

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

ON CONTINENCE

De Continentia

SABBATISMUS

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430)
De Continentia · On Continence

Latin text: public domain.
Translation, alignment and edition © 2026 Inversiones San Juan Diego
(Sabbatismus). Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International
license (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Sabbatismus is the imprint of the Inversiones San Juan Diego foundation,
San Pedro Sula, Honduras.
Set in EB Garamond and Cinzel.
sabbatismus.com

[ON CONTINENCE.]

ADVICE ON THE FOLLOWING BOOK.

Augustine himself acknowledges his book on Continencc in Letter 262, to Count Darius. Possidius mentions the same work in his Index, chapter 10, and Bede or Florus brings forth some excerpts collected from the same book in his collections, as well as Eugippius, who is historically closer to Augustine's time. Hence the judgment of Desiderius Erasmus is refuted, which he prefixed to the front of the book, that it seemed to him to belong to Hugh, and that the phrasing argued that it was not Augustine's. The style and diction, in our judgment indeed, is entirely similar to many of Augustine's Sermons, especially those he delivered or dictated in his early years. But that this book is a certain Sermon, which is why he passed it over in the Retractations of his books, is sufficiently declared by the exordium itself. Thus indeed the ancient books call it, as do Possidius, Eugippius, and Florus. No one would deny that it is conveniently recalled to his earlier years; since it is both a rather long Sermon and in large part directed against the Manichaeans, whose heresy Augustine used to pursue most of all at the beginning of his conversion.

SAINT AURELIUS AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO, ON CONTINENCE, ONE BOOK. (C)

He explains two short verses of Psalm 140: Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a

door of continence around my lips: incline not my heart to evil words, to make excuses in sins. Taking from there the argument for his sermon, he teaches that the virtue of Continence has as its duty the restraining of the lusts both of the body and of the soul, and universally the keeping watch to restrain the delights of concupiscence, which are opposed to the delight of wisdom. He commands that we should not trust in our own strength when fighting against concupiscence, which is indeed known through the law, but is not conquered except through grace. He reproves the proud who bring forward various excuses in their sins: in which genus he more painstakingly refutes the more iniquitous Manichaeans, who attributed their sins to the nature of evil implanted in themselves, and he evinces from the same apostle that the passage of the Apostle to the Galatians V, 17, For the flesh lusts against the spirit, etc., by which they wanted to demonstrate two natures of good and evil, was wrongly understood by those heretics.

CHAPTER ONE.

1. Continence from the lust of the flesh is a gift of God. Continence of the mouth is itself a gift of God. The mouth of the body and the mouth of the heart. It is difficult to dispute suitably and worthily enough about the virtue of the soul, which is named Continence: but under the burden of so great a weight, He whose great gift this virtue is, will help our littleness. For He who gives it to His continent faithful ones,

Himself gives speech to His ministers speaking about it. Therefore, about so great a thing, ready to speak what He Himself has given, we first say and prove that continence is a gift of God. In the book of Wisdom we have it written, that no one can be continent unless God gives it (Wis. VIII, 21). But the Lord says concerning that greater and more glorious continence itself, by which one is contained from the conjugal bond: Not all grasp this word, but those to whom it is given (Matt. XIX, 11). And since conjugal chastity itself, unless it is contained from illicit concubinage, cannot be kept; the Apostle preached that both are a gift of God, when speaking about both lives, that is, both conjugal, and that which is without conjugal union, saying: I would wish all men to be even as myself: but each one has his proper gift from God; one in this way, but another in that (I Cor. VII, 7).

2. And lest continence should seem necessary to be hoped for from the Lord only in the lust of the lower parts of the flesh, it is also sung in the Psalm, Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door of continence around my lips. But in this testimony of divine eloquence, if we understand the mouth as we ought to understand it, we recognize how great a gift of God the continence placed there is. For it is little to contain the mouth of the body, lest something from there which is not expedient break out through the sound of the voice. For inside is the mouth of the heart, where he who spoke those words, and wrote them down to be spoken by us, desired a watch and a door of

continence to be placed for him by the Lord. For many things we do not say with the mouth of the body, and we cry out in the heart: but no word of any thing proceeds from the mouth of the body, of which there is silence in the heart. Therefore that which does not flow from there, does not sound outside: but what flows from there, if it is evil, even if it does not move the tongue, it defiles the soul. There, therefore, continence is to be placed, where the conscience of even those who are silent speaks. For it happens through the door of continence, that from there goes not out that which even with closed lips of the flesh pollutes the life of the one thinking.

CHAPTER II.

3. The mouth of the heart, by which consent is expressed as an interior word. Continence of the heart commended by Christ under the name of the mouth. The continence of the heart is sometimes violated without the body being violated. When the continence of the heart is retained, there is no sin against the continence of the body. Finally, to show more openly the interior mouth, which he signified by those words, when he had said, Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door of continence around my lips; he immediately added, Incline not my heart to evil words (Ps. CXL, 3, 4). What is the inclination of the heart, if not consent? For he has not yet spoken, whoever has not consented by any inclination of the heart to the suggestions of whatever visions occurring in his heart. But if he has consented,

he has already spoken in his heart, even if he has not sounded it with his mouth: even if he has not done it with his hand or any part of his body, he has nevertheless done what he had already determined by thought had to be done by him; guilty before the divine laws, although hidden from human senses; with a word spoken in the heart, no deed having been admitted through the body. By no means indeed would he move a member outside in a deed, the beginning of which deed had not preceded inward in a word. For neither is it written falsely: the beginning of every work is a word. Indeed men do many things with closed mouth, quiet tongue, bridled voice: but nevertheless they do nothing by a work of the body, which they have not first said in their heart. And through this, since there are many sins in interior sayings, which are not in exterior deeds; but there are none in exterior deeds, which do not precede in interior sayings: there will be a purity of innocence from both, if a door of continence is placed around the inner lips.

4. Because of this also the Lord Himself with His own mouth says: Cleanse what is inside, and what is outside will be clean (Matt. XXIII, 26). And similarly in another place when He refuted the foolish talk of the Jews, because they made false charges against His disciples eating with unwashed hands: Not that which enters into the mouth, He says, defiles a man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles a man. If this whole sentence were to be understood of the mouth of the body, it is absurd. For vomit

does not defile him whom food does not defile. For indeed food enters into the mouth, vomit proceeds out of the mouth. But without doubt the former words pertain to the mouth of the flesh, where He says, Not that which enters into the mouth, defiles a man; but the latter to the mouth of the heart, where He says, but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles a man. Finally, when the apostle Peter sought from Him an exposition as if of this parable, He answered: Are you also yet without understanding? do you not understand, that whatever enters into the mouth, goes into the belly, and is cast out into the privy? Here certainly in what food enters, we recognize the mouth of the flesh. But in those things which He added, so that we might recognize the mouth of the heart, the slowness of our heart would not follow, unless the Truth deigned to walk even with the slow. For He says, But those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart; as if He were saying, When you hear from the mouth, understand from the heart. I say both; but I explain the one from the other. The inner man has an inner mouth, and the inner ear discerns this: what proceeds from this mouth, comes forth from the heart, and these defile a man. Then already leaving the name of the mouth, which can also be understood of the body, He shows more openly what He is saying: For out of the heart come forth, He says, evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies: these are what defile a man (Id. XV, 11-20). There is

