

SAINT PETER DAMIAN

ON FAITH PLEDGED TO GOD

De Fide Deo Obstricta

SABBATISMUS

Saint Peter Damian (1007–1072)
De Fide Deo Obstricta · On Faith Pledged to God

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ARGUMENTUM.

Dum Mediolani sanctus doctor ad corrigenda clericorum illius Ecclesiae vitia ab apostolica sede legatus versaretur, aderat ei praecipuus adjutor Landulphus quidam, vir et generis nobilitate, et litterarum cognitione non vulgaris; quique ad eam rem ex sententia perficiendam non mediocriter studium, auctoritatemque afferebat. Is concitata ab iisdem clericis populari seditione, cum uterque ad exitium furentibus plebis animis deposceretur, vovit se ubi primum ex tam atroci tempestate evasisset, rebus humanis valere jussis, ad religionis portum convolaturum. Quod tamen dexteritate et Damiani facundia, sedata populi seditione, voti compos effectus, praestare negligebat. Scribit igitur ad eum, et enumeratis multorum exemplis, qui graves Deo non servatae fidei poenas persolverant, hortatur, ut fidem non homini, sed Deo obstrictam fallere reformidet.

LANDULPHO clerico et senatorii generis, et peritiae litteralis nitore conspicuo, PETRUS peccator monachus salutem.

Praestolatus sum, et certum tenui, ut juxta condictum, sacri ordinis arripere institutum. Sed quia te rex Aegypti luti et lateris servitio non oppressit (Exod. I, V): quia a procinctu suae militiae satrapis insistentibus non abiecit, sed potius cum Levita illo de latere montis Ephraim blandiens socer Bethlehemita retinuit, filiaeque suae amore devinctum, multis sermonum atque refectionum suavitatibus delinivit (II Reg. XXIX; Judic. XVI); quod non homini, sed Deo spoponderas, humana non persolvisti temeritate.

[DE FIDE DEO OBSTRACTA.]

CAPUT PRIMUM. Quod nulla excusatione licet non implere votum.

Obsecro, mi frater, quid prudentia tua valet excusationis obtendere? quid argumentatur, ut ei liceat quod, Christo iudice et angelis testibus, promiserat, non implere? cum Dominus per Moysen dicat: «Si quis virorum voverit Domino, aut se constrinxerit juramento, non faciet irritum verbum; sed omne quod promisit, implebit (Num. XXX).» An forte hoc purgat mendacium, idoneumque videtur in defensione perfugium, quod Mediolanensis civitas tunc in seditionem versa, repentinum utique nostrum minabatur interitum? Et quod necessitas intulit, si voluntatis desit arbitrium, non manebit?

693-694 FORTY-SECOND OPUSCULUM. ON THE FAITH BOUND TO GOD NOT TO BE BROKEN; WITH ANOTHER DISSERTATION ON THE SAME SUBJECT ADDED.

ARGUMENT.

While the holy doctor was staying in Milan as a legate from the Apostolic See to correct the vices of the clergy of that Church, he had as a principal assistant a certain Landulf, a man of noble birth and of no ordinary knowledge of letters; who brought no mediocre zeal and authority to the task of carrying out that matter according to his intention. This man, when a popular sedition had been stirred up by those same clerics and both were being demanded for death by the raging minds of the common people, vowed that as soon as he had escaped from such a terrible storm, having bid farewell to human affairs, he would fly to the harbor of religion. However, when he had obtained his wish and the sedition of the people had been calmed by the dexterity and eloquence of Damian, he neglected to fulfill his vow. He writes to him, therefore, and having enumerated the examples of many who had paid heavy penalties to God for faith not kept, he exhorts him to fear breaking the faith bound not to man, but to God.

To LANDULF, a cleric of senatorial race and conspicuous for the brilliance of his literary skill, PETER, sinner and monk, sends greeting.

I have waited and held it for certain that, according to the agreement, you would take up the institute of the sacred order. But because the king of Egypt did not oppress you with the service of clay and brick (Exod. I, V): because he did not cast you out from the readiness of his warfare when the satraps were pressing, but rather, like that Levite from the side of Mount Ephraim, the Bethlehemite father-in-law detained you with flattery and, bound by the love of his daughter, softened you with many sweetnesses of speeches and refreshments (II Reg. XXIX; Judic. XVI); that which you had promised not to man, but to God, you have not fulfilled by human temerity.

[ON THE FAITH BOUND TO GOD.]

CHAPTER ONE. That it is not permitted to leave a vow unfulfilled by any excuse.

I beseech you, my brother, what excuse can your prudence offer? what does it argue, so that it may be allowed not to fulfill what it had promised, with Christ as judge and the angels as witnesses? when the Lord says through Moses: "If any man shall vow a vow unto the Lord, or bind himself by an oath, he shall not make his word void; but he shall fulfill all that he promised (Num. XXX)." Or does this perhaps purge the lie, and seem a suitable refuge in defense, that the city of Milan, then turned into sedition, threatened our sudden death? And that which necessity brought in, if the choice of the will be lacking, shall it not remain?

Sed canonica decernit auctoritas, ut si vidua pietatis violentiam pertimescens, sacrum velamen quasi non perseverantiam [perseveratura] suscipiat, ab eo quod semel iniit proposito non recedat.

Absit ergo ut virum timor absolvat, qui feminas etiam in iudicio non excusat; praesertim cum me denuntiantem, ne hujusmodi te voto pro timore mortis constringeres, nisi etiam consequenter per vivi operis efficaciam promissa impleres; tu te divinae sententiae devotasti, si datae sponsionis aliquando mysterium violares. Dicam quod super non dissimili re nuper apud nos accidisse cognoscitur.

CAPUT II.

Arduinus damnatus, quod monasticum habitum, ut voverat, non suscepisset.

Vir quidam, Arduinus nomine, famosae prudentiae, genere clarus, divitiis opulentus, certa mihi devotione sponderat, quod si ante non posset, saltem expleto decennio, ad monasterium B. Vincentii, quod videlicet in Urbinati constitutum est territorio, monachicum suscepturus habitum declinaret. Tandem termino conductae pactionis exacto, cum ego huic assiduus exactor insisterem; ille inde cedendo, blandiendo, verbis quidem bonum omne promitteret, ipsius autem conversionis effectum quibusdam tergiversationibus protelaret; rector quoque jam dicti monasterii illius favebat votis, dissuadebatque converti, cujus nimirum pernecessariis sustentabatur auxiliis. Interea languore corporis irruente decubuit, peccata confessus, iudicio sacerdotis absolvitur, pauperibus et ecclesiis multa largitur, in tantum, ut cunctis quasi bene compositis, assistentes sibi cognatos et affines sub hac obtestatione constringeret; «Obsecro, inquit, per charitatem, quae Deus est, nemo me reddi huic mortali vitae deposcat; ne quod absit, imparatum postmodum mors improvisa reperiatur (II Joan. IV).» Aliquanto autem post ejus obitum tempore, praedicto abbati vir ille per visum nocturnae quietis apparuit. Videbatur autem quod in spatiosa quadam campi planitie imperator, si recte teneo, vel quaelibet excelsa potestas, cum totius regni primoribus et copioso moraretur exercitu. Cumque ille stupefactus huc illucque oculos deduceret, ecce Arduinus a quibusdam tanquam custodibus celeriter ducebatur. Heus, inquit, siste gradum, fige pedem, quiesce paulisper, mihi non loqueris, Arduine?

