

Fathers of the Church

on

Consecrated Virginity
summarized

ST. AMBROSE

Paraphrased and summarized: *De Virginibus* and *De Virginitate*

Two main points that St. Ambrose stresses are: the virgin is the spouse of Christ and ideal Christianity means chastity and celibacy. The idea of the virgin as wedded to Christ brings St. Ambrose to look at the Song of Songs as expressing the intimacy between Christ and His spouse. *De Virginitate* is practically a phrase by phrase commentary on this book of the Bible. The Jews have seen this book as an allegory of Yahweh and the Chosen People; Christians have seen it as the union between Christ and the Church. The Greek Fathers have written that the virgin is the ideal representation of the Church, especially the Blessed Virgin.

St. Ambrose sees the Incarnation as an absolutely new Creation, with a new Adam and a new Eve; Christ and Mary are both virginal, as in Paradise before the Fall. The Christian, therefore, who is perpetually committed to virginity share that perfection and that paradise. Virginity is the essential nucleus of Christian virtue; sanctity means purity. St. Ambrose' moral writings turn on this one theme.

Virginity is not praiseworthy because it is paired with martyrdom, as in St. Agnes, but because it is what produces martyrs. Virgin/martyrs are victors not only over just flesh and blood, but also over the prince of this world, the ruler of this age. They are victorious over visible and invisible powers.

As we see in Matthew 22:30, those who are virgins for the Lord are compared to angels. This way of life, virginity, came down from heaven at the Incarnation; it was not found on earth after the Fall until Christ came down to earth himself.

Virginal chastity is integrity without stain because the author of virginity is the stainless Son of God. Christ is a virgin's Spouse, for virginity belongs to Christ, not Christ to virginity. In the same vein, the Church is both a virgin and spouse of Christ.

Virgins espoused to Christ do not depend on finery nor on cosmetics for their beauty, but on virtue. They should seek only to please God who can see the beauty of a soul despite an imperfect body.

Virgins, like the Church herself, have numerous offspring, for the chaste soul has everyone for her child who has been reborn in Christ. These descendants live forever; thus the virgin espoused to Christ never knows bereavement in her Spouse nor in her children.

St. Ambrose does not condemn marriage, for he praises the virtuous marriages of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel.

Ps. 44:10ff. The Holy Spirit has assigned to the virgin royalty, gold, and beauty. Royalty: her Spouse is an everlasting king; gold: the virgin's body when consecrated to the Spirit increases its splendor; beauty: there is no greater beauty than that of her who is loved by the divine King.

Song of Songs 4:7-8. The perfect and faultless virginal soul, consecrated at God's altars, unbent by mortal fears amid the assaults and deceits of evil spirits, ever intent on the mysteries of God, wins an eternal Spouse whose heart teems with joy.

Song of Songs 2:1. Virginité is compared with bees: industrious, modest, continent. The bee feeds on the dew, knows no sexual intercourse, produces honey: the food of the virgin is the dew of the Divine Word, virginal modesty knows no violation, the lips of the virgin produce no bitterness but words of sweetness. The virgin's words should always be the honey of simplicity and dignity.

Song of Songs 5:10. The virgin will recognize the white of divinity in her Spouse and the red of His humanity.

Religion of the true God is called a virgin; that which makes false gods is a harlot.

Some angels fell from heaven (devils) while those who are virgins for the sake of Christ have passed from earth to heaven because this world and its enticements have no hold on them.

The woman of the world, who tries to draw everyone's attention to her beauty through display admits her inherent ugliness, while the virgin's lack of adornment effects the recognition of her beauty.

The Spouse of the virgin is infinitely wealthy, so virginal poverty is more precious than earthly accounts. If you can trust your riches to men, why not lend at interest to Christ?

She who conquers the ties of home can conquer the world.

Take Mary as your example. Note that in her life she made God, rather than man, the arbiter of her inner thoughts and her actions.

Song of Songs 1:3 and 8:9. Note that at first the virgin is drawn by perfumes, but later they are exchanged for the fortress. She who formerly played with kisses now builds towers because she is turreted with the pinnacles of sanctity and can both repel hostile attack and build the fortifications of merit.

Prayer at various intervals of the day and night, as King David offered, is indispensable for the virgin betrothed to Christ.

Note the example of St. John the Baptist: if he gave his life for upholding the sanctity of marriage, how much more precious is it to uphold virginity consecrated to God himself.

Note the examples of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalen after the Resurrection. The Blessed Virgin was the first to see the resurrection of the Lord and believe at once. Mary Magdalen saw but doubted. Why? The Blessed Virgin had unwavering faith, but Mary Magdalen's faith wavered. Why was Mary Magdalen forbidden to touch the risen Christ? Because only a firm faith may touch Christ. Even the apparition of angels and Christ himself did not assuage Mary Magdalen's doubts, and because she doubted, she did not recognize Christ. He called her then "woman" while she was still an unbeliever. However, once her conversion begins, the risen Lord calls her "Mary," the same name as His mother who was a believer from the first. During her conversion, however, she was still not allowed to touch the risen Lord because she was still in the disposition of doubt. The lesson to be drawn is that Christ is never absent from those who seek Him and believe in Him.

Note another instance from the Gospel: children, ignorant of evil because of their years, possessed in their innocence the gift of purity. "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." It belongs to those who return to the purity of childhood, to a childlike ignorance of corruption.

A bishop must guard against consecrating a virgin too early in life. He ought to take account of her age--not her chronological age, but her age of faith and modesty. He should note her maturity of modesty, her wisdom, her good behavior, her years of purity, and the spirit of chastity. Her age of character is what is important, not her age in years.

Note our Lord's example in shunning all vainglory. He never objected to the great number of sick, but cured them all. He, however, shunned all ostentation in what He did.