certainly none of those evils, which can be perpetrated even by the members of the body, which an evil thought does not precede, and defile a man, even if something prevents the flagitious and villainous works of the members from following. For if, because power is not given, the hand ceases from the killing of a man, is the heart of the murderer therefore clean from crime? Or if someone cannot steal another's property as he wishes, is he therefore not a thief in his will itself? Or if she is chaste, whom an unchaste man wishes to adulterate, has he not therefore committed adultery with her in his heart? Or if a prostitute is not found in the brothel, does he who seeks her therefore not commit fornication in his mind? Or if time or place is lacking for one desiring to injure his neighbor through a lie, has he not therefore already spoken false testimony with his inner mouth? Or if anyone fearing men, does not dare to sound blasphemy with the tongue of the flesh, is he therefore not guilty of this crime, who says in his heart, There is no God (Ps. XIII, 1)? Thus the other evil deeds of men, which no movement of the body acts, which no sense of the body knows, have their hidden guilty ones; whom even alone the consent in thought defiles, that is, the evil word of the inner mouth. Into which he fearing that his heart should be inclined, asks from the Lord a door of continence to be placed around the lips of this mouth, which may contain the heart, lest it be inclined into evil words: but may contain it, by not allowing the thought to proceed into consent; for thus according to the apostolic

precept, sin does not reign in our mortal body, neither do we exhibit our members as weapons of iniquity to sin (Rom. VI, 12, 13). From fulfilling which precept they are certainly far, who do not move their members to sinning for this reason, because no power is permitted: which if it were present, immediately from the movements of the members as if of weapons, they show who reigns inside them. Therefore as much as is in them, they exhibit their members as weapons of iniquity to sin; because they will this, which they do not exhibit therefore, because they cannot.

5. And through this that chastity, which with the genital members bridled, is accustomed to be mostly and properly named continence, is violated by no transgression, if the higher continence, of which we have been speaking for a long time, is preserved in the heart. Therefore the Lord, when He had said, For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts; then following added what pertains to evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and the rest. Nor did He say all things; but having named some for example's sake He reminded that others are to be understood. Of which there is nothing that can be done, if an evil thought does not precede, by which that is instituted inside which is acted outside; and proceeding from the mouth of the heart, it already defiles a man, even if no faculty being permitted it is not acted outside through the members of the body. Therefore with the door of continence placed in the mouth of the heart, from where all things go out which defile a man, if nothing such

is permitted to go out from there, there follows a cleanness with which the conscience can already rejoice; although it is not yet that perfection, where continence will not struggle with vice. But now as long as the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Gal. V, 17), it is enough for us not to consent to the evils which we feel in ourselves. But when that consent takes place, then there goes out from the mouth of the heart what defiles a man. But when through continence consent is not held, the evil of carnal concupiscence, against which spiritual concupiscence fights, is not allowed to harm.

CHAPTER III.

6. The fight of continence against lusts as long as we are in this life. The internal fight of concupiscences is not experienced except by the warriors of virtues. Concupiscence is known through the law, but is not conquered except through grace. We must fight lest the concupiscence of sin reign. The works of the flesh are to be mortified. But it is one thing to fight well, which is now, when the contention of death is resisted; another not to have an adversary, which will be then, when death the last enemy shall be destroyed (I Cor. XV, 55, 26). For continence itself, when it bridles and restrains lusts, simultaneously also desires the good to whose immortality we tend, and rejects the evil with which we contend in this mortality. Of the former it is indeed a lover and spectator, but of the latter it is both an enemy and a witness; both desiring honor, and fleeing

dishonor. Continence would certainly not labor in bridling desires, if nothing pleased us against what is becoming, if nothing from evil concupiscence fought against our good will. The Apostle cries out: I know, he says, that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. For to will is present with me, but to perfect good I find not. For now it is possible that good be done, that evil concupiscence is not consented to; but good will be perfected, when evil concupiscence itself shall be finished. And likewise the same doctor of the Gentiles cries out: I delight in the law of God according to the inner man; but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind (Rom. VII, 18, 22, 23).

7. This fight is not experienced in themselves except by the warriors of virtues and the vanquishers of vices: nor does anything conquer the evil of concupiscence, except the good of continence. But there are those who, altogether ignorant of the law of God, do not even count evil concupiscences among their enemies, and serving them in miserable blindness, moreover even think themselves blessed, by satiating them rather than by taming them. But those who have known them through the law (For by the law is the knowledge of sin [Id. III, 20]; and, I did not know concupiscence, he says, unless the law said, You shall not covet, [Id. VII, 7]), and yet are conquered by their attack, because they live under the law, by which what is good is commanded, but is not also given; they do not live under grace, which gives through the Holy Spirit what

is commanded by the law: to these therefore the law entered in, that the offense might abound in them (Id. V, 20). The prohibition increased the concupiscence, and made it unconquered; that transgression might be added, which without the law did not exist, even if sin existed. For where there is no law, neither is there transgression (Id. IV, 15). Thus the law, without grace helping, prohibiting sin, moreover became the strength of sin: whence the Apostle says, The strength of sin is the law (I Cor. XV, 56). Nor is it to be wondered at that human weakness added strength to evil even from the good law, while it trusted in its own strength to fulfill the law itself. For being ignorant of God's righteousness, which He gives to the weak, and wishing to establish its own, which the weak lack, it has not submitted to the righteousness of God, being reprobate and proud (Rom. X, 3). But if the law acts as a pedagogue, leading the one made a transgressor to grace, as if more grievously wounded towards this, that he might desire a physician; against the noxious sweetness by which concupiscence was conquering, the Lord gives a beneficent sweetness by which continence may delight more amply, and our land gives its fruit (Ps. LXXXIV, 13), by which the soldier who vanquishes sin with God's help is fed.

8. The apostolic trumpet kindles such soldiers to battle with that sound: Let not sin therefore reign, he says, in your mortal body, to obey its desires; neither yield your members as weapons of iniquity to sin: but yield yourselves to God

as living from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you. For you are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. VI, 12-14). And in another place: Therefore, he says, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God (Id. VIII, 12-14). That therefore is now being done, as long as this mortal life of ours is under grace, that sin, that is, the concupiscence of sin (for this he calls by the name of sin in this place), may not reign in our mortal body. But then it is shown to reign, if its desires are obeyed. There is therefore in us the concupiscence of sin, which must not be permitted to reign: there are its desires, which must not be obeyed, lest it reign over those who obey. Because of which let not concupiscence usurp our members for itself, but let continence claim them for itself; that they may be weapons of righteousness to God, lest they be weapons of iniquity to sin: for thus sin shall not have dominion over us. For we are not under the law, which indeed commands the good, but yet does not give it: but we are under grace, which making us love that which the law commands, can command the free.