But canonical authority decrees that if a widow, fearing the violence of piety, should receive the sacred veil as if not about to persevere, she should not withdraw from that purpose which she once entered upon.

Far be it, therefore, that fear should absolve a man, which does not excuse even women in judgment; especially since, when I was warning you not to bind yourself by such a vow for fear of death unless you also consequently fulfilled your promises through the efficacy of living work, you devoted yourself to the divine sentence if you should ever violate the mystery of the pledge given. I will tell of something that is known to have happened recently among us regarding a not dissimilar matter.

CHAPTER II.

Arduin condemned, because he had not taken up the monastic habit as he had vowed.

A certain man, Arduin by name, of famous prudence, noble in birth, opulent in riches, had promised me with certain devotion that, if he could not before, at least at the end of a decade, he would turn aside to the monastery of Blessed Vincent, which is situated in the territory of Urbino, to receive the monastic habit. Finally, when the term of the agreed pact had expired and I was insisting as a constant exacter, he, by yielding and flattering, promised indeed every good thing in words, but prolonged the effect of his conversion itself with certain evasions; the rector also of the said monastery favored his wishes and dissuaded him from being converted, by whose very necessary assistance he was surely sustained. In the meantime, as a languor of the body rushed in, he lay down; having confessed his sins, he was absolved by the judgment of a priest, and gave much to the poor and to churches, to such an extent that, with all things being as it were well arranged, he bound his kinsmen and relatives assisting him under this protestation: "I beseech you," he said, "by the charity which is God, let no one ask for me to be restored to this mortal life; lest, which God forbid, an unforeseen death should afterwards find me unprepared (II Joan. IV)." But some time after his death, that man appeared to the aforesaid abbot in a vision of nightly rest. It seemed that in a certain spacious plain of a field, an emperor, if I remember correctly, or some high power, was staying with the leading men of the whole kingdom and a copious army. And when he, being stupefied, cast his eyes hither and thither, behold, Arduin was being led quickly by some men as if by guards. Ho, he said, stay your step, fix your foot, rest a little; will you not speak to me, Arduin?

Age, frater, quid tibi est? laetaris an pateris? adest poena vel gloria? Cui tristis et flebilis: Cur, ait, me de gloria consulis, qui jugibus poenis afficio, et ne ad momentum quidem respirare permittor? Ad quem abbas: Quid tibi, inquit, B. Vincentius, num tibi nunc in necessitate non succurrit, cui ad collaborandum suae domus administratoribus tam sedulo decertasti? Cui mox ille subjunxit: Sanctus, ait, Vincentius diu me suum fecit sperare colloquium; sed quia dudum fatigatus, hoc obtinere non merui, spem hanc, omnino jam frustratus, amisi. Ubi solerter attendendum quam recta sit linea divinae justitiae, imo quam artifex apud Deum mensura vindictae. Ille siquidem dum adhuc viveret, convertendum se in monasterio beati martyris et promittebat, et differebat; nunc autem ad ejusdem martyris venire colloquium, et quasi ex promissione sperabat, et tamen nullatenus impetrabat. Dignumque fuit, ut abbas potissimum hanc cerneret visionem, qui ne converteretur, illi obstiterat.

Alius etiam aequae notus mihi, atque civis in Ravennati urbe pollebat, et legis peritia strenuus, et grammaticorum regulis competenter instructus. Hic mecum fidedictor instituit, ut si ego, simul et ipse relinqueret saeculum. Quid plura? Tandem ego ad conversionem veniens, ut sponsio redderetur exegi, sed obtinere non potui. Ille quippe me gaudendo praemisit, suaeque vestigia subsistens, artificiose repressit. Non diebus vero multis postmodum, dum hunc adversus levirum suum furentis animi livor accenderet, gladio repente percussa manus ejus obriguit; sicque stupefacta mansit ac rigida deinceps, ut bajulo suo magis esset oneri quam virtuti. Jam itaque inutilis factus, mundum, dum abuteretur, abjecit; et non jam manceps, sed cum Benjamin totus dexter (Gen. XXXV), in sancta usque ad obitum conversatione permansit.

CAPUT III.

Episcopus percussus in gutture, quod pauperulae porcum abstulisset, religioni se dedit.

Interea Joannes quoque Commiacensis episcopus ad memoriam redit, qui dum conversionem suam per longa temporum intervalla differret, aliquando contigit ut in fundo suo, quem in saltus possidebat territorio, moraretur. Illic itaque constitutus, pauperulae cuidam viduae porcum; quem velut spem sui victus alebat, praecepit auferri, suisque ferculis profuturum, non segnius praeparari. Emittit preces illa, fletus fundit ac gemitus, sibiique diligentiae suae reddi postulat detrimentum.

Come now, brother, how is it with you? are you rejoicing or suffering? is punishment present, or glory? To whom he, sad and tearful, said: "Why do you consult me about glory, I who am afflicted with perpetual punishments, and am not permitted to breathe even for a moment?" To him the abbot said: "What of Blessed Vincent? does he not help you now in your necessity, for whom you fought so zealously to collaborate with the administrators of his house?" To which he soon added: "Saint Vincent made me hope for his conversation for a long time; but because, being weary for a long time, I did not deserve to obtain this, having been altogether frustrated, I have lost this hope." Where it is carefully to be observed how straight is the line of divine justice, or rather how skillful is the measure of vengeance with God. For while he was still living, he both promised that he would be converted in the monastery of the blessed martyr, and delayed it; but now he both hoped to come to the conversation of the same martyr, as if from a promise, and yet in no way obtained it. And it was worthy that the abbot especially should see this vision, who had stood in his way lest he be converted.

Another also, equally known to me, flourished as a citizen in the city of Ravenna, both strenuous in the skill of law and competently instructed in the rules of grammarians. He established himself with me as a co-pledger, that if I should leave the world, he would do the same. What more? Finally, when I came to conversion, I demanded that the pledge be rendered, but I could not obtain it. He indeed sent me ahead rejoicing and, staying behind, artificially repressed his own footsteps. Not many days afterwards, while the malice of a raging mind against his brother-in-law was inflaming him, his hand, suddenly struck by a sword, became stiff; and so it remained stupefied and rigid thereafter, that it was more of a burden than a power to its bearer. Having already become useless, he cast away the world while he was abusing it; and no longer a bondsman, but like Benjamin "all right-handed" (Gen. XXXV), he remained in holy conversation until his death.