We must seek Christ in good deeds, the same place where the Church seeks Him. He also frequents the open simplicity of a pure mind. God is drawn to the humble of heart, He is appeased by a heart of sorrow. Love cannot exist without faith, and no matter what we do we can invite our Lover to come and be with us in faith. He will come.

Anger, cupidity, pleasure, fear draw the soul down under the weight of the corruptible body. When we sin, do not try to conceal it but confess it to the Lord who already knows it.

If we are insulted or taunted because of our faith, do not answer the accusers or taunters, just as Christ did not answer those who jeered at Him when He hung on the Cross. Address our words only to Christ at these times.

Be aware at all times that you can fail God and fall. Pride leads one to a fall. Therefore, be humble. Do not envy.

Note the figures of the man, lion, ox, and eagle in the Bible. We often take them to represent the four Gospels. But they can also stand for the four affections: the rational, the irascible, the concupiscent, and the discerning. In every wise man there are four

faculties: reason, anger, desire, discernment (prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice). We must use these four faculties to virtuous advantage.

ST. ATHANASIUS

Paraphrased and summarized: "On Virginity--Timely Advice"

The consecrated virgin should direct all her thoughts to the work of God, to whom she is espoused. Her whole occupation should be to do the will of God. The will of Christ is that one should be one with Him and not follow the ways of the world nor occupy one's thoughts with the things of the world. She should put her thoughts toward the Cross and how Christ so loved the Cross. Her thoughts and solicitude should be to sing hymns of glory day and night in tribute to Christ Crucified, while keeping her intentions pure, her heart chaste. She should seek to know the will of God and to fulfil it.

Let us look also to the ways in which we treat others. If Christ, being God, tolerated insults from men who are sinners, how much more ought we to tolerate mistreatment and insults as fellow human beings!

One is often called a fool in this life when he acts according to the wisdom of God and follows His laws. We often see men defrauding others in order to build up gain for themselves. We know that the devil is clever in the ways of evil and we have to be on the alert. That is why the Savior said in the Gospel "Be wise as serpents but as innocent as doves."

Humility of soul is the great aid to salvation. Our God is the God of the humble of heart.

Fasting and simplicity of dress are contrary to the ways of the world, where women seek cosmetics and costly clothes; but the virgin should seek only those things which her Spouse desires, namely a pure heart, a body without dishonor and given to fasting. If anyone counsels the virgin differently, she should not follow that advice. Enemies often are jealous. Just look at the Holy Scriptures and see how Daniel and his young companions ate only vegetables and drank only water; the result was that they looked in better health than those young men who ate at the king's table. The effects of fasting are health of the body, the putting to flight of the demons, the expulsion of harmful thoughts, and purity of heart and mind. In a word, it exalts the man to the throne of God. Remember the episode in the Gospel when the disciples could not cast out the evil spirits in the sick boy. The Lord said that this kind could only be cast out by prayer and fasting. So powerful is fasting that great feats can be realized through it by God, even the cure of the sick. One cannot live a holy life and one of devotion and humility without fasting. Fasting, however, requires that no unkind words fall from the lips and that one keep oneself innocent of all greed.

Ambition and vainglory are enemies that can trip one as she follows the road of virtue. One can even make too much of fasting. If another person should happen to call you holy, you should say that if you make it to heaven, then he can call you holy. But in the meantime, here on earth, there is no guarantee that one is going to end up holy because men can change like the wind.

Take note also that if a good work needs to be done, then do it. However, do it in secret so that only your Heavenly Father will see it and reward you in heaven. Otherwise, vainglory will

sneak up on you. In addition, if others wish to hear you speak, then do it, but not one word extra. Remember that the Lord said one does not throw precious stones to pigs. The words of God are these precious stones and they should be given only to those who are worthy of them.

Pray, sing the Psalms, and read--do these acts all alone in a place apart. Do not take other hearers with you when you pray and do spiritual reading. However, if there are one or two virgins of similar heart and mind, then pray together because, as Our Lord said, "Where two or three are gathered together, I am there in the midst of them."

When you work, do it well and with a serious demeanor.

Be modest at all times, especially because, since the moment of your determination to live in continence for God, your body is a temple of God [as it was made at Baptism] and it is holy to Him and should not be desecrated in any way.

Day and night the Holy Scriptures should be your meditation.

When you eat, do so with prudent and pious virgins, not with arrogant women. Do not take as a friend a woman who is boastful. If you are seated at table with a rich woman and then see a beggar woman, invite the beggar to eat too without being ashamed to do so in the presence of the rich woman. Don't love the glory one receives from men better than the glory which comes from God because He is a God of the poor and deprived.

It is better for a young woman to live under the supervision of an older one than to live in the company of another young woman.

The majority of mankind in the world are insensitive to the things of God and occupy themselves with eating, just like animals without reason. They often confess with their lips, but their works betray them. If one really loves God, then he ought to obey Him.

Sorrow and tears over sin is an excellent remedy to wipe away guilt. Not all tears are efficacious, but only those which are directed toward heaven and change one's life to live in mortification and penance. In this life one can expect to have to continue to work at virtue with sadness and anguish that will come one's way. There is no rest in this life, but only in heaven.

There are two roads one can choose--either life or death. The way of death is the way of the world; the way of life is sanctity, that is, following the ways of holiness and justice while living in this world. A holy man goes from this world to eternal rest. He will experience what "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."

The poor and the rich, the slaves and the free, the sinners and the just--all have to work in this life. The just man works, it is true, but not just to eat; he does not worry just about his body. His thoughts are on God, looking for God. The man who seeks only material things is blinded by them in this world.

In the middle of the night, rise and give praise to God, singing the Psalms. It was at this hour that the Lord rose from the dead and praised His Father.