9. And likewise when he exhorts that we should not live according to the flesh, lest we die, but by the spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh, that we may live; the trumpet indeed which

sounds, shows the war in which we are engaged, and kindles us to fight fiercely and mortify our enemies, lest we be mortified by them. But who these enemies are, he expressed evidently enough. For those whom he wished to be mortified by us, are themselves, namely the works of the flesh. For thus he says: But if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. And that we may know what these are, let us likewise hear the same man writing to the Galatians and saying: Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornications, uncleannesses, luxuries, service of idols, poisonings, enmities, contentions, emulations, animosities, dissensions, heresies, envies, drunkenness, carousings, and such like; which I foretell you, as I have foretold, that those who do such things shall not possess the kingdom of God. For even there he was showing the war itself, that he might say these things, and he was exciting the soldiers of Christ to mortify these enemies with the same celestial and spiritual trumpet. For he had said above: I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the desires of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary to one another, so that you do not the things that you would. But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law. Therefore he wishes those established under grace to have this conflict against the works of the flesh. And to demonstrate these works of the flesh, he added those which I commemorated above: Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are

fornications, and the rest, whether those he commemorated, or those he reminded are to be understood, especially adding, and such like. Finally in this battle against the carnal army as it were, bringing forth as it were another spiritual battle line: But the fruit of the spirit is, he says, charity, joy, peace, long-suffering, benignity, goodness, faith, meekness, continence: against such there is no law. He does not say, against these; lest they alone should be thought: although even if he had said this, we ought to understand all those goods of the same kind which we could think of: but he says, against such; meaning both these and whatever are like them. Nevertheless, that among those goods which he commemorated, he placed continence in the last place, about which we have now undertaken to dispute, and on account of which we have already said many things, he especially wished it to adhere to our minds. For indeed it prevails very much in this war, in which the spirit lusts against the flesh; since it in a certain way crucifies the concupiscences of the flesh themselves. Whence the Apostle, having said these things, immediately added, And those who are Jesus Christ's, have crucified their flesh with its passions and concupiscences (Gal. V, 16-24). This is the action of continence: thus the works of the flesh are mortified. But they mortify those, whom falling away from continence, concupiscence draws to the consent of perpetrating such works.

CHAPTER IV.

10. That continence may be preserved, presumption of our own strength must be avoided. To live according to man, and to live according to the flesh, is the same. But that we may not fall away from continence, we ought to watch especially against those snares of diabolical suggestions, lest we presume on our own strength. For cursed is every one who puts his hope in man (Jer. XVII, 5). And who is this, if not man? Therefore he cannot truly say that he does not put his hope in man, who puts it in himself. For to live according to man, what is it but to live according to the flesh? Let him therefore hear who is tempted by such a suggestion, and if he has any Christian sense, let him tremble: let him hear, I say, If you live according to the flesh, you shall die.

11. But someone will say to me that to live according to man is one thing, and to live according to the flesh is another: because man is namely a rational creature, and in him there is a rational soul, by which he differs from cattle; but the flesh is the lowest and earthly part of man, and therefore to live according to it is vicious: because of which he who lives according to man, certainly does not live according to the flesh, but rather lives according to that part of man by which he is man, that is, according to the spirit of the mind, by which he excels cattle. But this disputation perhaps is worth something in the schools of the philosophers: but that we may understand the Apostle of Christ, we ought to notice how Christian books are accustomed to speak. It is certainly the faith of all of us, to whom Christ is life, that

a man was assumed by the Word of God, not indeed without a rational soul, as certain heretics wish; and yet we read, The Word was made flesh (John I, 14). What is flesh to be understood here, but man? And all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke III, 6); what can be understood, but every man? Unto Thee shall all flesh come (Ps. LXIV, 3); what is it, but every man? Thou hast given Him power over all flesh (John XVII, 2); what is it, but over every man? By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Rom. III, 20); what is it, but no man shall be justified? Which the same apostle expressing more plainly elsewhere, says, Man is not justified by the works of the law (Gal. II, 16). He also rebukes the Corinthians, saying: Are you not carnal, and walk according to man (I Cor. III, 3)? When he had called them carnal, he does not say, you walk according to the flesh; but, according to man: because what did he wish this too to be understood as, but according to the flesh? For certainly if one were to walk, that is, to live, culpably indeed according to the flesh, but laudably according to man, he would not say reproachfully, you walk according to man. Let man acknowledge the reproach, let him change his purpose, let him avoid destruction. Hear, O man; do not walk according to man, but according to Him who made man: do not fall away from Him who made you, not even towards yourself. For a man was saying, who however did not live according to man: Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God (II Cor. III, 5). See if

he lived according to man, who truthfully said these things. The Apostle therefore admonishing man, lest he live according to man, restores man to God. But he who does not live according to man, but according to God, surely does not live even according to himself; because he himself is a man. But therefore he is also said to live according to the flesh, when he lives thus; because man is understood even by the flesh alone being named, which we have already shown: just as man is understood by the soul alone being named; whence it is said, Let every soul be subject to higher powers (Rom. XIII, 1), that is, every man; and, Seventy-five souls went down into Egypt with Jacob (Gen. XLVI, 27), that is, seventy-five men. Do not therefore live according to yourself, O man: from there you had perished, but you have been sought. Do not, I say, live according to yourself: from there you had perished, and you have been found. Do not accuse the nature of the flesh, when you hear, If you live according to the flesh, you shall die. For thus it could have been said, and most truly it could have been said, If you live according to yourselves, you shall die. For the devil does not have flesh, and yet because he wished to live according to himself, he stood not in the truth. What wonder therefore if living according to himself, when he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own (John VIII, 44)? Which the Truth spoke truly concerning him.

CHAPTER V.

12. Let not him trust in himself who wishes to conquer the concupiscence of sin. The excusing of sins is to be restrained by continence. Diverse excuses in sins. The accusation of fate, of fortune, of the devil, but of God Himself by the Manichaeans. When therefore you hear, Sin shall not have dominion over you; do not trust in yourself, that sin may not have dominion over you; but in Him to whom a certain holy man praying says, Direct my steps according to Thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me (Ps. CXVIII, 133). For lest perhaps, when we had heard, Sin shall not have dominion over you, we should exalt ourselves, and attribute this to our own strength, the Apostle immediately saw this, and added, For you are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. VI, 14). Grace therefore causes that sin may not have dominion over you. Do not therefore trust in yourself, lest it have dominion over you much more from thence. And when we hear, If by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live; let us not attribute this so great good to our spirit, as if it could do these things by itself. For lest we should savor that carnal sense with a dead rather than a mortifying spirit, he immediately added, For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God (Id. VIII, 13, 14). Therefore that we may mortify the works of the flesh by our spirit, we are led by the Spirit of God who gives continence, by which we may bridle, tame, and conquer concupiscence.

