Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

38 Contrition (*Contricio*)

Contrition[[1]](#endnote-1) is the sorrow voluntarily assumed with the proposition of confessing and making satisfaction. Having the opportunity this contrition can be acquired in this manner. Let there be as if a circuit from the body and the soul. One part of which, namely, the body is figured in the earth. Of the other part, however, the foot, namely, the soul, goes around through the circumference of the whole human life from the rising to the setting. And examine yourself according to that of Isai. [38:15]: “I will recount to you all my years in the bitterness of my soul.” Revolving how long and how you have lived, what evils you have committed, what goods you have omitted, and what goods you have lost.

Again, by thinking where, because you are in a place of misery. Where you have been, because you were born in pain, subdued in labor, and exit in fear. Wherefore, Innocent,[[2]](#endnote-2) I consider with weeping from what man was made, what man does, and what man is to be. For sure man was formed from the earth, conceived in guilt, born in pain.

Again, consider what is coming, because at a terrible judgment since he will pay for too much done, or said. Therefore, it is said in the *Vitae patrum,[[3]](#endnote-3)* make your thoughts like the one in prison saying, “Where is the judge, when will he come,” etc.

Again, in the same place Abbot Elias said,[[4]](#endnote-4) I fear three things: when my soul will leave, when it will meet God, and how might it respond to the judge.

¶ Again, consider where you are not, because you were not made in glory for this. From these arise the detestation of sin and consequently contrition of the heart. Wherefore it often happens

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concerning God and the sinner, just as concerning the nurse and the child for when the child sleeps, the nurse recedes, as if not caring for the child. But when he wakes up, he cries out and then the nurse approaches, feeds, and carries him caressingly. So, while man sleeps in sin Christ recedes. But when man is worn out by contrition and cries out through confession, Christ returns as if saying that, [1] Kings 1[:22]: “I will not go until the child be weaned, and till I may carry him, that he may appear before the Lord.” For Osee 11[:3]: “I was like a foster father, I carried them in my arms.”

¶ And note that true contrition obtains the grace of God. Wherefore just as a small rain settles a great wind, so compunction settles the wrath of the judge. Where Chrysostom, O the tears of the humble with prayer, you will not fear the tribunal of the judge. He is not one who forbids you to enter, if once you have entered not alone or empty, you will return to your accusers, you will impose silence, you will take away judgment from the mouth of the judge, you will torment the devil more than infernal pain.[[5]](#endnote-5) Again, just as an apple is fought over by boys in order to extract the sweetness. So, the penitent ought to offer the heart so that the fruit of penitence may follow.

¶ The figure for this, Luke 18[:13]: “The publican struck his breast.” The example of the poor little spinster who received wool by weight for spinning. But with bad luck falling in the meantime, she sold some of the wool in order that she may live. Which, when she carried it back, she washed and dampened it lest it lack anything of the weight. So, ought the penitent. Wherefore Bede, *On Judith*,[[6]](#endnote-6)the tears have the weight of spoken words to command more than plead. And Bernard,[[7]](#endnote-7) with the weeping of penitence we will recoup things lost. Again, in turbid water it is better to fish than in clear. So, in the heart of compunction, Psal. [142:4]: “My heart within me is troubled.”

¶ Third contrition purges the souls. We see in cities that the filth that is in the houses is thrown out to the streets. But the rain arriving carries everything away into the ditch. Thus, what is filth in the heart must be thrown out to the street of the mouth, but with the tears coming everything will be thrown into the ditch of divine forgetfulness, Ezech. 18[:21]: “If the wicked do penance for all his sins,” it will not be remembered. The example of the mendicants who make boys whom they carry on their shoulders cry so that they may receive more alms. So also, us, Apo. 21[:4]: “God shall wipe away all tears.”

¶ Fourth contrition fails the devil. The example of a beast attacked by a dog, travels across water so thus the dog does not smell his tracks, so tears

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trick the devil.

¶ Fifth tears shorten the journey toward heaven. So when men set out on water. The example of the Magdalen, Luc. 7[:38]. Wherefore someone has said concerning tears. The verse:[[8]](#endnote-8)

In tears there are three characteristics which are congruently useful to many.

Tears are clear, salty, and bitter.

They clarify clearly, salt holds things together, and they purge bitterness.

1. Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 4.24 (8:218a-b): Contritio est dolor voluntarie pro peccatis assumptus, cum proposito confitendi, et satisfaciendi. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Innocent III, *De contemptu mundi* 1.1 (PL 217.702): Consideravi ergo cum lacrymis de quo factus sit homo: quid faciat homo, quid facturus [al. futurus] sit homo. Sane formatus de terra, conceptus in culpa, natus ad poenam, [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Vitae Patrum*, Verba seniorum 3,2 (PL 73.860): Dixit ei senex: Vade, et talem fac cogitationem tuam, sicut faciunt iniqui qui sunt in carcere. Illi enim interrogant homines: Ubi est judex, et quando veniet? et in ipsa exspectatione poenarum suarum plorant. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Vitae Patrum, Verba seniorum* 3.4(PL 73.861): Dixit abbas Elias: Ego tres res timeo (Append. Mart., n. 97, tit. Senis). Unam, quando egressura est anima mea de corpore; aliam quando occursurus sum Deo; tertiam, quando adversum me proferenda est sententia. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Thomas Brinton, *Sermons* : O lacrima, tua est potencia, 3 tuum regnum, tu tribunal iudicis non vereris. Immo diabolum plus crucias quam pena infernalis…. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Bede, cf. Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 3.1.158 (LCL 151:382-383): interdum lacrimae pondera vocis habent.

   for tears sometimes have the weight of spoken words. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Bernard, *In festo omnium sanctorum* 1.14 (PL 183:461): luctu poenitentiae praeterita quoque recuperat, sicut scriptum est: *Recogitabo tibi omnes annos meos in amaritudine animae meae* (Isai. XXXVIII, 15). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Richard Rolle of Hampole, MS Arundel 507, ll. 379-281 in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. Carl Horstman (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), (p. 426):

   In lacrimis tria sunt que multis cognita prosunt:

   Sunt etenim clare, sunt salse, sunt et amare;

   Clarificat clarum, sal condit, purgat amarum. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)