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277 Virginity (*Virginitas*)

Virginity. Virginity is triple according to Bernard, *Supermissus est*,[[1]](#endnote-1) bodily only, mental only, and both body and mind which can be called a profession [vow]. The first is pointless, the second is meritorious, the third is perfect. The first is compared to a tree having only leaves. Second to a tree having fruit without leaves. The third to a tree having fruit with leaves and flowers. For virginity is preferred to marriage and widowhood because it is more generous as far as matters of birth. For it is born and drawn from heaven. Again, it is more gracious as far as exercise is concerned because its merit is multiplied. Again, it is more glorious as far as payment is concerned because above gold it merits a golden crown.

¶ And note that virginity among the ancients was held in reverence. Wherefore Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum*.[[2]](#endnote-2)

¶ Roman emperors and consuls and others in triumphal chariots meeting virgins gave them honor. And if in virginity they saw anything in the least. Wherefore in a sign of Christ’s love for virginity Christ himself wanted to be a virgin and to be born of a virgin, and to be baptized by a virgin. Again, on account of sanctity virginity is compared to a lily, Can. 2[:2]: “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”

¶ And wherefore because by the nature of the lily it whole and not broken, it gives off a fragrance, but trod upon it emits a foul odor. Just like virginity preserved whole is fragrant to God and angels, but indecently broken it renders a person hateful. The example in the *Vitae patrum*,[[3]](#endnote-3) concerning the angel and the hermitess meeting together where there was a corpse

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of someone who had died. The hermitess blocked her nostrils but the angel did not. And again, at the meeting of a certain lascivious youth the angel held his nose. Therefore, it is said, Eccli. 39[:19]: “As the lily and yield a smell.” This lily is said to be among thorns when the virgin dwells among slippery people. We see in the thorn beautiful leaves and flowers and yet they prick acutely. So, it is concerning these red-headed ones which have sweet and soft words for deceiving under which the punctures lie hidden by which they lacerate the leaves of the lily. And just as in the lily there are six white petals. So, in a virgin there ought to be honesty in speaking, sobriety in eating, regularity in playing. Loquacity harms the first petal with adjoined foulness. Wherefore Seneca,[[4]](#endnote-4) abstain from foul language because it gives license to nourish indecency, Prov. 7[:10]: “Behold a woman meets him in harlot's attire, talkative and wandering.” The second petal is sobriety in eating. For just as it is impossible to find chastity where drunkenness reigns, Prov. 20[:1]: “Wine is a luxurious thing.”

¶ Note here one tells of that one who of three chose from the devil once to be drunk because with the deed accomplished, he lay with his mother and killed his father. Therefore, the Apostle warns the Eph. [5:18]: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury,” understand, occasionally. The third petal is rarity in playing. The example of “Dina the daughter” of Jacob “went out” alone “to see the women” and she was corrupted, Gen. 34[:1]. A dissolute way of singing and playing lacerates this petal, [1] Cor. 15[:33]: “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Therefore, because one growing among the thorns is easily harmed. But these thorns are exceedingly abundant in the world. Wherefore both Valerius, book 5,[[5]](#endnote-5) and Ambrose, *De virginitate*, book 3,[[6]](#endnote-6) that a certain youth marvelously beautiful by the name of Spurinna, stigmatized himself in the face because the women were solicitous of him.