13. In this so great battle, in which a man lives under grace, and when he fights well being

helped, exults in the Lord with trembling, nevertheless there are not lacking even to strenuous warriors, and although unconquered mortifiers of the works of the flesh, some wounds of sins, on account of the healing of which they may daily truthfully say, Forgive us our debts (Matt. VI, 12): striving against those same vices, and against the devil the prince and king of vices, much more vigilantly and fiercely by that very prayer, lest his death-bringing suggestions avail anything, by which he moreover instigates the sinner to excuse rather than accuse his sins; and thus those wounds not only may not be healed, but even, although they were not death-bringing, they may be inflicted heavily and lethally. And here therefore there is need of more cautious continence, by which the proud appetite of man may be restrained, by which he pleases himself and does not wish to be found culpable, and disdains when he sins, to be convicted that he himself has sinned; not receiving the accusation of himself with salutary humility, but rather seeking an excuse with ruinous elation. To restrain this pride, he asked continence from the Lord, whose words I have already placed above, and as I was able, commended. For when he had said, Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door of continence around my lips; incline not my heart to evil words; explaining more evidently whence he said this, to make, he says, excuses in sins (Ps. CXL, 3, 4). For what is more malignant than these words, by which an evil man denies that he is evil, even when convicted of an evil work

which he cannot deny? And since he cannot hide the deed, nor can he call it a good deed, and sees that what was done by him lies open, he seeks to refer what he did to another, as if from thence he could take away what he deserved. Unwilling that he is guilty, he rather adds to his guilt, and by excusing, not accusing, his sins, he is ignorant that he removes not the punishment from himself, but the pardon. For before human judges, since they can be deceived, whatever fallacy to purge as it were what was done wrongly, seems to profit something for a time: but before God, who cannot be deceived, a fallacious defense is not to be applied, but a truthful confession of sins.

14. And some indeed who are accustomed to excuse their sins, complain that they are impelled to sin by fate, as if the stars had decreed this, and heaven had first sinned by decreeing such things, so that man might afterwards sin by committing such things. Others prefer to impute what they sin to fortune: who think that all things are agitated by fortuitous chances; and yet they contend to know and assert this not by fortuitous temerity, but by perceived reason. What sort of madness is it, therefore, to attribute their disputations to reason, and to subjugate their actions to chances? Others refer all that they do evilly to the devil: nor do they wish to have even a part with him, since they may suspect that he persuaded them to evil things by hidden suggestions, but they cannot doubt that they themselves consented to those suggestions, from wherever they may have been. There are

also those who extend their excuse into an accusation of God, miserable by divine judgment, but blasphemous by their own madness. For indeed against Him they bring in a rebellious substance of evil from a contrary principle, which He would not have been able to resist, unless He had mixed a part of His own substance and nature to be contaminated and corrupted by the same rebel: and then they say that they sin, when the nature of evil prevails over the nature of God. This is the most unclean insanity of the Manichaeans, whose diabolical machinations are most easily subverted by undoubted truth, which confesses the nature of God to be incontaminable and incorruptible. But what of flagitious contamination and corruption is not deservedly believed about those, by whom God, who is supremely and incomparably good, is believed to be contaminable and corruptible?

CHAPTER VI.

15. Against others who, to excuse themselves, say that sins please God. God even out of evils makes good things. Man made with the power of sinning, to receive as a reward the not being able to sin. There are also those who in the excusing of their sins accuse God in such a way, that they say that sins please Him. For if they displeased Him, they say, He would by no means permit them to be done with His most omnipotent power. As if indeed God has permitted sins to be unpunished, even in those whom He frees from eternal punishment by the remission of sins. For no one

receives the pardon of the heavier punishment due, unless he has paid some sort of punishment, even if far less than he owed: and thus the bounty of mercy is imparted, so that the justice of discipline is not even left behind. For even the sin which seems unpunished, has its own attendant punishment, so that no one may not grieve with bitterness concerning what has been committed, or not grieve with blindness. Just as therefore you say, Why does He permit these things, if they displease Him? so I say, Why does He punish these things, if they please Him? And through this, just as I confess that these things would not be done at all, unless they were permitted by the Omnipotent; so you confess that what is punished by the Just One ought not to be done: so that by not doing what He punishes, we may merit to learn from Him why He permits to exist what He punishes. For solid food, as it is written, is for the perfect (Heb. V, 14): in which those who have progressed well, already understand that it pertained rather to the omnipotence of God, that He should permit evils coming from the free choice of the will to exist. For so great is His omnipotent goodness, that even out of evils He can make good things, whether by pardoning, or by healing, or by fitting and turning them to the utilities of the pious, or even by most justly avenging. For all these things are good, and most worthy of the good and omnipotent God: yet they are not done except out of evils. What therefore is better, what more omnipotent than Him who, when He does no evil, does well even out of evils? Those

who have done evil cry to Him, Forgive us our debts (Matt. VI, 12): He hears, He pardons. Their own evils have harmed the sinners: He comes to their aid and heals their sicknesses. The enemies of His people rage: out of their raging He makes martyrs. Finally He even condemns those whom He judges worthy of damnation: although they suffer their own evils, yet He does what is good. For what is just cannot not be good: and certainly as sin is unjust, so the punishment of sin is just.

16. However, the power was not lacking to God, to make such a man who could not sin: but He preferred to make him such, that to sin should be adjacent to him, if he wished; not to sin, if he did not wish: prohibiting the former, commanding the latter: that first it might be to his good merit not to sin, and afterwards a just reward not to be able to sin. For He will also make His saints such in the end, who can by no means sin. He indeed has such Angels even now, whom we love in Him thus, that we do not fear concerning any of them that by sinning he will become a devil. Which we do not presume concerning any just man in the mortality of this life. But we trust that all will be such in the immortality of that life. For the omnipotent God who works good things even out of our evils, what sort of good things will He give, when He has freed us from all evils? Many things can be disputed more copiously and subtly concerning the good use of evil: but we have neither undertaken this in that sermon, and its excessive length is to be avoided.

ON CONTINENCE
CHAPTER VII.

17. The duties of continence and justice equally tend to peace. Against the insanity of the Manichaeans concerning two natures conflicting with each other. War is in man from the sickness contracted by fault, peace will be in the future when the sickness is healed. Now therefore let us return to that, on account of which we said these things. Continence is necessary for us, and we know it to be a divine gift, lest our heart be inclined to evil words to make excuses in sins. But for restraining which sin do we not have necessary continence, lest it be committed, when it restrains even this itself, lest if it has been committed it be defended by nefarious pride? Universally therefore continence is necessary for us, that we may decline from evil. But that we may do good, seems to pertain to another virtue, that is, to justice. The sacred Psalm admonishes us of this, where we read: Decline from evil, and do good. But to what end we should do these things, it immediately added, saying: Seek peace, and pursue it (Ps. XXXIII, 15). For perfect peace will then be for us, when our nature inseparably cohering to its Creator, nothing from ourselves will be repugnant to us. This the Savior Himself wished, as much as it seems to me, to be understood, where He says: Let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning. What is it to gird the loins? To coerce lusts, which is of continence. But to have lamps burning, is to shine and be fervent in good works, which is of justice. Nor was He silent

here to what end we should do these things, adding and saying: And you like men expecting their lord, when he comes from the wedding (Luke XII, 35, 36). For when he comes, he will remunerate us, who have contained ourselves from those things which cupidity commanded, and have done those things which charity commanded: so that in his perfect and eternal peace, without any contention of evil and with the greatest delight of good, we may reign.