Live in charity above all things because it is the highest virtue. God is love, and He loved man first, submitted Himself to free him from sin. If, then, the Lord died for us, we ought also to give our lives for each other. If a man does a great deal for his neighbor but has no love, then his work is in vain. Charity toward one's neighbor shows itself not only by word, but also by deed. One should not bear any grudges toward one's neighbor for a past offense because one cannot then offer a pure prayer to God.

Do not remain disheartened over an adversity nor a past injury. "The sadness of this world works toward death." Do not raise one's voice against anyone or injure anyone through vicious talk; rather, raise one's voice in hymns and prayers which give glory to God. If someone arrives at your house, give him hospitality because Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "He who receives you, receives Me." As to hospitality and alms, do not remember what you have done.

In church, keep silent, without speaking a word but just keep your attention on the reading. If you are inspired to do some work, do not take it lightly or reject it, but consult with the elders. Always in your prayers, keep your attention on the Psalms and prayers and let them penetrate your heart.

The commandments of God are not heavy for those who fear God. Do not let the oil of the lamp run out, but wait for the arrival of the Bridegroom . You do not know when He will come, whether at the first hour of the night or in the morning. Be prepared, then when he comes. You can meet him in the company of prudent virgins, carrying their lamps of oil, that is, of good works. A penitent life is trying, continence is difficult; but nothing is sweeter than the heavenly Spouse.

ST. AUGUSTINE

Paraphrased and summarized: "On Holy Virginity"

Part I: The prerogatives of virginity and its advantages over matrimony

The Church, spouse of Christ, is like Mary, Virgin and Mother. So also is the consecrated virgin; she is virgin and mother. Mary gave birth to the Head of the Church so that the Word was made flesh; the Church gives spiritual birth to the members of the Body of Christ. The virgin, sharing in both the flesh and in the spirit, is a truly virgin and mother because of her vocation as part of the Church.

Like Mary, the virgin can share in her fecundity by following Mary's example of doing the will of the Father. Christ himself said that "whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is my mother, my brother, my sister." Although, therefore, only Mary is the mother of Christ according to the flesh, Christ himself calls those who do the will of His Father his brothers, sisters, and mother according to the spirit. The Church, therefore, by doing the will of the Father shares in this spiritual motherhood to give birth to Christ in souls. The virgin also, by doing the will of the Father as a member of the Church, gives spiritual birth to Christ in souls.

All Christian women, married or consecrated virgins, if they live a holy life and possess the charity that comes from a pure heart, a correct conscience, and a sincere faith, are truly mothers of Christ according to the spirit if they do the will of the Father. No one can be called pure unless she be so not only in the flesh but also in her heart.

No one is born a consecrated virgin as such. Only in the Church do we find consecrated virgins because the Church herself is a sacred virgin; one might say that it is through the Church are consecrated virgins brought forth. The Church brings to birth, so to speak, virgins sacred in body and in spirit.

Part III: Humility is necessary in order to maintain virginity, which is a gift from God

One's greatness is measured by her degree of humility. The battle against pride continues on; and pride is the mother of envy. Charity is not puffed up or conceited; in charity there is no envy because there is no pride.

Certainly the model of virginal integrity is Christ himself and it is to Him that we should direct our attention and focus. The greatest thing is to be humble because we will never learn from Christ unless we are humble. If all sinners easily recognize the value of humility, how much more easily ought consecrated virgins see its value. We ought to look at the humility and tears of the woman who cried over her sins at the feet of the Savior and learn from her what humility and love are.

The fear of the Lord is to fear the danger of gravely offending One we love and who is so

lovable. We should fear because of love, not out of servility. The Holy Spirit dwells in hearts that have true humility and that fear the danger of sin as long as they are on this earth.

Those who have not fallen into sin should have the greatest humility and love because by God's providence they have been spared the tragedy of falling into sin. Their humility and love should be greater than those who committed sin and then were forgiven. Those who are prudent and sincere know that they would have committed great sin if it were not for the providence of God. Therefore, all our virtues and good works are not ours; they are gifts of God to us.

Continence and wisdom proceed from God, not from man. One should not become like the pharisee who thanked God for the graces he had received, but he lacked humility. Before God, no one can pretend humility, either. When we look at the gifts God has given us, can we truly say that we are free of this temptation to regard them as our own virtues, and not as gifts from God?

When we look at the gifts of God among us, we must acknowledge that the most useful are those not for this life, but those for eternity. Therefore, the virgin ought to try to grow in humility and avoid all occasions whereby the greatest of all gifts, that of the virtue of charity, would be lost or even diminished.

All must acknowledge that they are sinners. Anyone who says she is not a sinner is a liar, as St. John tells us.

The great men of any time will always be the most humble and will always find grace in the presence of God.

The great gift of virginity can be lost if one is proud. God truly sustains the grace of virginity. God will dwell only where there is humility because He is love itself. And, beware, pride leaves no place in one's heart for love. So, humility of heart is the best way to welcome God, who is love, into our hearts. And, when He is there, He will sustain the grace of virginity.

Work hard at humility, virgins of God. Follow the Lamb wheresoever He goes. And learn from Him for He is "meek and humble of heart." Think of others as being better than yourselves and look at their virtues. Pardon others their faults and pray for yourselves; face the future with vigilance, and blot out your sins through confession. Contemplate the beauty of your loving Spouse, consider how He is equal to the Father and submitted himself to a mother, how He rules the heavens and serves the earth, how He created all things and lived among creatures. Think on these things when the proud sneer at you. Contemplate with the eyes of your soul the wounds He suffered on the Cross, the wounds that were opened, the blood that was poured out, the valor of submitting himself as the price of our salvation, the precious price of our redemption.