CHAPTER III.

A Bishop struck in the throat because he had taken away the pig of a poor woman, gave himself to religion.

In the meantime, John, Bishop of Comacchio, also comes to memory, who while he delayed his conversion through long intervals of time, it happened at one time that he was staying on his estate, which he possessed in the territory of the forest. Being established there, he commanded that the pig of a certain poor widow, which she was raising as the hope of her living, be taken away, and prepared no less quickly to be profitable for his dishes. She sends forth prayers, pours out tears and groans, and demands that the loss of her diligence be restored to her.

Sed suo ventri magis quam illi pius episcopus dum propriis providet mensis, mandatum parvipendit auctoris, qui per prophetam dicit: «Subvenite oppresso, iudicate pupillo, defendite viduam (Isai. I).» Sed qui absens credebatur instituendo praeceptum, praesentem esse se docuit inferendo iudicium. Nam episcopus, dum lacrymas viduae, suae facit delicias gulae, mox percussus in gutture, vulnus incurrit, quod nullis medicorum studiis, donec vixit, evasit.

Hoc itaque praepeditus incommodo, cum jam juxta Scripturam, sola vexatio intellectum daret auditui (Psal. XXVIII), tandem sanis consiliis acquievit, et episcopales infulas monachica professione mutavit, atque in Pomposiano coenobio, quod in B. Mariae semper virginis est honore constructum, longis post temporibus vixit. Usque tamen ad obitum tanta laesi gutturi laboravit molestia, ut nisi cum magna difficultate trajicere alimenta non posset; adeo ut ad geminam semper mensam succedentium sibi fratrum in refectioe discumberet, vixque tantum cibi caperet, unde recreare stomachum potuisset.

Sed dum hujus episcopi reminiscimus, sub hac occasione quid etiam Clusino episcopo contigerit, scribere provocamur. In ipsa plane quarta feria, quae initium Quadragesimae dicitur, fecit convivium sumptuosis dapibus instrui, et balneum praeparari, accitisque militibus, et obsequentium turbis lautum diem deduxit, et velut advenienti nuptae, Quadragesimae cum nuptiali convivio gratulabundus occurrit. Ubi hoc tantum dissonabat a regula, quia cum adhuc livescerent in capitibus cineres, aestuabant ingurgitati mero et distenti dapibus ventres. Sed, o vigilans super nos divina clementia! incolumis tunc, atque vegeti vultum episcopi paralysis repente corripuit, ejusque faciem inhonestam visu atque ora distorsit; per plures etiam annos, quibus postmodum supervixit, hoc in se divinae animadversionis insigne portavit.

CAPUT IV.

Adamus Sempronienis episcopus inopinato moritur, quod religionis ingressum distulisset.

Num et Adam Semproniensem episcopum praeteribo, qui se monachum fieri saepe promiserat; sed semper excusationes quibusdam quasi rationibus coloratas obtendere satagebat. Aliquando mitius febriens, me vocavit ad se; cui nimirum, ut monachus fieret, cum ego violenter insisterem, velle se perhibebat; et tamen ut per quasdam verborum ejus rimas erumpere videbatur, rem differre tentabat.

But while the pious bishop provides more for his own belly than for her at his own tables, he undervalued the command of the Author, who says through the prophet: "Relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow (Isai. I)." But He who was believed to be absent in instituting the precept, showed Himself to be present by bringing in the judgment. For the bishop, while he made the tears of the widow the delights of his gluttony, was soon struck in the throat and incurred a wound, which he did not escape by any studies of physicians as long as he lived.

Hindered therefore by this inconvenience, when now according to the Scripture, only vexation should give understanding to the hearing (Psal. XXVIII), he finally yielded to sound counsels, and changed the episcopal mitres for the monastic profession, and lived for a long time thereafter in the monastery of Pomposa, which is constructed in honor of Blessed Mary ever Virgin. Yet even until his death he labored under such great trouble of his injured throat, that he could not swallow food except with great difficulty; so that he sat always at the double table of the brothers succeeding him in refreshment, and took scarcely so much food as might have been able to refresh his stomach.

But while we remember this bishop, we are provoked to write what also happened to the Bishop of Chiusi. On that very Wednesday, which is called the beginning of Lent, he caused a banquet to be furnished with sumptuous dishes, and a bath to be prepared, and having summoned soldiers and crowds of attendants, he spent a luxurious day, and met Lent with a nuptial banquet as if meeting a bride arriving. Where this only disagreed with the rule, that while the ashes were still dark on their heads, their bellies, engorged with unmixed wine and distended with dishes, were seething. But, O divine clemency watchful over us! a paralysis suddenly seized the face of the then healthy and vigorous bishop, and distorted his face, shameful to see, and his mouth; through several years also, during which he lived thereafter, he carried in himself this mark of divine animadversion.

CHAPTER IV.

Adam, Bishop of Fossombrone, dies unexpectedly because he had delayed his entrance into religion.

Shall I also pass over Adam, Bishop of Fossombrone, who had often promised to become a monk; but always busied himself with offering excuses colored by certain as it were reasons. Once, suffering from a mild fever, he called me to himself; to whom, when I was violently insisting that he should become a monk, he claimed that he was willing; and yet, as it seemed to break out through certain cracks of his words, he was attempting to delay the matter.

Postremo quod apud me magis obtinuit, ait: Ego quidem, pater, quidquid praecipis, incunctanter obtempero; verumtamen nolo te lateat, quia mox ut ego factus fuero monachus, praedis quoque atque rapinis haec procul dubio patebit Ecclesia; insuper et possessiones ejus, et praedia scelesti homines radicitus extirpabunt. Hoc ergo audiens, dum delusus Ecclesiae tam periclitanti, proh dolor! animae non praevidi. Recedens igitur sibi, suisque mandatum dedi, ut si languor aliquatenus ingravesceret, aut mihi per judicem protinus innotescerent, aut illum ad monasterium non longe positum deferrent.

CAPUT VII.

Clericus luxuriosus cum pellice incendio perit.

Memini plane, quia cum apud Parmense oppidum liberalium artium studiis docendus insisterem, dum adhuc videlicet in ipso adolescentiae flore, et nova pubertas indueret faciem, et aestus libidinis accenderet carnem, clericus quidam, Zeuzolinus nomine, pellicem suam juxta meum habebat hospitium, ut aiunt, aspectu lubricam et inhonesto satis decore venustam. Hic itaque nitidulus, et semper ornatus atque conspicuus incedebat, ita ut caput ejus nunquam nisi gibellinica pellis obtegeret, indumenta carbasina, atque niventia siligio per artem fullonis inficeret, calceus postremo ad aquilini rostri speciem non falleret. Erat illi praeterea vox gracilis, suavis ac tinnula, adeo ut in ecclesia modulans audientium corda mulceret, et astantium in se plebis ora converteret. Affluebat uterque deliciis, rubebant ora flammantia; quotidie cachinnis invicem atque ludibriis, oculorum nutibus et scurrilitatis illecebris festivis applaudebant.