18. All we therefore who believe in the living and true God, whose supremely good and immutable nature neither does any evil, nor suffers any evil, from whom is every good, which can even be diminished, and who by His own good which He Himself is can by no means be diminished, when we hear the Apostle saying, Walk in the spirit, and do not fulfill the concupiscences of the flesh: for the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary to one another, so that you do not the things that you would (Gal. V, 16, 17); far be it from us to believe, what the insanity of the Manichaeans believes, that here two natures are demonstrated conflicting from contrary principles among themselves, one of good, the other of evil. Rather both of these are good: and the spirit is good, and the flesh is good; and the man who consists of both, one ruling, the other serving, is certainly good, but a mutable good: which however could not be, except from the immutable good, by whom every good is created, whether small or great; but however small, yet

made by the great; and however great, yet by no means to be compared to the greatness of the maker. But in this good nature of man, and well founded and instituted by the good, there is now war, because salvation is not yet. Let the sickness be healed, there is peace. But fault merited this sickness, nature did not have it. Which fault indeed the grace of God has already remitted to the faithful through the laver of regeneration; but under the hands of the same physician nature still conflicts with its sickness. But in such a fight total health will be victory: nor a temporary health, but an eternal one; where not only this sickness may be finished, but also no other may arise from then on. Because of which the just man addresses his soul, and says: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His retributions: who makes Himself propitious to all your iniquities, who heals all your sicknesses (Ps. CII, 2 and 3). He makes Himself propitious to iniquities, when He pardons sins: He heals sicknesses, when He restrains wicked desires. He makes Himself propitious to iniquities, by giving indulgence: He heals sicknesses, by giving continence. The former was done in Baptism to those confessing, the latter is done to those striving in the agony; in which our disease is to be conquered by us through His help. Even now the former is done, when we are heard saying, Forgive us our debts: but the latter, when we are heard saying, Lead us not into temptation (Matt. VI, 12, 13). For everyone is tempted, as the apostle James says, being drawn away and enticed by his own concupiscence (James I, 14).

Against which vice medicinal help is demanded from Him who can heal all such sicknesses, not by the separation of an alien nature from us, but in the reparation of our nature. Whence also the aforesaid apostle did not say, Everyone is tempted by concupiscence; but added, his own: so that he who hears this may understand how he ought to cry out, I said, O Lord, have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee (Ps. XL, 5). For it would not have needed healing, unless it had vitiated itself by sinning, so that its own flesh should lust against it, that is, it should be repugnant to itself in that part by which it was weakened in the flesh.

CHAPTER VIII.

19. The flesh lusts against the spirit, not because it is an enemy nature, but because it is vitiated. The concupiscences of the flesh are from vice, and these can indeed be diminished here, but not entirely taken away except in the other life. Concupiscence of the flesh is here a punishment for sin, it will not be in the blessed when the flesh is healed. For the flesh desires nothing except through the soul; but the flesh is said to lust against the spirit, when the soul with carnal concupiscence struggles against the spirit. We are this whole thing: and the flesh itself, which dies when the soul departs, our lowest part, is not dismissed to be fled from, but is laid down to be received again, nor will it be left behind once received. For a natural body is sown, a spiritual body will rise again (I Cor. XV, 44). Then the

flesh will no longer lust against the spirit, when it itself will also be called spiritual, since it will be subjected to the spirit to be vivified forever, not only without any repugnance, but also without any need of bodily nourishment. These two therefore, which now oppose each other in us, since we are in both, let us pray and act that they may agree. For we ought not to think either of them an enemy, but the vice by which the flesh lusts against the spirit: which being healed, will itself not exist, and both substances will be safe, and between both there will be no fight. Let us hear the Apostle: I know, he says, that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. He says this certainly, because the vice of the flesh in a good thing is not a good thing: which when it has ceased to be, there will be flesh, but it will no longer be vitiated or vicious. Yet that it pertains to our nature, the same teacher shows, first by saying, I know that it does not dwell in me: which to explain, he added, that is, in my flesh. And so he says that his flesh is himself. It is therefore not itself our enemy: and when its vices are resisted, it itself is loved, because it itself is cured. For no man ever hated his own flesh (Eph. V, 29); as the Apostle himself says. And in another place he says: Therefore I myself with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. Let those hear who have ears: Therefore I myself; I with the mind, I with the flesh; but with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. How with the flesh the law of sin? is it by consenting to carnal concupiscence? Far be it: but

by having motions of desires there, which he did not wish to have, and yet he had them. But by not consenting to them he served the law of God with the mind, and held his members, lest they should become weapons of sin.

20. There are therefore in us evil desires, by not consenting to which we do not live evilly: there are in us concupiscences of sins, by not obeying which we do not perfect evil, but by having them we do not yet perfect good. The Apostle shows both, neither that good is perfected here, where evil is so lusted after; nor that evil is perfected here, when such concupiscence is not obeyed. For he shows the former where he says, To will lies near to me, but to perfect good does not (Rom. VII, 18, 25): but the latter, where he says, Walk in the spirit, and do not perfect the concupiscences of the flesh. For neither there does he say that doing good does not lie near to him; but, to perfect it: nor here does he say, You shall not have the concupiscences of the flesh; but, you shall not perfect them. Therefore evil concupiscences are made in us, when what is not lawful is pleasing: but they are not perfected, when lusts are contained, the mind serving the law of God. And good is done, when what is evilly pleasing is not done, good delight conquering: but the perfection of good is not fulfilled, as long as the flesh serving the law of sin, lust entices, and although it is contained, yet it is moved. For there would be no need for it to be contained, unless it were moved. There will be sometime also the perfection of good, when there will be the consumption

of evil: the former will be supreme, the latter will be null. But if we think this is to be hoped for in this mortality, we are deceived. For it will be then, when there will be no death; and it will be there, where there will be eternal life. For in that world and in that kingdom the supreme good will be, evil null; when and where there will be the supreme love of wisdom, the labor of continence null. Therefore the flesh is not evil, if it lacks evil, that is, the vice by which man was vitiated, not made evilly, but making it himself. For from both parts, that is, both soul and body made good by the good God, he himself made the evil by which he was made evil. From the guilt of which evil already also loosed through indulgence, lest he esteem light what he made, he still fights with his vice through continence. But far be it that there should be any vices in those who will reign in that peace which is to come; since indeed in this war not only sins are daily diminished in those who are progressing, but also the concupiscences themselves, by not consenting to which there is conflict, and by consenting to which there is sin.