What a joy to have such a Spouse, whom you do not see with your eyes, but you know by faith! He has no defect, no ulterior motives, nor false suspicions. When you live with this kind of love, you will not fear, then, the vice of pride in you because you will be full of love and meek and humble of heart.

ST. CYPRIAN

Paraphrased and summarized: "The Dress of Virgins"

"[Virgins] are the flower of the tree that is the Church, the beauty and adornment of spiritual grace, the image of God reflecting the holiness of the Lord, the more illustrious part of Christ's flock. The glorious fruitfulness of Mother Church rejoices through them, and in them she flowers abundantly; and the more a bountiful virginity adds to its numbers, the greater is the joy of the Mother."

Virgins should not be solicitous to adorn themselves nor to please anyone except the Lord Jesus Christ. If virginity is destined for the kingdom of God, it does not make sense that virgins, then, would ever wish to strive to please men in their dress, adornments, or cosmetics. Continence and chastity consist not only in purity of the body but also in dignity and modesty of dress and adornment. A virgin should not only be such, she should be recognized as such by all who see her. Her innocence, dignity, and modesty should be apparent to all the public.

Instead of seeking external trappings, therefore, the virgin should be seeking only the word of God and to embrace those blessings which will last forever.

Virgins are rich in God; their wealth is Christ himself. These riches are eternal. Worldly wealth will remain just where it is--in the world when death comes.

If a virgin should find that she is wealthy in the goods of this world, it does not mean that she is free to do whatever she likes with those riches. She is not to boast of those riches, either. Worldly riches, if they are in the virgin's possession, should be used for good works and to relieve the needs of the poor. Make Christ your debtor through your alms and good works.

Virgins should avoid cosmetics, which falsify one's body that has been created by God, and gossip, which also profanes the glory and dignity of virginity. If a virgin does not heed this admonition, then just as she had been destined for great rewards she will find that she will suffer great punishment for the defilement of her vocation.

Persevere in what you are and will be forever. We will all be virgins in paradise, but virgins have already begun that life here on earth. They are passing through the world without the pollution of the world. As long as they remain pure in body and spirit, they are like the angels of God. They are already tasting the glory of the resurrection.

Older virgins should give instruction to the younger; younger virgins should encourage each other.

Lastly, remember us (St. Cyprian and other bishops) when you begin to receive your heavenly reward.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA

Paraphrased and summarized: "On Virginitv"

As an introduction, it is important to note that anyone who wants to live a life of continence cannot do so if she is submerged in the affairs of the world, that is, total involvement in concupiscence and in what belongs only to this world.

It is through virginitv that we can understand that the Father has an only-begotten Son. When He was made incarnate, He was conceived without passion through the Holy Spirit. The immaculate virgin Mary was filled with the plenitude of Christ's divinitv, in her virginal soul as well as in her body. But first Mary had to have faith, just as we need to know Christ now through faith, not by means of our bodily senses. Such is the power of virginitv that it spans both heaven and earth.

When one is living her virginitv for Christ, she is free of the cares of the world. She does not suffer the sorrow of widowhood, the lament of seeing orphans, the anxiety of living with a husband that will someday die, the cares of a household, and the fear of possible disgrace among her associates. Rather, a virgin always lives in the presence of those mansions where there is no death, no separation from her Beloved. She does not have to bother about the human vices of greed, hatred, and vanity. In the acquisition of virtue, there is no room for envy. When one is concerned about the things of heaven and lives in the sphere of God, then she will remain elevated above all the problems of the earth.

All the earth belongs to the Creator; man is not the lord of the earth. He is born without knowing it and will leave this earth when he least desires to. Men come and go, but the earth remains. Such is the vanity of this life. The vanities of this life are such that the more one has, the more one wants, be it material goods or vainglory. How does one escape the vanities of this life except as a bird from a snare, as the Psalmist says. The means to escape the snare of vanities is by means of the wings of virtue.

One should try to keep as free as possible from the cares of this world, just as those who want to become scholars put their minds on the discipline of study. For the one who wants to live a virginal life, she should take up a moral discipline and contemplate the divine. As such, then, she can go through life with great tranquility. Elias and St. John the Baptist are examples of this kind of life. One can take the example of a river--if it runs in too many little directions of rivulets, then it loses its effectiveness in agriculture. The same is true of life--if we disperse our attention in too many diverse directions, we lose also the effectiveness of our attention and sense of direction in life.

In all that one does in life, prudence is the best guide. It lies in the center of the two extremes. However, one should never expose oneself to occasions of sin, to temptations, or try out what is morally forbidden. When one falls one time, it is very easy to fall again into sin.

Some people do not understand the loftiness of virginitv. To try to explain it to them would be

like trying to perceive the radiance of the sun by means of the ears. Virginity is of a supernatural order and to perceive its meaning one must have pure eyes and mind. The parable of the coin which was lost fits here. One must sweep the house clean before one can discover the meaning of virginity. The neighbors in the parable are the other faculties of the person--knowledge, reason, emotions. They rejoice when the soul finds the meaning of virginity.

If to be united totally to Christ, we have to prepare to die, then we should begin to prepare for that ultimate separation from the things of this earth. Paradise is the dwelling of the living, not for those who are dead through sin. We know that the flesh and things of the earth are subject to death as a consequence of sin, but the Spirit of God is immortal, living, and incorruptible. Virginity lived for God alone triumphs over sin and death. Virginity does not dwell only in the body, but in the good actions of the soul.

The spiritual maternity of the virgin means that she conceives immortal children through the work of the Holy Spirit. She is called sterile by the prophet because of her continence. Death which came into the world through sin and rolled on through the centuries was as if dashed to pieces against a rock when it came to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. The power of death was broken by the dominance of virginity over the carnal life, no longer having its mortal sting. The Son born of her was not the work of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but only of God. In Him we receive the incorruption of the Spirit, the light of wisdom, justice, and the sanctity of redemption.