His ergo furiis ac perditis moribus, quia corpore contiguus aderam, mente longinquus esse non poteram. Quid dicam? quia dum haec cernerem, titillantibus luxuriae molestias pertuli, cum etiam postquam ad eremum veni, ejusdem lenocinii memoria me saepius colaphizare non destitit; saepe, fateor, mihi malignus hostis hoc schema proposuit, et illos esse felices ac beatissimos, qui tam jucunde viverent, persuadere tentavit. Sed hujus beatitudinis initium diximus, consequenter etiam quo fine concluderint attexamus. Nam dum per quinque fere annorum lustra in hac luxuriosa voluptate vixissent, ante annum, cum commune ipsius urbis flagraret incendium, in una domo reperti, uterque simul igne consumpti sunt. Sic sic nimirum flamma libidinis ignem meruit combustionis; et quid dulcis vita contulerit, amarus, proh dolor! exitus demonstravit.

Finally, what prevailed more with me, he said: "I indeed, father, obey whatever you command without hesitation; nevertheless, I do not want it to be hidden from you, that as soon as I shall have been made a monk, this Church will without doubt be open to plunders and robberies; and moreover wicked men will radically uproot its possessions and lands." Hearing this, therefore, while I was deluded for the Church so much in peril, alas! I did not foresee for his soul. Receding therefore, I gave a command to him and his people, that if the languor should in any way grow heavy, they should either notify me immediately through a messenger, or carry him to a monastery placed not far off.

CHAPTER VII.

A luxurious cleric perished in a fire with his mistress.

I remember clearly that when I was staying at the town of Parma to be taught in the studies of the liberal arts, while I was still namely in the very flower of youth, and a new puberty was covering my face, and the heat of lust was inflaming my flesh, a certain cleric, named Zeuzolinus, kept his mistress near my lodging, who was, as they say, slippery in appearance and beautiful enough with a quite dishonest grace. And so this man used to go about elegant, and always adorned and conspicuous, so much so that nothing except a zibeline fur ever covered his head; he would dye his linen garments, and snowy fine wheat by the art of the fuller; finally, his shoe did not fail in the appearance of an eagle's beak. There was to him, moreover, a slender voice, sweet and tinkling, so much so that when modulating in the church he would soothe the hearts of the listeners, and turn the faces of the people standing by toward himself. Each of them abounded in delights, their flaming faces were red; daily they would applaud each other with festive laughs and mockeries, with nods of the eyes and the allurements of scurrilousness.

From these furies, therefore, and lost morals, because I was present close in body, I could not be far off in mind. What shall I say? Because while I saw these things, I endured the troubles of titillating luxury, since even after I came to the hermitage, the memory of that same enticement did not cease to buffet me more often; often, I confess, the malignant enemy proposed this pattern to me, and attempted to persuade me that those were happy and most blessed who lived so pleasantly. But we have told the beginning of this happiness; consequently, let us also weave together by what end they concluded. For when they had lived in this luxurious pleasure for nearly five lustra of years, a year ago, when a common fire of that city was blazing, having been found in one house, they were both consumed together by the fire. Thus, thus indeed the flame of lust earned the fire of combustion; and what a sweet life conferred, a bitter, alas! end demonstrated.

Sed ut ad reos redeam, qui conversionem suam et pollicentur, et fallunt, presbyter quidam Maurus nomine, ante annos paucos se mihi devote commisit, meque certum, quia monachus in eremo fieret, reddidit; paulo post mutatum est cor ejus, ac foedus quod pro me cum Deo pepigerat, violavit. Sed ut caecitas mentis erumperet in superficiem carnis, et caligo quae latebat liquido pingeretur in fronte, in ejus oculo repente vulnus oboritur, quod eum, donec advixit, inhonesta deformitate foedavit. Postmodum vero dum orationis studio Romam pergeret, amnemque tenuis admodum gurgitis transvaderet, cum caeteri omnes vadum illaesi transmearent, solus equus illius subito sine sessore repertus est. Requirentes igitur eum, dum per alveum fluminis huc illucque discurrunt, undis hunc obrutum exanime cadaver inveniunt. Hoc itaque modo dum sancto proposito vagationis suae quisquilias praetulit, utriusque laboris meritum delusus amisit.

Verum ego dum dulcedine tuae charitatis illectus, sermonem diutius protraho, non clam me est, quod modum jam compendii epistolaris excedo. Porro autem non ego te peritum rudis admoneo, non de Scripturis exempla propono, sed tanquam rusticus res tantum domesticas retuli; ut quotidianis stomachum dapibus, hebetem vilibus ad edendum siliquis, vel herbis virentibus excitarem. Ad tuae igitur te remitto mentis armarium, ubi certe plurimae conduntur paginae Scripturarum. Illic prudentia tua solerter inquirat, quid melius sit, an ut persoluto conversionis tuae debito, in soliis judicantium sedeas; vel non soluto, ante tribunal aequissimi judicis rationem redditurus assistas (Matth. XIX). Unum scio, quia si a mundi vanitatibus ulla posses ratione converti, fieres procul dubio os Dei, praeco Christi, tuba coelestis eloquii, destructor diaboli, aedificii fundator aeterni; esses postremo lumen Ecclesiae, ac murus inexpugnabilis militiae Christianae.

DISSERTATIO ALTERA, DE SERVANDA FIDE DEO PRAESTITA. *ARGUMENTUM.*

But that I may return to the guilty, who both promise their conversion and deceive, a certain priest named Maurus committed himself devotedly to me a few years ago, and made me certain that he would become a monk in the hermitage; a little later his heart was changed, and he violated the covenant which he had struck with God for my sake. But that the blindness of the mind might break out onto the surface of the flesh, and the darkness which was hidden might be clearly painted on the forehead, a wound suddenly arose in his eye, which defiled him with a dishonest deformity as long as he lived. Afterwards, indeed, while he was proceeding to Rome for the sake of study of prayer, and was wading across a river of a quite thin whirlpool, when all others were crossing the ford unharmed, his horse alone was suddenly found without a rider. Seeking him, therefore, while they ran hither and thither through the bed of the river, they found him overwhelmed by the waves, a lifeless corpse. In this way, therefore, while he preferred the sweepings of his wandering to the holy purpose, having been deluded, he lost the merit of both labors.