21. Therefore that the flesh lusts against the spirit, that good does not dwell in our flesh, that the law in our members is repugnant to the law of God, is not a mixture of two natures made from contrary principles, but a division of one made against itself on account of the merit of sin. We were not thus in Adam, before nature having heard and followed its deceiver, despised and offended its creator: this is not the prior life of created man, but the posterior punishment of the

condemned. From which condemnation through Jesus Christ freed by grace, the free fight with their punishment, not yet with full salvation, but already having received the pledge of salvation: but not freed, they are both guilty of sins, and implicated in punishments. But after this life to the guilty there will remain forever punishment for their fault; to the free there will not remain forever either fault, or punishment: but there will remain forever the good substances of spirit and flesh; which the good and immutable God created good, although mutable. But they will remain changed for the better, never again to be changed for the worse; all evil being entirely consumed, both what man did unjustly, and what he suffered justly. Which two kinds of evil entirely perishing, of which one is of preceding iniquity, the other of consequent unhappiness, the will of man will be right without any pravity. There it will be clear and perspicuous to all, what is now believed by many faithful, understood by few, that evil is not a substance; but just as a wound in a body, so in a substance which vitiated itself, it began to be the plague having begun, and there it ceases to be health having been perfected. All evil therefore having arisen from us, and having perished in us, our good also having been increased and perfected even to the height of the most happy incorruption and immortality, what sort will each of our substances be? Since indeed now in this corruption and mortality, when still the corruptible body weighs down the soul (Wis. IX, 15), and what the Apostle says, the body is

dead because of sin (Rom. VIII, 10), yet that same one bears such testimony to our flesh, that is to our lowest and earthly part, as to say what I commemorated a little before, No man ever hated his own flesh; and immediately subjoins, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church?

CHAPTER IX.

22. That the flesh is not evil by nature, since the Apostle exhorts that wives should be loved by its example. Three copulas insinuated by the Apostle, all good, of which the third is of flesh and spirit. Why an example of subjection for a woman was not given from the flesh. By what therefore, I do not say, error, but rather madness, the Manichaeans attribute our flesh to I know not what fabulous nation of darkness, which they wish to have always had its own evil nature without any beginning: since the truthful teacher exhorts that men should love their wives by the example of their own flesh, whom he also exhorts to this very thing by the example of Christ and the Church? Finally that whole passage of the apostolic Epistle himself, very much pertaining to the matter, is to be remembered: Husbands, he says, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word; that He might present to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So, he says, men also ought to love their wives, as their own bodies. He who loves

his wife, loves himself (Eph. V, 25-29). Then he subjoined, what we already commemorated: For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church. What does the insanity of the most unclean impiety say to these things? What do you say to these things, O Manichaeans? who attempt to induce on us as if from the apostolic Letters two natures without beginning, one of good, the other of evil; and you do not wish to hear the apostolic Letters, which would correct you from that sacrilegious perversity. As you read, The flesh lusts against the spirit (Gal. V, 17); and, Good does not dwell in my flesh: so read, No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church. As you read, I see another law in my members repugnant to the law of my mind (Rom. VII, 18, 23): so read, As Christ loved the Church, so also men ought to love their wives, as their own bodies. Do not be insidious in those testimonies of holy Scripture, and deaf in these; and you will be corrected in both. For if you accept these as it is worthy, you will also try to understand those as it is true.

23. The Apostle insinuated to us three certain copulas, Christ and the Church, husband and wife, spirit and flesh. Of these the former consult for the latter, the latter serve the former. All are good, when in them some excellently placed guard the beauty of order, some decently subjected. Husband and wife, what sort they ought to be with each other, receive a precept and an example. The precept is: Let women be subject to

their husbands, as to the Lord; because the husband is the head of the woman; and, Husbands, love your wives. But an example is given to women from the Church, to men from Christ: As the Church, he says, is subject to Christ, so also let women be to their husbands in all things. Similarly the precept having been given to men, that they should love their wives, he added the example, As Christ loved the Church. But he exhorted men also from the inferior thing, that is, from his own body; not only from the superior, that is, from his Lord. For he did not only say, Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, which is from the superior; but he also said, Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies (Eph. V, 22-28), which is from the inferior: because both the superior and the inferior are all good things. Yet the woman did not receive an example from the body or flesh, that she should be so subject to the man, as the flesh to the spirit: but either the Apostle wished it to be understood consequently, what he omitted to say; or perhaps because the flesh lusts against the spirit in the mortality and sickness of this life, therefore he did not wish to apply an example of subjection for the woman from it. But he wished to do so for men, because although the spirit lusts against the flesh, even in this very thing it consults for the flesh: not as the flesh lusting against the spirit, neither consults for the spirit by such a repugnance, nor for itself. Yet the good spirit would not consult for it, whether by nourishing and cherishing its nature through providence, or

by resisting its vices through continence, unless each substance indicated God the maker of both, also by the decorum of this its own order. What is it therefore that you with true madness both boast yourselves to be Christians, and contend with such perversity against the Christian Scriptures with closed, or rather extinguished eyes, both asserting that Christ appeared to mortals in false flesh, and that the Church in the soul pertains to Christ, in the body to the devil, and that the masculine and feminine sex are works of the devil, not of God, and that the flesh coheres to the spirit as an evil substance to a good substance?

CHAPTER X.

24. The heresy of the Manichaeans denies that there was true flesh in Christ. It says that souls pertain to Christ, bodies to the devil, and that both sexes are from the devil. If the things which we commemorated from the apostolic Letters seem to you to answer too little, hear still others, if you have ears. What does the most insane Manichaean say concerning the flesh of Christ? That it was not true, but false. What does the blessed Apostle say to this? Be mindful that Christ Jesus rose from the dead of the seed of David, according to my gospel (II Tim. II, 8). And Christ Jesus Himself says, Feel, and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me to have (Luke XXIV, 39). How is there truth in their doctrine, which preaches that in the flesh of Christ there was falsity? How was there not any evil in Christ, in whom there was

so great a lie? Because evidently to men too pure true flesh is an evil, and false flesh for true is not an evil: true flesh of one born from the seed of David is an evil, and a false tongue of one saying, Feel, and see that a spirit does not have bones and flesh, as you see me to have, is not an evil! Concerning the Church what does the deceiver of men say in his deadly error? That from the part of souls it pertains to Christ, from the part of bodies to the devil. What does the Teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth say to these things? Do you not know, he says, that your bodies are members of Christ (I Cor. VI, 15)? Concerning the sex of male and female what does the son of perdition say? That neither sex is from God, but from the devil. What does the Vessel of election say to these things? As, he says, the woman is from the man, so also the man through the woman; but all things are from God (Id. XI, 12). Concerning the flesh what does the unclean spirit say through the Manichaeon? That it is an evil substance, not a creature of God, but of the enemy. What does the Holy Spirit say to these things through Paul? For as the body is one, he says, and has many members, but all the members of the body though they are many, are one body; so also is Christ. And a little after: God, he says, has placed the members, every one of them in the body, as He willed. Likewise a little after: God, he says, has tempered the body, giving more abundant honor to that which lacked, that there might be no schisms in the body, but the same itself that the members might be mutually

careful one for another: and whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it (Id. XII, 12-26). How is the flesh evil, when the souls themselves are admonished to imitate the peace of its members? How is it a creature of the enemy, when the souls themselves which rule the bodies, that they may not have schisms of enmities among themselves, take an example from the members of the body, so that what God has bestowed on the body through nature, they themselves may love to have through grace? Rightly when writing to the Romans, I beseech you, he says, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God (Rom. XII, 1). Not without cause do we contend that darkness is light, and light is darkness, if we present a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God from the bodies of the nation of darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

