Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

15 The Arms of Virtues (*Arma virtutum*)

One must assume the arms of virtues against the enemies of the soul, namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Certainly, the arms of wisdom against the deception of the devil; the arms of patience against the disturbances of the world; the arms of continence against the desire of the flesh. The armed devil, therefore, besieges with lie and deception saying that it would be justice to take vengeance, to give money. For usury it would be providential to gather treasures, Prov. 22[:5]: “Arms” for capturing “and swords” for killing, and Luke 11[:21]: “When a strong man armed,” that is, the strong devil, armed through nature, through shrewdness, “keeps,” through diligence, “his court,” that is, the soul of the sinner, “those things are in peace all which he possesses,” lest, namely, they would flee from their lord.

¶ But against this are the necessary arms of wisdom through which they are caught, and evil suggestions are cast out, Rom. 13[:12]: “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Wherefore it is said in the *Philosophia* of Boethius,[[1]](#endnote-1) We gave you weapons which would have protected you with invincible power, if you had not thrown them away. 2 Macc. the last chapter 15[:11]: “So Judas armed every one of them, not with defense of shield and spear, but with very good speeches.” Good because they teach, put evil to flight. It is for the better because they teach one to do good. It is the best because it teaches perseverance up to when one arrives at the reward. Therefore, it is said in Eccle. 9[:18]: “Better is wisdom, than weapons of war.”

¶ The second enemy besieges, that is, the world armed with falsities. Thus Saul [besieged] David, Psal. [56:5]: “The sons of men, whose teeth are weapons and arrows.” Arms prepared in contention like dogs, and arrows in hidden detraction like wolves. The sharp sword quickly enters false flattery like scorpions.

¶ In these things contention generates rancor; detraction, disgrace; flattery, vain glory, James 3 throughout the whole. Against this enemy the arms

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of patience are necessary, 1 Pet. 4[:1]: “Christ having suffered in the flesh, be also armed with the same thought.” But many are like the bishop who with a cleric disturbing him, but exhorting him to patience, according to that of Rom. 5[:3]: “Tribulation works patience.” He responded, It is true, but not without a way of solving [the matter]. Therefore, it is a foolish man who throws away his arms while he is at war, the stick while the dogs tear at him, Rom. 12[:12]: “Patient in tribulation.” It is good certainly according as it is in acquisition of the more difficult, to such a degree as it is in operation of the more commendable, such as continence also in youth, abstinence in feasting, humility in dignity, patience in adversity. Thus, wine is better which grows in difficult conditions. And this is “the armor of valiant men,” Can. 4[:4].

¶ The third enemy besieges, namely, the flesh armed with the pleasures of the senses and members, just as his mistress [the wife of Potiphar] besieged Joseph, Gen. 39[:7]. Therefore, Rom. 6[:13]: “Neither yield your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin.” He would be foolish who handed over his arms to the attacker himself which they do, who expose themselves to dangerous occasions. Against this enemy the arms of justice are necessary. Wherefore it follows, Rom. 6[:13]: “But present your members as instruments of justice unto God.” For it is just that the flesh serves the spirit and the spirit, God, 2 Cor. 6[:4-7]: “But in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God … by the armor of justice on the right hand,” by following right reason, “and on the left,” by putting to flight evil delight. 2 Cor. 10[:4]: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty to God,” etc.

¶ Concerning the evil it is said in Ezech. 32[:27]: “They went down to hell with their weapons.” Concerning the good, 2 Macc. 3[:25]: “He that sat upon him seemed to have armor of gold,” and prized.

¶ Arms of virtues for small soldiers are onerous, the figure for this [1] Kings 17[:39]: David tried if he could walk in armor,” and he could not. “For he was not accustomed to it.” Because of these the devil either elevates in easy prosperity just like one unarmed and unknowing, or he snatches him in adversities. Therefor the Apostle counsels [2] Cor. 6[:4-7]: “In all things exhibit yourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in fasting” against the flesh, “in watching” against the enemy, “in charity unfeigned” against worldly avarice. And it follows, “by the armor of justice on the right hand and on the left,” this is, in prosperity and adversity. If man knows fortitude, he will not fall into a multitude of his adversaries unarmed and alone.

¶ Therefore the Apostle counsels to the Eph. 6[:11-12]: “Put on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil: for our wrestling is not [against flesh and blood],” etc.

1. Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophica,* lib. 1, prosa 2 (PL 63:599): Atqui talia contuleramus arma, quae nisi prius abjecisses, invicta te firmitate tuerentur.

Cf. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. 1, pr. 2 (LCL 74:138-139):  And did I not furnish you with such weapons as would now keep you steadfast and safe if you had not thrown them away?  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)