum detrimenta.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *Confessiones* 13.9.10 (PL 32.849): Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror quocumque feror. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.40, 624a29-31 (Barnes 1:971): The kings never quit the hive, except in conjunction with the entire swarm, either for food or for any other reason. They say

that, if a young swarm go astray, it will turn back upon its route and by the aid of scent seek out its leader. It is said that if he is unable to fly he is carried by the swarm, and that if he dies the swarm perishes; and that, if this swarm outlives the king for a while and constructs combs, no honey is produced and the bees soon die out.. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.22 (PL 34.381): Positus est quippe homo in paradiso, ut operaretur eumdem paradisum, sicut supra disputatum est, per agriculturam non laboriosam, sed deliciosam, et mentem prudentis magna atque utilia commonentem: custodiret autem eumdem paradisum ipsi sibi, ne aliquid admitteret, quare inde mereretur expelli. Denique accepit et praeceptum, ut sit per quod sibi custodiat paradisum, id est, quo conservato non inde projiciatur. Recte enim quisque dicitur non custodisse rem suam, qui sic egit ut amitteret eam, etiamsi alteri salva sit, qui eam vel invenit vel accipere meruit. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The geese in the temple of Juno on the Capitoline Hill were said by Livy to have saved Rome from the Gauls around 390 BC when they were disturbed in a night attack.

Cf. Livy, *History of Rome* 5.47.4 (LCL 172:158-159): tanto silentio in summum evasere ut non custodes solum fallerent, sed ne canes quidem, sollicitum animal ad nocturnos strepitus, excitarent. Anseres non fefellere quibus sacris Iunonis in summa inopia cibi tamen abstinebatur. Quae res saluti fuit; namque clangore eorum alarumque crepitu excitus M. Manlius qui triennio ante consul fuerat, vir bello egregius, armis arreptis simul ad arma ceteros ciens vadit,*H*

in such silence that not only the sentries but even the dogs—creatures easily troubled by noises in the night—were not aroused. But they could not elude the vigilance of the geese, which, being sacred to Juno, had, notwithstanding the dearth of provisions, not been killed. This was the salvation of them all; for the geese with their gabbling and clapping of their wings woke Marcus Manlius,—consul of three years before and a distinguished soldier,—who, catching up his weapons and at the same time calling the rest to arms, strode past his bewildered comrades to a Gaul who had already got a foothold [↑](#endnote-ref-5)