But while I, enticed by the sweetness of your charity, prolong the discourse longer, it is not hidden from me that I am already exceeding the measure of an epistolary compendium. Furthermore, however, I, unpolished, do not advise you who are skilled; I do not propose examples from the Scriptures, but as a rustic I have related only domestic things; that I might excite the stomach, dull from daily feasts, with cheap husks or green herbs for eating. I remit you, therefore, to the armory of your mind, where certainly very many pages of the Scriptures are stored. There let your prudence search skillfully what is better: whether that, having paid the debt of your conversion, you should sit on the thrones of those judging; or, not having paid it, you should stand before the tribunal of the most just judge to render an account (Matth. XIX). One thing I know: that if you could be converted from the vanities of the world by any reason, you would without doubt become the mouth of God, the herald of Christ, the trumpet of heavenly eloquence, the destroyer of the devil, the founder of an eternal building; you would be, finally, the light of the Church, and an impregnable wall of the Christian warfare.

SECOND DISSERTATION, ON KEEPING THE FAITH PLEDGED TO GOD. *ARGUMENT.*

Attonem quemdam professione jurisconsultum, qui cum Deo se dicatum reliquum vitae in monasterio acturum verbis conceptis pollicitus esset, fidem impie praestare recusabat; perjuriumque suum cavillationibus quibusdam (ut huiusmodi solent homines) et captiosis argumentorum laqueis defendere nitebatur; a tam nefario facinore detertere conatur et culpae magnitudine, et poena ante oculos proposita.

ATTONI cauidico PETRUS peccator monachus salutem in Domino.

Constat te, vir illustris, domini Mainardi abbatis manibus sponte commissum, et pro coelesti desiderio monachicum devovisse propositum: nunc autem mente mutata, sicut dicitur, non modo votum violare disponis, sed et id fieri posse per multas argumentorum versutias cavillaris. Hinc est, quod eundem abbatem hoc conspuisse jurgio stomachatus assereris: Ostende, inquires, mihi authenticae Scripturae sententiam, qua me, vel mundo digne calumnieris abstractum, vel monasticae regulae jure fatearis obnoxium. Ut igitur legis perito viro in primis de forensi jure respondeam, Romanis legibus cautum est, ut quod semel a dante conceditur, nullo modo revocetur.

[DE SERVANDA FIDE DEO PRAESTITA.]

CAPUT PRIMUM. Quod Dei vota ac promissa violare nefas sit.

Cum ergo haec apud homines jubeatur forma servari, quanto magis apud Deum debet inviolabiliter custodiri! Homo itaque non amittit quod semel accepit: Deus autem possessionis suae jure fraudabitur? Terrenae militiae duces, eos sibi qui militiam professi sunt, vindicant; nos in divini procinctus arma juramus, characterem nobis militiae coelestis imprimimus, et notam nobis inurere transfugii non timemus? Dediti Deo non aurum, non equum, non denique alienum, quod extra te, sed temetipsum, et nunc subtrahere niteris? Quam ergo mercem vice tui Domino permutabis? «Quam enim commutationem dabit homo pro anima sua? (Matth. XVI.)» Quanquam Moyses in lege praecipiat: «Homo, inquit, qui votum fecerit et sponderit Deo animam suam, sub aestimatione dabit pretium (Levit. XXVII.)» Ubi solerter attendendum est quod paulo inferius subinfertur: «Omne quod Domino consecratur, sive homo fuerit, sive animal, sive ager, non vendi, nec redimi poterit; quidquid enim semel fuerit consecratum, sanctum sanctorum erit Domino (Ibid.).»

A certain Atto, a lawyer by profession, who, although he had promised in formal words that he, dedicated to God, would spend the remainder of his life in a monastery, impiously refused to fulfill his faith; and he was striving to defend his perjury with certain cavils (as men of this kind are accustomed) and with the deceitful snares of arguments; [the author] attempts to deter him from such a nefarious crime both by the magnitude of the fault and by the punishment proposed before his eyes.

To ATTO the lawyer, PETER, sinner and monk, greeting in the Lord.

It is established, illustrious man, that you committed yourself voluntarily to the hands of the lord abbot Mainard, and on account of a heavenly desire you vowed the monastic purpose: now however, with your mind changed, as it is said, not only do you prepare to violate the vow, but you also cavil that this can be done through many shrewdnesses of arguments. Hence it is, that you are asserted to have vomited against the same abbot with this quarrel, saying: "Show me a sentence of authentic Scripture, by which you may either worthily accuse me of being withdrawn from the world, or confess me to be subject by right to the monastic rule." So therefore, that I may respond in the first place to a man skilled in the law concerning forensic right, it is cautioned by the Roman laws, that what is once granted by a giver, is in no way revoked.

[ON KEEPING THE FAITH PLEDGED TO GOD.]

CHAPTER I. That it is a crime to violate the vows and promises of God.

Since therefore this form is commanded to be observed among men, how much more ought it to be kept inviolably before God! A man, therefore, does not lose what he once received; shall God then be defrauded of the right of His possession? The leaders of earthly warfare claim for themselves those who have professed military service; do we swear into the arms of the divine preparation, do we imprint on ourselves the character of the heavenly warfare, and do we not fear to burn into ourselves the mark of desertion? You gave to God not gold, not a horse, not finally something foreign which is outside of you, but your very self, and now you strive to withdraw? What reward, therefore, will you exchange with the Lord in place of yourself? "For what exchange shall a man give for his soul? (Matth. XVI.)" Although Moses in the law commands: "A man," he says, "who shall have made a vow and pledged his soul to God, shall give the price under estimation (Levit. XXVII)." Where it is to be carefully noted what is added a little lower: "Everything that is consecrated to the Lord, whether it be a man, or an animal, or a field, cannot be sold, nor redeemed; for whatever shall have been once consecrated, shall be the holy of holies to the Lord (Ibid.)."

Audi etiam, fili mi, quam terribilem in te sententiam vir sapiens manifeste depromat: «Initium, ait, superbiae hominis, apostatare a Deo, quoniam ab eo qui fecit illum recessit cor ejus; quoniam initium omnis peccati est superbia: qui tenuerit illam, adimplebitur maledictis, et subvertet eum in finem (Eccli. X).»

Ergo, frater mi, juxta consilium ejusdem sapientis: «Convertere ad Dominum, et relinque peccata tua, precare ante faciem Dei, et minue offendicula (Ibid.).» Ubi praesto subjungit: «Revertere ad Dominum, et avertere ab injustitia tua; et nimis odito execrationem, et cognosce justitias et judicia Dei, et sta in sorte propositionis et orationis altissimi Dei (Ibid.).» Illud etiam ejusdem viri te non praetereat. «Non impediarius orare semper, et non verearis usque ad mortem justificari; quoniam merces Domini manet in aeternum (Eccli. XVIII).» Illud etiam non obliviscaris: «Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et ne differas de die in diem; subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictae disperdet te (Eccl. V).» Ecclesiastes etiam dicit: «Memento Creatoris tui in diebus juventutis tuae, antequam veniat tempus afflictionis tuae, et appropinquent anni de quibus dicas: Non mihi placent (Eccle. XII).»