25. In what the comparison of the flesh and the Church consists. But, they say, how is the flesh by a certain similitude compared to the Church? Does the Church lust against Christ; since the same apostle said, The Church is subject to Christ (Eph. V, 24)? Plainly the Church is subject to Christ: because for this reason the spirit lusts against the flesh, that from every part the Church may be subject to Christ; but the flesh lusts against the spirit, because the Church has not yet received the peace which is promised to

be perfect. And through this the Church is subject to Christ from the pledge of salvation, and the flesh lusts against the spirit from the infirmity of sickness. For neither were the same ones not members of the Church, to whom he said these things: Walk in the spirit, and do not perfect the concupiscences of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary to one another; so that you do not the things that you would (Gal. V, 16 and 17). These things were certainly said to the Church, which if it were not subject to Christ, the spirit would not in it lust against the flesh through continence. On account of which they could indeed not perfect the concupiscences of the flesh, but the flesh lusting against the spirit they could not do the things which they wished, that is, also not to have the concupiscences of the flesh themselves. Then, why should we not confess in spiritual men the Church subject to Christ, but in carnal men still to lust against Christ? Or did they not lust against Christ, to whom it was said, Is Christ divided (I Cor. I, 13)? and, I could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal. As to little ones in Christ I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you could not yet: but neither can you now; for you are still carnal. For since there is among you emulation and contention, are you not carnal (Id. III, 1-3)? Against whom do emulation and contention lust, except against Christ? For these concupiscences of the flesh Christ heals in his own, but loves in none. Whence the holy Church as long as it has even such members,

is not yet without spot and wrinkle. To this are added also those sins, for which the daily voice of the whole Church is, Forgive us our debts (Matt. VI, 12): from which lest we should think spiritual men alien, not whatever one of the carnal, nor whatever one of the spiritual themselves, but he who reclined upon the breast of the Lord, and whom he loved before the rest (John XIII, 23), If we say, he says, that we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (I John I, 8). But in every sin, more in greater, less in lesser, yet against justice there is lust. And of Christ it is written: Who is made for us wisdom from God, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption (I Cor. I, 30). In every sin therefore there is without doubt lust against Christ: but he who heals all our sicknesses (Ps. CII, 3), when he shall have brought the Church to the promised health of sickness, then in no one of its members will there be any spot or wrinkle however small. Then in no way will the flesh lust against the spirit; and therefore there will be no cause why even the spirit should lust against the flesh. Then all this fight will receive an end, then of both substances there will be supreme concord: then to such an extent will there be no one carnal there, that even the flesh itself will be spiritual. What therefore now everyone living according to Christ does with his own flesh, when he both lusts against its evil concupiscence, which he contains to be healed, which he holds not yet healed; and yet nourishes and cherishes its good nature, since no man ever hated his own flesh (Eph. V, 29): this

Christ also does with the Church, as much as it is lawful to compare lesser things to greater. For both by rebukes he represses it, lest puffed up by impunity it burst; and by consolations he raises it, lest weighed down by infirmity it succumb. Hence is that of the Apostle: For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged: but when we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world (I Cor. XI, 31 and 32). And that in the Psalm: According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy consolations have gladdened my soul (Ps. XCIII, 19). Then therefore the perfect health of our flesh without any repugnance is to be hoped for, when the certain security of the Church of Christ without any fear shall be.

CHAPTER XII.

26. The continence of the Manichaeans and of certain others, especially heretics, is false. Likewise the continence of certain ones is unclean, so that through magical arts they may attain to the wives of others. It will have been sufficient to have disputed these things for truthful continence against the Manichaeans falsely containing, lest the fruitful and glorious labor of continence in restraining and restraining our lowest part, that is, the body, from immoderate and illicit pleasures, should be believed to pursue hostilely, and not to castigate healthfully. The body indeed is of a diverse nature from the mind, but it is not alien to the nature of man. For the mind does not consist of the body; but yet man

consists of mind and body: and certainly God whom he frees, frees the whole man. Whence also the Savior Himself assumed the whole man, having deigned to free in us the whole that He made. Those who think against this truth, what does it profit them to contain lusts? if however they do contain any. What can become clean in them through continence, whose continence is such unclean? which is not even to be named continence. For to think what they think is the poison of the devil; but continence is the gift of God. But as not everyone who suffers something, or most tolerantly suffers any sorrows, has that virtue, which is similarly a gift of God, and is named patience: for many tolerate many torments, lest they betray either those conscious of evil with themselves in their crimes, or themselves; many for fulfilling their most ardent lusts, and obtaining, or not leaving those things by which they are bound by the bond of depraved love; many for diverse and pernicious errors, by which they are vehemently held; all of whom far be it that we should say have true patience: so not everyone who contains something, or even wonderfully contains the very lusts of flesh or mind, is to be said to have that continence, concerning the utility and decorum of which we are discussing. For certain ones, which may seem wonderful to say, contain themselves through incontinence; as if a woman should contain herself from her husband, because she swore this to an adulterer. Certain ones through injustice, as if a spouse should not yield the due of mixed sex to a spouse, because

he or she is already able to conquer such a bodily appetite. Likewise certain ones contain deceived by false faith, and hoping for vain things, and secting vain things: in which are all heretics, and whoever under the name of religion are deceived by any error; whose continence would be true, if the faith also were true: but since that is not even to be called faith for this reason, because it is false, without doubt also this is unworthy of the name of continence. For are we going to say that continence, which we most truly call the gift of God, is a sin? Far be from our hearts so detestable a madness. But the blessed Apostle says, All that is not of faith, is sin (Rom. XIV, 23). That therefore which does not have faith, is not even to be named continence.

27. There are also those who by openly serving malignant demons, contain themselves from bodily pleasures, that through them they may fulfill nefarious pleasures, the impetus and ardor of which they do not contain. Whence that I may say something, and keep silent about the rest on account of the length of the discourse; certain ones do not touch even their own wives, while as if pure through magical arts they attempt to arrive at the wives of others. O wonderful continence, or rather singular wickedness and uncleanness! For if it were true continence, the concupiscence of the flesh ought to have contained from marriage more from adultery, than on account of perpetrating adultery. This concupiscence of the flesh indeed conjugal continence is accustomed to relax, and to impose modera-

tion on its reins so far, that not even in marriage itself is immoderate license overflowed, but a measure is kept, either due to the infirmity of the spouse, to whom the Apostle concedes this not ascending to command, but according to pardon (I Cor. VII, 6), or accommodated to procreating children, which was the one cause of mixing flesh mutually even for the holy fathers and mothers formerly. But continence doing this, that is, moderating and in a certain manner limiting the concupiscence of the flesh in spouses, and ordering its unquiet and inordinate motion in a certain manner within certain bounds, uses well the evil of man, whom it makes and wishes to perfect good: as God also uses even evil men, on account of those whom he perfects good.

CHAPTER XIII.