For the consecrated virgin, it is absolutely necessary that she have a longing, a yearning, deep in her soul for the Lord. This longing for the Lord will help her to keep her consecration intact and pure. The consecrated virgin should arm herself with patience and hope, especially when she experiences temptations; and she should do penance for sins, taking advantage of the sorrow she feels in her penitence. However, she should seek the counsel of those wiser than she in this life so that she never falls into fraud or foolishness. It is not, we repeat, abstaining from marriage that is of merit, but it is a pure soul with the proper motivations for virginity that elevate the life of virginity. The life of the spirit in the true virgin takes total precedence over the life of the flesh.

Just as the eye cannot look at two things at once, nor can one speak two languages at the same time, one cannot be married to a man and be married to God at the same time.

One who is a virgin for God must take special care not to indulge in delights of food and drink. Overindulgence in either not only makes for ailments of the body, but also leads to vices that afflict the soul. One should be aware of rationalization when being tempted to overeat or overdrink, saying that this or that is necessary for health, when in actuality it is not. In practicing temperance, one should separate the useful from the pleasurable so that one can better distinguish what might be rationalization. One does not enter the spiritual realms through corporal indulgence; but bodily indulgence rather makes the spiritual life of a person weak and gaunt. Temperance is the answer to proper eating and drinking in order to preserve the health of the body while advancing in one's spiritual life at the time.

One should try to find a wise spiritual director, usually an older person who is schooled in the ways of the spiritual life, in order to lead one to a life of perfection. Just as one does not go to a doctor who experiments on his patients, so one does not go to a spiritual director who does not have wisdom and know what he is doing. One can usually spot such a spiritually wise person by the example of his life; if he has lived an innocent and good life, he can usually direct others to the same.

One should use the energy of one's youth throughout life to pursue virtue and God Himself. One should have a firm anchor of hope in God, knowing that if one is crucified with Christ, then she will reign forever with Him as He is now reigning in heaven. All our hopes and desires will be fulfilled in Christ, in His glory, above anything we can now hope for or feel. This is what Moses hoped for, as well as did the prophets and kings.

ST. JEROME

The following is the Conclusion of "The Theological Basis of Virginité According to St. Jerome" by Fr. Demetrius Dumm, O.S.B. It was his dissertation for the Doctorate presented to the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Institute of St. Anselm, Rome, 1961. Reprinted with permission of the author.

St. Jerome, as a man formed by the Bible, was keenly aware of the divine orientation of history. God wholly dominates history: he inaugurated it, he maintains constant control over it and he guides it ineluctably to its conclusion. Within this framework, the drama of salvation-history unfolds, consisting of a personal interplay between God--holy, merciful, just--and man--sinful, repentant, suffering. It is against this background that one must view St. Jerome's writings on virginity.

Sacred history begins and ends with the harmony and happiness of paradise. And in the garden of Eden just as in heaven virginal continence is the characteristic of man absorbed in his Creator. Marriage came only after the Fall and was an indulgence granted by God to weakened human nature. It is therefore good and meritorious but it is not the ideal and its chief merit lies in the fact that it provides an eventual "harvest" of virgins.

The Incarnation marked the turning-point of history. When God assumed a human nature and entered personally into human history, it meant that the reign of sin was challenged and that a new era of the spirit had been inaugurated; it meant, in a word, that paradise had been restored. And with paradise virginity returned to earth. Christ and Mary were virgins; the Apostles were virgins, or, at least, remained continent after their calling. Until the Second Coming, the challenge of Christ remains in effect and every man must make his personal choice: either to remain with the world or to follow Christ. Logically, those who would follow Christ perfectly must also accept the call to a life of virginity.

The culmination of sacred history will be marked by the glorious Coming of the Lord and the judgment of the world. At that time paradise will be fully restored and virginity will again become the normal condition of man under God. Accordingly, virgins presently anticipate the life of heaven. Death for them is a simple transition to the state of perfect and irrevocable virginity; they will have nothing to give up because they have learned to cherish only that which can survive the assault of death.

In view of this concept of virginity, St. Jerome is perfectly consistent when he characterizes the virgin quite simply as one who has accepted wholeheartedly the challenge of Christ and has pledged himself unconditionally to the Christian ideal. Since the essence of Christianity consists, not in a philosophy but in a Person, it is altogether appropriate that the virgin should be called quite simply the "bride of Christ." As such, she is wholly dedicated to God and, like the perfect virgin, Mary, she too combines purity of life with bountiful spiritual fecundity.

St. Jerome repeatedly warns the virgin that the world which she has renounced does not necessarily lose its attractiveness and that she must therefore maintain constant vigilance lest she

fail in “marital fidelity.” In this respect there can be no compromise or concession. It is also clear that true virginity goes far beyond physical or corporal integrity; the virgin must give her heart and soul to God as well as her body. In order to do this effectively, she will strive to divorce herself as much as possible from contacts with the world, in the sure knowledge that solitude is a perfect ally of undivided spiritual devotion.

It was inevitable that St. Jerome should compare virginity with marriage. He takes pains to acknowledge the merit of a truly Christian married life but it is obvious that he considers it an indulgence granted by a merciful God to imperfect mankind. When he speaks harshly of the married state, however, it is only fair to bear in mind that he was by nature of an uncompromising disposition and that he took full advantage of the somewhat more liberal rules of literary combat in vogue in his day. St. Jerome cast himself unabashedly in the role of virginity’s champion; he did not condemn matrimony but he certainly did not strongly recommend it either. To do otherwise would have appeared to him an infidelity to his declared personal convictions.