CAPUT II.

Quod qui vota non perficit, Deum videtur irridere.

Obtulisti temetipsum Deo, et factus refuga subtraxisti? Deum puerum, et te facis ovum. Nam dum te sibi prius oblatum conaris, quasi ludendo subducere, videris eum velle velut puerum obgannire. «Nolite errare; Deus non irridetur. Quae enim seminaverit homo, haec metet (Gal. VI).» Deludis auctorem, offendis mendacio veritatem. Porro cum Deus sit procul dubio Veritas, nullo magis offenditur vitio quam mendacio. Audi itaque quid in Deuteronomio per Moysen Dominus dicat: «Cum votum voveris Domino Deo tuo, non tardabis reddere; quia requirit illud Dominus Deus tuus; et si moratus fueris, reputabitur tibi in peccatum: si nolueris polliceri, absque peccato eris; quod autem semel egressum est de labiis tuis, observabis, et facies sicut promisisti Domino Deo tuo, et propria voluntate, et ore tuo locutus es (Deut. XXIII).»

Hear also, my son, how terrible a sentence a wise man clearly brings forth against you: "The beginning," he says, "of the pride of man, is to apostatize from God, because his heart has receded from Him who made him; because the beginning of all sin is pride: he who shall have held it, shall be filled with curses, and it shall subvert him unto the end (Eccli. X)."

Therefore, my brother, according to the counsel of the same wise man: "Be converted to the Lord, and leave thy sins, pray before the face of God, and diminish thy stumbling-blocks (Ibid.)." Where he immediately subjoins: "Return to the Lord, and turn away from thy injustice; and exceedingly hate execration, and know the justices and judgments of God, and stand in the lot of the purpose and prayer of the most high God (Ibid.)." Let that also of the same man not pass you by: "Be not hindered from praying always, and fear not to be justified even until death; because the reward of the Lord remains forever (Eccli. XVIII)." Also do not forget that: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and do not put it off from day to day; for suddenly His wrath shall come, and in the time of vengeance He shall destroy thee (Eccl. V)." Ecclesiastes also says: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of thy affliction comes, and the years approach of which thou shalt say: They please me not (Eccle. XII)."

CHAPTER II.

That he who does not fulfill his vows seems to mock God.

You offered your very self to God, and having become a runaway, you withdrew? You make God a boy, and yourself an egg. For while you attempt to withdraw what was previously offered by you to Him, as if in play, you seem to want to snarl at Him as if at a boy. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap (Gal. VI)." You delude the author, you offend the truth with a lie. Furthermore, since God is without doubt Truth, He is offended by no vice more than by a lie. Hear therefore what the Lord says through Moses in Deuteronomy: "When thou shalt have vowed a vow to the Lord thy God, thou shalt not delay to pay it; because the Lord thy God will require it; and if thou shalt have delayed, it shall be imputed to thee for a sin: if thou wilt not promise, thou shalt be without sin; but what has once gone out of thy lips, thou shalt observe, and do as thou hast promised to the Lord thy God, and hast spoken of thy own will and with thy own mouth (Deut. XXIII)."

Imo perpende insuper, et haec quam formidolosa sententia sit, quam per Evangelium Dominus intonat, dicens: «Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei (Luc. IX).» Spopondisti, et sponsionem violare non metuis? Vovisti, et votum solvere negligis? cum Psalmista dicat: «Venite et reddite (Psal. LXXV).» Salomon etiam in Proverbiis: «Fili mi, inquit, si spoponderis pro amico tuo, defixisti apud extraneum manum tuam; illaqueatus es verbis oris tui, et captus propriis sermonibus tuis (Prov. VI).»

Si ergo manum suam apud extraneum ille defigit, et reddendae pro eo rationi sese obnoxium facit, qui pro amico spoponderit, quanto magis tu ratiocinium Deo debes, qui non pro alieno vel extraneo spopondisti, sed temetipsum Deo specialiter obtulisti! Coepisti quidem divini amoris igne fervere, cum te decrevisti militiae coelestis obsequio mancipare: ardere scilicet per spiritum coepisti, sed per degenerem carnis ignaviam tepuisti. Unde per Apocalypsim Joannis sententia haec in te divina dirigitur, cum torpens animus tuus a sancto proposito revocatur: «Utinam frigidus esses aut calidus; sed quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, neque calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo (Apoc. III).» Sane praeterquam cibus evomitur, nulli prorsus usui congruus judicatur. Tu vero et in corpus Christi tanquam suave refectionis epulum trajecisti, dum observandis ejus excubiis te per astipulationis et commissionis iudicium tradidisti; nunc autem, pro dolor! quasi fastiditus evomeris, dum votum sponsionis refringere ac violare conaris; non attendens quod in libro Numeri per Moysen Dominus ait: «Si quis virorum votum Domino voverit, aut se constrinxerit juramento, non faciet irritum verbum suum; sed omne quod promisit, implebit (Num. XXX).» Et quidem in conspectu hominum laicus es per paludamenti ac saecularis habitus speciem; sed in Dei omnipotentis obtutibus a monacho cecidisti per violatam sacri propositi sponsionem. Coram hominibus stare conspiceris, sed in conspectu Domini cecidisti. Nam quod tibi fuerat ante commissionem licitum, de caetero tibi licere non poterit, dum a melioris propositi deliberatione succumbis.

CAPUT III.

Bona opera fidem frangentium Deo minus placent.

Nay, consider moreover, how fearful a sentence this is, which the Lord thunders through the Gospel, saying: "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luc. IX)." You pledged, and do you not fear to violate the pledge? You vowed, and do you neglect to pay the vow? since the Psalmist says: "Come and pay (Psal. LXXV)." Solomon also in the Proverbs: "My son," he says, "if thou shalt have pledged for thy friend, thou hast fastened thy hand with a stranger; thou art ensnared by the words of thy mouth, and caught by thy own speeches (Prov. VI)."

If therefore he fastens his hand with a stranger, and makes himself liable for rendering an account for him, who shall have pledged for a friend, how much more do you owe a reckoning to God, who pledged not for another or a stranger, but specifically offered your very self to God! You began indeed to grow warm with the fire of divine love, when you decreed to hand yourself over to the service of the heavenly warfare: that is, you began to burn through the spirit, but through the degenerate sluggishness of the flesh you grew lukewarm. Whence through the Apocalypse of John this divine sentence is directed against you, when your sluggish soul is recalled from its holy purpose: "I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth (Apoc. III)." Surely, after food is vomited, it is judged fit for no use at all. You indeed also passed into the body of Christ as a sweet feast of refreshment, while you handed yourself over to the observing of His watches by the judgment of stipulation and commission; now however, alas! you are vomited as if loathed, while you attempt to break and violate the vow of your pledge; not attending to what the Lord says through Moses in the book of Numbers: "If any man shall have vowed a vow to the Lord, or shall have bound himself by an oath, he shall not make his word void; but all that he promised, he shall fulfill (Num. XXX)." And indeed in the sight of men you are a layman by the appearance of the cloak and secular habit; but in the sight of almighty God you have fallen from a monk through the violated pledge of your holy purpose. Before men you are seen to stand, but in the sight of the Lord you have fallen. For what had been lawful for you before the commission, henceforth will not be able to be lawful for you, while you succumb from the deliberation of a better purpose.