28. Continence coerces and rules not only the lusts of the body, but also the cupidity of the mind. Depraved motions of the soul are to be restrained by continence, consent being denied and even the delight of thought rejected. Far be it therefore that we should say that those also have continence, concerning which Scripture says, And this very thing was of wisdom, to know whose gift this was (Wis. VIII, 21), who by containing either serve errors, or therefore conquer some lesser cupidities, that they may fulfill others, by the greatness of which they are conquered. But that continence which is true coming from above, does not wish to press some evils with other evils, but to heal all evils with

goods. The action of which that I may briefly embrace; the duty of continence keeps watch over coercing and healing all delights whatsoever of concupiscence, which are adverse to the delight of wisdom. Whence they without doubt measure it more narrowly, who define that it prohibits only the lusts of the body: better certainly those, who do not add of the body, but say generally that to rule lust or cupidity pertains to continence. Which cupidity is placed in vice, and is not only of the body, but also of the mind. For if the cupidity of the body is in fornications and drunkenness, are not enmities, contentions, emulations, finally animosities, exercised in bodily pleasures, and not rather in motions and perturbations of the mind? Yet the Apostle named all these works of the flesh, whether they pertained properly to the mind, or to the flesh, calling man himself by the name of the flesh (Gal. V, 19-21). For the works of man are those which are not said to be of God; since man who does these things, lives according to himself, not according to God, in so far as he does these things. But there are other works of man, which are more to be called the works of God. For it is God, says the Apostle, who works in you both to will and to work, for His good will (Phil. II, 13). Thence is also that: For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. VIII, 14).

29. Therefore the spirit of man adhering to the Spirit of God, lusts against the flesh, that is, against himself; but for himself, that those motions whether in the flesh, or in the soul, ac-

cording to man, not according to God, which are still through acquired sickness, may be cohibited by continence, on account of acquiring salvation: so that man not living according to man, may already be able to say, But I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me (Gal. II, 20). For where it is not I, there is a happier I; so that when any reprobate motion arises according to man, to which he does not consent who with his mind serves the law of God, he may also say that, Now I do not work it (Rom. VII, 17). To such indeed those things also are said, which as their companions and partakers we ought to hear: If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God: when Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with him in glory. Let us understand to whom he speaks, or rather let us hear more attentively. For what is plainer than this? what more open? He certainly speaks to those who had risen with Christ, not yet of course in the flesh, but in the mind; whom he calls dead, and from this more living: for your life, he says, is hidden with Christ in God. Of such dead the voice is: But I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me. Whose life therefore was hidden in God, they are admonished and exhorted that they mortify their members which are upon the earth. For that follows: Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth. And lest anyone too slow

should think those visible members of the body are to be mortified by such, immediately opening what he says: Fornication, he says, uncleanness, perturbation, evil concupiscence, and avarice, which is the service of idols. Is it really to be believed that those who were already dead, and their life was hidden with Christ in God, were still fornicating, still living in unclean morals and works, still serving the perturbations of evil concupiscence and avarice? What madman would think these things of such men? What therefore does he wish them to mortify, namely by the work of continence, except those very motions still living in a certain interpellation of theirs, without the consent of our mind, without the operation of corporal members? And how are these mortified by the work of continence, unless when the mind does not consent to them, nor are the members of the body exhibited as weapons to them; and what is greater, and with the greater care of continence to be watched, even our very thought itself, although it is touched in a certain manner by their suggestion and as if whispering, yet is turned away lest it be delighted by them, and is converted to thinking supernal things more delectably; for this reason naming them in sermons, lest they should be dwelt in, but fled from? Which happens, if we hear efficaciously, He Himself helping who commands this through His Apostle: Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above; not the things that are upon the earth.

ON CONTINENCE
CHAPTER XIV.

30. Faith without works does not save. The vices of the flesh must be constantly fought against. In the battle of continence strength and victory must be referred to God. But when he had commemorated those evils, he added and said: On account of which the wrath of God comes upon the children of unbelief. Certainly he healthfully terrified them, lest the faithful should think that on account of their faith alone, even if they lived in these evils, they could be saved; the apostle James crying out against that sense with a most manifest voice and saying, If anyone says he has faith, but has not works, can faith save him (James II, 14)? Whence also here the Teacher of the Gentiles said that on account of those evils the wrath of God comes upon the children of unbelief. But when he says, In which you also sometimes walked, when you lived in them; he shows sufficiently that they no longer lived in them. For to these they were dead, that their life might be hidden in God with Christ. Since therefore they no longer lived in them, they were now commanded to mortify such things. For to those very ones not living in them, those things were living; as I have already shown a little before: and they were called their members, those vices namely which dwelt in their members, by a mode of speech through that which contains that which is contained; as it is said, The whole forum speaks of it, when men speak who are in the forum. By that very mode of speech it is sung

in the Psalm, Let all the earth adore thee (Ps. LXV, 4); that is, all men who are on the earth.

31. But now put off, he says, you also all things (Col. III, 1-8); and he commemorates many evils of this kind. But what is it, that it is not sufficient for him to say, Put off you all things; but adding a conjunction he said, you also? Unless lest they should therefore think that they could do these evils, and live with impunity in them, because their faith would free them from the wrath, which comes upon the children of unbelief doing those things, and living in these without faith. Put off, he says, you also those evils on account of which the wrath of God comes upon the children of unbelief; nor promise yourselves impurity of them on account of the merit of faith. But he would not say, Put off, to those who had already put them off from that part by which they did not consent to such vices, nor gave their members to them as weapons of sin, unless because in this fact is, and in this operation still turns, as long as we are mortal, the life of the saints. For while the spirit lusts against the flesh, this matter is driven with great intention, that depraved delights, unclean lusts, carnal and base motions, are resisted by the sweetness of holiness, the love of chastity, spiritual vigor, and the decorum of continence: thus they are put off by those who are dead to them, nor do they live in them by consenting. Thus, I say, they are put off, while by continued continence, lest they rise again, they are pressed. Whoever as if secure from this putting off of theirs shall cease, immediately they will leap into

the citadel of the mind, and from there they will themselves put it down, and reduce it to their own servitude, basely and deformedly captive. Then sin will reign in the mortal body of man to obey its desires; then he will exhibit his members as weapons of iniquity to sin (Rom. VI, 12), and his last state will be worse than the first (Matt. XII, 45). For it is much more tolerable not to have begun a contest of this kind, than having begun the conflict to have left it, and to have been made a captive from a good warrior or even from a victor. Whence the Lord does not say, He who shall begin; but, He who shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved (Id. X, 22).

32. But whether lest we be conquered fighting bitterly, or sometimes even conquering with unhopd for or unthought of facility, let us give glory to Him who gives us continence. Let us remember that a certain just man said in his abundance, I shall not be moved forever; and it was demonstrated to him how rashly he said this, as if attributing to his own strength, what was bestowed upon him from above. But we learned this from him confessing: for soon he added, Lord, in thy will thou hast bestowed strength on my beauty; but thou turnedst away thy face, and I became troubled (Ps. XXIX, 7, 8). Through medicinal providence he was deserted for a little while by the ruler, lest through deadly pride he himself should desert the ruler. Whether therefore here, where we conflict with our vices to be tamed and minished; or there, which will be in the end, where we shall lack every enemy, because every

pestilence; it is healthfully driven with us, that he who glories, may glory in the Lord (I Cor. I, 31).