Finally, St. Jerome outlines, with an exceptional grasp of practical difficulties, the program that the virgin must follow if she wishes to remain faithful to her commitment. The body must be kept in check by fasting and penance. But such ascetical exercises must never become an end in themselves. The chief aim of the bride of Christ must always be to spend as much time as possible in spiritual communion with her divine Spouse; the virgin must accordingly be concerned first of all with prayer. This prayer will be nourished in turn by *lectio divina*: a meditative perusal of the holy Scriptures. And the virgin should also apply herself assiduously to manual labor since this will not only eliminate the serious hazards of idleness but will also serve as a means for the provision of alms. By generous fidelity to this program the virgin will enter every more deeply into that union of spiritual marriage with God which is the fulfillment of the Christian vocation and which, as such, represents a restoration of the harmony of Eden as well as an authentic anticipation of heavenly glory.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Paraphrased and summarized: "On Virginity"

Part I

A woman is not considered in the state of virginity just because she is unmarried. She is not considered in the state of virginity while she is unmarried but waiting for the right man to come along. She is considered in the state of virginity only if the will to remain a virgin for the sake of her love for Christ is added on to her physical virginity. The state of virginity in the Church requires both the physical integrity as well as the decision to remain a virgin for the sake of Christ.

To remain a virgin before marriage is morally correct. That is just meeting the minimum. To decide to remain a virgin forever for the sake of Christ goes beyond the minimum. To abstain from sexual activity before marriage is a law of God; to follow Christ in the state of perpetual virginity is a counsel given by the Lord (St. Matthew).

If one detests marriage, however, one is playing into the hands of the devil. Marriage is good.

Neither fasting nor virginity is a good in itself; it is the intention that gives the merit.

If virginity is adopted for the wrong reason, then it is worse than adultery; it is an injustice against men and is in conflict with God, offending His infinite wisdom.

Two points can be summarized here: one should see the good in marriage as a divine institution while one should appreciate the glory of virginity at the same time.

To condemn matrimony is to offend the state of virginity. Those who are married will someday live like the angels in heaven where there is no giving and taking in marriage; the married, then, are on their way to a heavenly state in life which the virgins anticipate now here on earth.

The merit of a true virgin (one who has decided to remain a virgin for the sake of Christ) is not in her dress, albeit it poor and simple to all who see her, but in her soul.

Part II

The counsel of St. Paul on virginity is the same as the counsel given by Christ himself. St. Paul says that he has the Spirit of God who speaks through him.

Matrimony is necessary in this life for the procreation of children. When all creation is fulfilled according to the plan of God, then matrimony will cease at the end of time. Matrimony is the plan of God; God could have created men just as He did in the very beginning with Adam and Eve, but He chose to do it through matrimony after the Fall of man. Because matrimony is part of God's plan, it is good and should never be deprecated. God ordered mankind to multiply and

fill the whole earth.

After man had lived for some time on earth and multiplied, then Divine Providence revealed the state of virginity. Mankind was gradually taught over the centuries the higher truths of Revelation; virginity was one of them. Virginity in principle existed before the Fall of man, but after the Fall was revealed only after mankind had lived in marriage for some time and matrimony had become more refined, more and more according to the plan of God. Only with the coming of Christ in His Incarnation through a Virgin do we see the state of virginity in its glory.

Some people state that virginity ruins human generation. It is not virginity that ruins, but vices that ruin mankind. Those who deprecate the state of virginity are liable for punishment because they are calumniating a holy state of life. If they do not receive their punishment here on earth, they can expect more terrible punishments in the next life.

Part III

Virginity is a fountain of immeasurable good. In the fight against the demons, we have to realize that "only if the Lord keeps guard over the city" is it safe. So also with our moral life--fasting, night vigils, exactitude in keeping the Commandments and observing the counsels cannot protect one as well as the distrust in oneself and thereby putting all one's trust in the Lord.

In matrimony one might find it more difficult to give oneself up to a total seeking of virtue because of the reluctance of one's spouse. The virgin can aim straight at practicing virtue without distraction of another human being.

One should always be aware that continence is a gift of the Lord. In the fight for a virtuous life, the virgin must never rest or slack off.

A professed virgin (or a widow who promised perpetual chastity after her husband had died) is guilty of a great abomination if she then marries. A virgin has a Spouse who lives forever; she cannot marry a man when her Spouse is always alive.

Note St. Paul's words as he writes about himself: he does not say he is a guide to us because he has remained faithful, but because he has received the grace from God to be faithful.

Part IV

The virgin has the responsibility to overcome all difficulties because of the grace given to her. Also her way of life removes her from the distractions of riches, banquets, beautiful dresses, cosmetics, and a plethora of other sensual delights. She also has a Spouse who is always faithful; therefore, she can never be the victim of deceit or fraud. She is never enslaved in a tyrannical situation or arrangement; she never has to fear the death of her Beloved or His

separation from her at death. On the contrary, death means a meeting with her Spouse and enjoyment of His glory.

The virgin does not have to fear being poor nor humble because she should live as such in patience and be thanking her Spouse for such a state. She does not have to concern herself with bodily beauty nor any such useless effort. She is in a free condition in this regard which allows her to concentrate on the beauty of her soul.

She does not have to fear other women in better conditions, nor does she have to think about obtaining a rich husband. Gold and jewelry bring with them more troubles than delights.

Simply, a virgin does not have to bother herself with all the earthly adornments and styles, but rather her soul should animate her simple dress, her walk, her smiles.

The tears of a virgin, because of her faith in Christ, have great power and they are greater than all the laughter of the world. Like the Apostles, after they were whipped, they left the place where they were punished with joy.