CHAPTER III.

The good works of those who break their faith please God less.

Sed quia mihi forte non credis, meisque sermonibus fidem adhibere contemnis, beatus saltem tibi Gregorius papa sufficiat, qui hoc in tertia expositionis homilia super Ezechielem, per haec eadem quae supponimus, verba declarat: «Sunt, ait, nonnulli qui bona quidem quae noverunt operantur, atque haec operantes, meliora deliberant; sed retractantes meliora, quae deliberaverant immutant. Et quidem bona agunt quae coeperunt; sed a melioribus, quae deliberaverant, succumbunt.» Hi nimirum ante humana judicia stare videntur in opere, sed ante omnipotentis Dei oculos ceciderunt in deliberatione. Unde fit plerumque, ut et bonum opus eorum minus placeat Deo; quia cum per mentis deliberationem in meliori gradu inconstanter ponitur, hoc ipsum cogitationis inconstancia accusat.

Sed quia perfecti quique magna se discretionis subtilitate conspiciunt, ne ad deteriora unquam vel in opere, vel in cogitatione delabantur; et quantum quotidie proficiunt, incessanter pensant, recte de his dicitur: «Non revertebantur, cum incederent; sed unumquodque ante faciem suam gradiebatur (Ezech. I).» Tu autem te, mi frater, econtra retrogradum exhibes, dum non cum sanctis animalibus ante faciem tuam graderis, sed ridiculose post tergum redire conaris. Nec illud advertis quod per Isaiam Dominus dicit: «Vae genti peccatrici, populo gravi iniquitate; semini nequam, filiis sceleratis: dereliquerunt Dominum, blasphemaverunt sanctum Israel, abalienati sunt retrorsum (Isai. I).» De quibus Jeremias: «Facti sunt retrorsum, et non ante (Jer. VII).»

Perpende ergo, quia qui retrorsum abalienatur in semine nequam, et inter sceleratos filios ponuntur: illos scilicet, qui non cum benedictione dignis in haereditatis jura succedunt, quibus dictum est: «In hoc vocati estis, ut benedictionem haereditate possideatis (I Petr. III):» sed cum eis potius, qui sententiam perpetuae maledictionis incurrunt, quibus utique dicitur: «Maledicti qui declinant a mandatis tuis (Psal. CXVIII).» Expedire te coepisti, frater, de laqueis hujus perniciosi ac deceptoris mundi, et festinare ad dulcedinem Dei; nunc disponis a Deo recedere, et mundi te rursus laqueis implicare? Contra quod Petrus ait: «Si enim refugientes coinquinationes mundi in cognitionem Domini nostri et Salvatoris Jesu Christi, his rursus implicati superantur, facta sunt eis posteriora deteriora prioribus (II Pet. II).» Melius enim erat illis non cognoscere viam justitiae, quam post agnitionem, retrorsum converti ab eo quod illis traditum est sancto mandato. Contigit enim eis illud vere proverbium: «Canis reversus ad suum vomitum, et sus lota in volutabro luti (II Pet. II).»

But because perhaps you do not believe me, and you disdain to apply faith to my words, let at least Blessed Pope Gregory suffice for you, who declares this in the third homily of his exposition upon Ezekiel, through these same words which we set down: "There are," he says, "some who indeed work the good things which they have known, and while working these, they deliberate better things; but retracting the better things, they change what they had deliberated. And indeed they do the good things which they began; but they succumb from the better things, which they had deliberated." These indeed seem to stand in their work before human judgments, but before the eyes of almighty God they have fallen in their deliberation. Whence it happens for the most part, that even their good work pleases God less; because since through the deliberation of the mind it is inconstantly placed in a better grade, the inconstancy of thought itself accuses it.

But because all the perfect behold themselves with great subtlety of discretion, lest they ever slide down to worse things either in work or in thought; and how much they profit daily, they weigh incessantly, it is rightly said of these: "They turned not when they went; but every one went before his face (Ezech. I)." You however, my brother, on the contrary exhibit yourself as retrograde, while you do not go before your face with the holy animals, but ridiculously you attempt to return behind your back. Nor do you observe that which the Lord says through Isaiah: "Woe to the sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, ungracious children: they have forsaken the Lord, they have blasphemed the Holy One of Israel, they are gone away backwards (Isai. I)." Of whom Jeremiah says: "They are gone backward, and not forward (Jer. VII)."

Consider therefore, that they who are alienated backward are placed in a wicked seed and among ungracious children: those namely, who do not succeed to the rights of inheritance with those worthy of blessing, to whom it was said: "Unto this are you called, that you may possess a blessing by inheritance (I Pet. III):" but rather with those who incur the sentence of perpetual malediction, to whom surely it is said: "Cursed are they that decline from thy commandments (Psal. CXVIII)." You began to free yourself, brother, from the snares of this pernicious and deceptive world, and to hasten to the sweetness of God; now do you prepare to recede from God, and to entangle yourself again in the snares of the world? Against which Peter says: "For if flying from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former (II Pet. II)." For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them. For that true proverb has happened to them: "The dog is returned to his vomit: and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (II Pet. II)."

Porro sicut per prophetam dicitur: «Quam durum et amarum est dereliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum (Jer. II).» Iterumque de te tuisque similibus: «Me, inquit, dereliquerunt fontem aquae vivae, et foderunt sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quae continere non valent aquas (Ibid.).» Quos contra Paulus admonet, dicens: «Videte, fratres, ne forte sit in aliquo vestrum cor malum incredulitatis, discedendi a Deo vivo et vero (Hebr. III).» A Deo plane non receditur gradibus pedum, sed pravorum perpetrationibus operum. Et cum a celsioris propositi sublimitate corruiatur, tunc a Deo, qui est vertex et cardo bonorum omnium, infelix anima separatur.

Non sufficit tibi, quia sacri ordinis sponsionem violata fide conaris infringere, nisi et ejusdem perversae defensionis audaciam velis, et in alios frivolis quibusdam argumentationibus propagare. Dogmatizas enim, ut arbitror, quia licet quispiam manibus se committat abbatis, et sacrum polliceatur subire propositum, non prohibeatur hujusmodi sponsionis violare promissum. Ex quibus profecto assertionibus haeresis oritur, nisi conatus iste tuus quantocius reprimatur. Neque enim mox ut quis in haeresim labitur, jure protinus haeretici vocabulo denotatur; sed ille duntaxat haeticus merito dicendus est qui tuetur errorem, qui defendit abominabilis perfidiae pravitatem.