1. Bernard, cf. Augustine, cf. *De sancta virginitate* 27.27 (PL 40:411): Merito eum sequimini virginitate cordis et carnis, quocumque ierit. Quid est enim sequi, nisi imitari? Quia Christus pro nobis passus est, relinquens nobis exemplum, sicut ait apostolus Petrus, ut sequamur vestigia ejus (I Petr. II, 21). Hunc in eo quisque sequitur, in quo imitatur: non in quantum ille Filius Dei est unus, per quem facta sunt omnia; sed in quantum filius hominis, quae oportebat, in se praebuit imitanda: et multa in illo ad imitandum omnibus proponuntur; virginitas autem carnis non omnibus; non enim habent quid faciant ut virgines sint, in quibus jam factum est ut virgines non sint. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.41 (PL 23:271): Certe Romanus populus quanto honore virgines semper habuerit, hinc apparet, quod consules et imperatores, et in curribus triumphantes, qui de superatis gentibus trophaea referebant, et omnis dignitatis gradus, eis de via cedere solitus sit. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Vitae patrum* 6.3.18 (PL 73:1014): Dicebant Patres de aliquo sene magno, quia cum ambularet in eremo, vidit duos angelos comitantes secum, unum a dextris, et alium a sinistris [Col.1014C] suis. Dum vero ambularent, invenerunt cadaver in via jacens. Et cooperuit ille senex nares suas propter fetorem: fecerunt autem et angeli similiter. Et profecti pusillum, dixit senex: Et vos hoc odorastis? Qui dixerunt ei: Nequaquam, sed propter te cooperuimus et nos; nam immunditiam mundi hujus non odoramus nos, neque appropiat nobis; sed animas, quae fetorem peccatorum habent, ipsarum odorem nos odoramus. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Seneca, in Albertano of Brescia, *De amore et dilectione Dei* Book 2 : Et Seneca dixit, "A verbis quoque turpibus abstineto, quia licentia eorum impudentiam nutrit." [De amore et dilectione Dei/II - Wikisource](https://la.wikisource.org/wiki/De_amore_et_dilectione_Dei/II) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.5.ext. 1 (LCL 492:400-401): Quod sequitur externis adnectam, quia ante gestum est quam Etruriae civitas daretur. excellentis in ea regione pulchritudinis adulescens nomine Spurinna, cum mira specie complurium feminarum illustrium sollicitaret oculos, ideoque viris ac parentibus earum se suspectum esse sentiret, oris decorem vulneribus confudit, deformitatemque sanctitatis suae fidem quam formam irritamentum alienae libidinis esse maluit.

   I shall attach the following item to external examples because it happened before citizenship was given to Etruria. An exceptionally handsome young man in that region named Spurinna attracted the eyes of many ladies of high station by his marvelous appearance. Feeling himself suspect on that account to their husbands and parents, he blurred the beauty of his face with wounds, preferring that ugliness prove his innocence rather than good looks excite the lust of strangers.

   cf. Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain* (London: Routledge, 2004). p. 52: External beauty was a source of sin, and was only rarely accompanied by modesty.62 [Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, L. 31, C. 86, cols. 2359-60] This was the moral of the exempla about young men and women who not only tamed their bodies by ascetic means but actually disfigured their own beauty in order to avoid succumbing to their own sinfulness, or to prevent others from sinning, in thought or act. There were stories about a handsome youth who disfigured his face by scarring it with a knife, a young woman who cut off her lovely hair, a nun who put out her beautiful eyes which had aroused a king’s lust. The young man who disfigured his face was said to have wished to be ugly in body so that his soul should become more beautiful.63 [R. E. Marsan, *Itineraire espagnol de conte medieval VIIIe-Xve siecles* (Paris, 1974), pp. 227-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ambrose, *De virginibus* 3.7.38 (PL 16:232): Qui enim fieri posset ut sancta Sotheris tibi non esset mentis auctor, cui auctor est generis? Quae persecutionis aetate, servilibus quoque contumeliis ad fastigium passionis evecta, etiam vultum ipsum qui inter cruciatus totius corporis liber esse consuevit injuriae, et spectare potius tormenta quam perpeti, carnifici dedit: tam fortis et patiens, ut cum teneras poenae offerret genas, prius carnifex caedendo defecerit, quam martyr injuriae cederet. [Col.0232B] Non vultum inflexit, non ora convertit: non gemitum, non lacrymam dedit. Denique cum caetera poenarum genera vicisset, gladium quem quaerebat, invenit

   Schaff, p. 387, 39. For how could it come to pass that holy Sotheris should not have been the originator of your purpose, who is an ancestor of your race? Who, in an age of persecution, borne to the heights of suffering by the insults of slaves, gave to the executioner even her face, which is usually free from injury when the whole body is tortured, and rather beholds than suffers torments; so brave and patient that when she offered her tender cheeks to punishment, the executioner failed in striking before the martyr yielded under the injuries. She moved not her face, she turned not away her countenance, she uttered not a groan or a tear. Lastly, when she had overcome other kinds of punishment, she found the sword which she desired. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)