The virgin should appreciate that her home is a place far from disturbances of the world, its riches, its business deals--it is a place of silence and serenity of the spirit. Heaven is more splendid than gold, silver, or another other brilliant metals.

The virgin never has to worry about the vicissitudes of fortune, i.e., that she could lose all her riches or her way of life could be dissolved by a change in finances or the death of her husband. Rather, the virgin waits for the day of resurrection which is always close at hand. In all tribulation the virgin suffers all for Christ with love and enthusiasm because the time is short. The virgin lives with only the necessities of life in food and dress and devotes her thoughts to how to grow in holiness and adorn herself with sanctity in body and soul.

Virginity is not a lasso or rope around the neck. One should embrace it only with one's own free will and then take care to live it honestly and assiduously. She who strives for the things of this world is not a true virgin of Christ. To be a true virgin does not consist only in not getting married but to be pure in one's soul--i.e., a soul given only to Christ. She has eyes and longings only for Christ, not for things of this world, nor for superfluities, nor for any sort of concupiscence.

Virginity is a life like that of the angels, but it is also a life that has its roots in a crucified life. The fruits of this life grow from the crucified life. A life like this overcomes all fears and difficulties, is a slave to no one, and reaches glory and honor. It will reach heaven in liberty, trust, strength, ardent zeal, and fervent love. The Holy Spirit has now bestowed an abundance of grace with the coming of Christ; He has communicated Himself to us as a sovereign gift to make us as adults in the spiritual life after being children. Therefore we must discipline ourselves, and we should enjoy the perfect peace and rise to higher triumphs, much higher and superior than the ferocity of the battle itself.

ST. LEANDER

Paraphrased and summarized: "Letter to Virgins" and "Rule and Book of Instruction for Virgins and Their Contempt of the World"

One cannot put her full attention to the words of God and the work of the Holy Spirit when she is occupied with the vanities of this world and wounded by the whips of so many invitations to put her attention to this world.

God has given to the virgin the inheritance of His very self. God himself is her Spouse, her friend, her brother, her inheritance, the price of her redemption, her Lord and her God. In Him she has a Spouse to love. Because she is the adopted daughter of God the Father, God the Son is her brother. Jesus is a friend whom she can never have any reason to doubt. He is the goal of all her ambitions because He is a very part of her inheritance. He is the price of her ransom from sin because His Precious Blood was her redemption. In sum, He is her God and Lord, and she ought to obey, honor, and respect Him.

In order to gain our redemption from sin and eternal punishment, He used an antidote to sin, so to speak. His death means our life, his humiliation was the remedy for our pride, and by His wounds He restored our innocence.

It is impossible to speak of virginity and its rewards. It is a gift hidden from the eyes, closed to ears, absolutely incomprehensible to ordinary human understanding. Virgins are in fact in this life what the entire Church waits for in faith for all the members at the final resurrection. Virgins here on earth already enjoy something of the incorruptibility of the body that will be the inheritance of all in our final glory. What a crown of glory awaits all in eternity! The virgin has received here below the beginnings of the gift of incorruptibility which many long for. The virgin maintains the original condition of man at the beginning of Creation. The virgin should reflect on this and not vacillate in her commitment to Christ in perpetual virginity. Christ has embraced the virgin in His arms and she has put under foot and walked away from the attractions of the world. She has experienced the pleasure and peace of the arms of her Spouse, and may she obtain by her prayers pardon for her brothers and sisters, her parents, and others. She wins for them the blessings of glory. She should not think that her prayers are sterile; no, rather, she has as many spiritual children as she has virtues. Be it understood, however, that only the pure of heart have spiritual fruitfulness.

Pointers on how to live the life of virginity

The lifestyle of the virgin and the lifestyle of the married woman are different.

In imitation of the Savior, the virgin ought to be concerned for sorrows and illnesses of her sisters as if they were her own. She should remember the words of the Lord when He said, "When I was ill you visited me."

When she is spoken ill of, the virgin ought to repay with a kind word so that evil is overcome by good. She should not even try to defend herself against evil attacks, but trust her vindication to the Lord who will bring out the truth and see justice executed in due time. She should trust her innocent heart to God who sees all and will reward her confidence in Him. Patience, also, will calm the passion of the sister who inflicts injury upon another.

Prudence requires that the virgin not be puffed up with pride. One of the best ways to guard against pride is modesty because modesty leads to humility. Moderation and temperance conserves modesty and humility.

Insolence and pride are heinous crimes. Anger and arrogance corrupt the soul of one whose body has not been violated. When virgins are guilty of pride, they have not prostituted themselves by man but by demons.

The interior life, the soul, is where the glory of the virgin is found because of the grace given by God and the virgin's cooperation with that grace in a life of virtue. This is the real glory of chastity. The virgin, therefore, ought to cultivate not exterior dress but the beauty of the soul where God will find pleasure in just looking at her heart. A virgin's clothing should not render distinction and dignity before men, but it should present her as innocent before God, in simplicity and integrity of heart.

The greatest example of humility is that of Jesus, who, though He was equal to God, humbled himself to become a man and suffer a most cruel death because of our sins and to win for us salvation.

A virgin should eat whatever is necessary for her to maintain good health. This is part of her moderation and temperance.

There are three types of intemperance. One consists of an appetite for things that are forbidden. The second is eating and drinking what is licit, but which is a luxury. The third is not having discretion at times of meals, even though what one is eating and drinking is licit.

One should not murmur about anyone who is not present. Criticisms and gossip are great sins before God. What one cannot say to another's face should not be said behind her back. 171 One should not allow another to murmur in your presence either. One wounds the Body of Christ in this way, rather than building up its health.

