Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

239 The Prudence of a Serpent (*Serpentis prudencia*)

The prudence of a serpent. The first is the custody of its head

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for which, namely, it exposes its whole body.

¶ So, the saints expose their bodies for Christ the head, Philip. 3[:7]: “The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ.”

¶ Second,[[1]](#endnote-1) is the shedding of its skin. For in a narrow aperture, it sheds its old skin. So, the saints through penitence, to the Eph. 4[:22]: “To put off, according to former association, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of” the flesh.

¶ The third wisdom is the deluding of the snake charmer because it blocks one ear with the earth and the other with its own tail just as the *Gloss* says on Psal. [57:5]: “Like the deaf asp that stops her ears.” So holy men who when tempted block one ear with their tail, that is, the memory of death according to that of Eccli. 7[:40]: “Remember your last end, and you shall never sin.” And the other they block with earth, that is, the consideration of their own fragility, Gen. 3[:19]: “For dust you are, and into dust you shall return.”

¶ Fourth,[[2]](#endnote-2) is wariness of an ambush of the foot, because it happens more to the heel than the head. So, the saints conquered evil desires by the consideration of the end, that is, death, Rom. 6[:21]: “The end of them is death.”

¶ For imitating these things the savior said, [Matt. 10:16], “Be wise as serpents.” But lest the prudence of a serpent becomes harmful, let the simplicity of a dove temper it.[[3]](#endnote-3)

1. William de Lancea, *Diaetae Salutis* 5.5 (8:301a): Secunda astutia serpentis est depositio pellis; ponit enim se in arcto foramine, ubi renovatur, deposita veteri pelle: sic sancti in arcto poenitentiae seipsos incarcerant, ut veterem conversationem deponant, sicut monet Apostolus: *Deponite vos secundum pristinam conversationem veterem hominem, qui corrumpitur secundum desideria erroris.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. William de Lancea, *Diaetae Salutis* 5.5 (8:301a-b): Quarta astutia serpentis est insidiatio pedis: insidiatur enim calcaneo, non capiti: sic viri sancti superant desideria carnis, attendentes quis finis delectationis, scilicet mors immortalis, vel infernalis juxta illud: *Finis illorum mors.* ... Ad imitandas istas serpentis astutias dicit Salvator: *Estote prudentes sicut serpentes*; ... Et ne serpentis astutia fiat virulenta, temperat eam simplicitas columbina; unde addit: *Et simplices sicut columbae*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. At this juncture F 128 adds: But how and in what manner, see above in chapter [302] Prudence (*Prudencia*). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)