Praeterea, nec abs re esse credimus, si vel pauca de sacris canonibus exempla ponamus; quatenus ex diversis auctoritatibus evidenter appareat, quatenus aversioni tuae reluctantis justitiae murus obsistat; ut oberrantibus inconstantiae tuae vestigiis nullum pateat prorsus aufugium; sed quocunque te verteris, auctoritatis te lora cohibeant, pravisque conatibus concorditer atque ideo valenter obsistant. Et dum per anfractus oberrare contendis, obicibus undique circumpositis, invitatus ad recti tramitis lineam revertaris. Attende igitur quid statuerit Chalcedonense concilium (Act. XV, can. 7): (Qui monachorum, inquit, vitam expetiverunt, statuimus, neque ad militiam, neque ad dignitatem aliquam venire mundanam. Sed hoc tentantes, et non agentes poenitentiam, quominus redeant ad hoc, quod propter Dominum primitus elegerunt, anathematizari.)

CAPUT IV.

Conciliorum decretis religiosae vitae propositum relinquentes damnantur.

Audi nihilominus et Leonis papae decretum: «Propositum monachi proprio arbitrio aut voluntate susceptum, deserere non potest absque peccato.»

Furthermore, as it is said through the prophet: "How hard and bitter it is to have left the Lord thy God (Jer. II)." And again concerning you and those like you: "Me," he says, "they have forsaken, the fountain of living water, and they have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Ibid.)." Against whom Paul admonishes, saying: "Take heed, brethren, lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living and true God (Hebr. III)." From God, clearly, one does not recede by steps of the feet, but by the perpetrations of wicked works. And when one falls from the sublimity of a higher purpose, then the unhappy soul is separated from God, who is the vertex and hinge of all good things.

It does not suffice for you, that you attempt to break the pledge of the holy order with violated faith, unless you also wish [to spread] the audacity of that same perverse defense, and to propagate it among others with certain frivolous argumentations. For you dogmatize, as I think, that although someone commits himself into the hands of an abbot, and promises to undergo a holy purpose, he is not prohibited from violating the promise of such a pledge. From which assertions surely a heresy arises, unless this attempt of yours be repressed as soon as possible. For not immediately as anyone slips into a heresy, is he straightway denoted by the word of a heretic; but that one only is worthily to be called a heretic who maintains error, who defends the depravity of abominable perfidy.

Moreover, we do not believe it to be out of place if we set down even a few examples from the sacred canons; so that from diverse authorities it may clearly appear, how much the wall of resisting justice stands against your turning away; so that to the wandering footsteps of your inconstancy no refuge at all may lie open; but wherever you turn yourself, the thongs of authority may restrain you, and consistently and therefore strongly resist your wicked attempts. And while you strive to wander through turnings, with obstacles placed around on every side, you may return unwillingly to the line of the right path. Attend therefore to what the Council of Chalcedon established (Act. XV, can. 7): (Those of the monks who have sought life, we have established, neither to come to military service, nor to any worldly dignity. But those attempting this, and not doing penance, so as to return to that which they first chose for the sake of the Lord, shall be anathematized.)

CHAPTER IV.

By the decrees of the Councils those leaving the purpose of religious life are condemned.

Hear nevertheless also the decree of Pope Leo: "The purpose of a monk undertaken by one's own judgment or will, cannot be deserted without sin."

Quod enim quis vovit Deo debet reddere. Unde qui relictæ singularitatis professione, ad militiam vel ad nuptias devolutus est, publicæ poenitentiae satisfactione purgandus est; quia et si innocens militiam, et honestum esse potest conjugium, electionem tamen meliorem deseruisse transgressio est. Monachi plane propositum proprio tunc arbitrio suscepisti, cum ad monachicum te transiturum ordinem spondidisti.

Hinc est, quod egregius ille vir non ait, quod induit quis non debet exuere; sed potius ait, quod vovit Deo debet reddere. Ut evidenter edoceat, quoniam et vovere, est suscipere; et votum frangere, procul dubio sacrum propositum violare. Hinc est, quod postmodum non dicit, sacrum habitum deseruisse; sed, electionem, inquit, meliorem deseruisse, transgressio est. Hinc est etiam, quod in Toletano concilio reperitur: (Monachum autem paterna devotio, aut propria professio facit, quidquid horum fuerit, allegatum tenebit. Proinde his ad mundum revertendi recludimus aditum, et omnes ad sæculum interdicimus regressus.)

Sed jam ab his supersedendum est, ne dum propositionem nostram pluribus nitimur Scripturarum testimoniis allegare, videamur in epistolari compendio lacinias texere. His igitur tantisper instructus exemplis diligenter attende, quam plectibilis sit excessus sponsionem sacri ordinis violare. Quamobrem, dilectissime fili, venenata male blandientium contemne consilia; perniciose, vel potius mortifera suadentium ridendam perhorresce veniam, et a sibilis antiqui serpentis aures obtura. Sacrum, sicut pollicitus es, non tardes adire propositum; ut non cum his qui apostati sunt subruaris, quod absit, in poenam, sed cum his potius qui apostolicam tenuere doctrinam, porrigente manum Christo, quandoque proveharis ad gloriam.

For what one has vowed to God, he ought to pay. Whence he who, having left the profession of singularity, has devolved to military service or to marriage, is to be purged by the satisfaction of public penance; because even if military service can be innocent, and marriage can be honest, yet it is a transgression to have deserted a better choice. Clearly you undertook the purpose of a monk by your own judgment then, when you pledged that you would pass over to the monastic order.

Hence it is, that that excellent man does not say, that what one has put on he ought not to put off; but rather says, that what one has vowed to God he ought to pay. So that he may clearly teach, since both to vow is to undertake; and to break a vow is without doubt to violate a holy purpose. Hence it is, that afterwards he does not say, to have deserted the holy habit; but, he says, to have deserted a better choice is a transgression. Hence it is also, that it is found in the Council of Toledo: (Paternal devotion or one's own profession makes a monk; whichever of these it shall be, it shall hold him bound. Therefore we shut the approach of returning to the world for these, and we interdict all returns to the secular life.)

But now we must desist from these, lest while we strive to allege our proposition with more testimonies of the Scriptures, we seem to weave together fringes in an epistolary compendium. Instructed therefore meanwhile by these examples, attend diligently how punishable an excess it is to violate the pledge of the holy order. Wherefore, most beloved son, despise the poisonous counsels of those poorly flattering; abhor the laughable pardon of those persuading pernicious or rather deadly things, and stop your ears from the hissings of the ancient serpent. Delay not to approach the holy purpose, as you promised; so that you may not be cast down, which God forbid, into punishment with those who have apostatized, but rather with those who held the apostolic doctrine, with Christ stretching out His hand, you may one day be advanced to glory.