The virgin should pray and read diligently. She should distribute her time between prayer and reading. When she does manual work or even takes a light snack, she should take something to read. In that way she will be nourishing her soul as well as her body on the word of God. Reading instructs and prayer always begs for grace. After prayer, too, the virgin should read in order to be aware of what she should pray for in her future prayers.

No matter what class a virgin comes from, she should look at her sister virgins as equals. The Lord does not make a distinction in classes, and neither should she. If she is from a higher class

in society by reason of birth or education, she should look at other virgins as her sisters, as equals. If she is from a lower class in society, she should serve others not in a spirit of slavery, but in a spirit of charity.

Take the example of our Savior who hid himself when the crowd wanted to make Him an earthly king; He was already with the Father who reigns eternally. So also the virgin should not seek to be elevated above others. Surely it is true that unless a virgin follows in the footsteps of humility of her Spouse, He will not receive her into His kingdom in eternity.

The virgin should not seek after earthly riches, which evaporate. Some people, like some of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, were able to possess riches and yet maintain a humble heart. They accepted riches and gave thanks to God; they were poor in heart. The virgin, however, should follow the example of Job who praised God in good times and in bad. The virgin should realize that prosperity can evaporate like vapor from the earth.

Note that the virgin should always speak the truth with her heart, but never judge another. Note that our Lord said that what is said in the darkness will be brought into the light of day and what He says for us to hear will be proclaimed from the rooftops. The best advice is never to say anything that you would not want God to know.

Another piece of advice is that the virgin should never turn back from the road of dedicated virginity that she has embarked on. She should look to Abraham as her example who never looked back, not like Lot's wife. The virgin should recall the words of Psalm 44 in which she is asked to forget her own people and her father's house because the King has desired her beauty, and He is her Lord and God.

As a dedicated virgin, she should remember in her prayers all her family and all those with whom she has ties of blood or friendship.

ST. METHIDIUS OF OLYMPUS

Paraphrased and summarized: *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*

Marcela

Virginity is a very noble and beautiful state of life. Although the virgin walks with feet on the earth, her head touches heaven.

A virgin should strive with all her strength to take care and be determined to listen to the divine words with diligence and without ceasing because they open the doors of the wise to her. These words will lead her to glorify Him who is Truth itself.

Meditation is the piquant salt which also preserves that which has been given for our benefit.

Before exalting our state of life as virgins and encouraging noble thoughts about virginity, one should get rid of all the infection of concupiscence. Many feel they can devote just a brief amount of time to hearing sacred doctrine because they are distracted by worthless things. Those souls which only seek diluted doctrine and false and rotten learning do not have a place in divine instruction. What a ridiculous thing to see these people speak without restraint and bracing themselves for things of little importance. They follow their own pretensions in the most assiduous way possible and neglect the most important determination that they should have, i.e., to go after the necessary means in order to grow in their love of chastity.

The flower of virginity was sent from heaven to the earth by a most noble act of God. Historically, one can see that at first after the Creation, God gave the command that mankind should multiply upon the earth. Then God led mankind progressively to follow the way of heaven until finally he arrived at the sublime evangelical counsel of virginity in order to give glory to His perfection. We can see that God led man to perfection gradually: at first he was forbidden to marry among his close family, then he was forbidden to take several women in marriage (as the animals do), then he was forbidden to commit adultery, and finally he was led to continence and from here to virginity so that he could arrive at the peaceful gate of incorruption.

We see in the Old Testament excellent prophets who taught and practiced many excellent doctrines; however, none praised nor elected the state of virginity. To our Savior alone was it reserved that He should carry into the world the counsel of virginity; He came into this world to teach man to go near to God. This High Priest, our Savior Jesus Christ, was the first among the prophets, the prince of the angels, and at the same time the first among all the virgins.

In the antiquity of the Old Testament times, we see that man had not yet arrived at perfection; he had not arrived at an understanding of virginity, a state so perfect in itself and created in the image of God that it was necessary that it could only be received from someone who is God, the Word made flesh. He was sent into the world to take our nature which had been stained by sin and to raise this nature to the divine. His mission was to enable us to participate in the divine. Therefore, being God, he chose to put on the clothing of our flesh so that we would have a divine

model and imitate its Author.

Jesus Christ, permanently a virgin Himself, encourages us to live in virginity, which is a privilege of a few.

Theophilia

It is clear that God, even though He had progressively raised mankind to appreciate and understand virginity in salvation history, does not deprecate marriage. It is very clearly seen in the Scriptures that the Divine Word, with His introduction of the counsel of virginity did not abolish marriage. Look at the splendor of the moon as an example: when it comes up, it does not extinguish the light of the stars.

It is clear that we must continue to multiply, just as Our Lord said that His Father is continuing to work at Creation. At the moment when the number of people destined for eternal life is complete, then human generation will cease. Never should we deprecate the procreation of children because the Almighty God himself takes part in their creation. Even those children who are born out of wedlock should never be despised, but cherished because God himself is the Creator of all. Did not God himself design the substance and form of the bones, the joints, the nerves of the baby even before he has been born? We know that even though children are born illegitimately, they are nevertheless given angels to guide and teach them. God does not negate those who have been given life.

Let us look to God and be inspired by Him: he is the only Creator of things visible and invisible. Those things which are invisible are incorruptible.

Human procreation is dignified, even though perpetual chastity carries with it the palm and crown. Note that St. Paul says that he who gives his daughter in marriage has done something good, but he that keeps his daughter as she is (as a virgin) has done something even better.

Talia

Note that St. Paul says it is better to marry if one need to than to fall into sin because of great difficulties one may have in keeping continent. One must be chaste in all respects, especially in conversation, to maintain truly one's chastity. St. Paul takes special care to write that one must be perfectly in control of oneself and in true liberty in order to decide to remain as a virgin. One should not be under any pressure whatsoever when deciding this state of life. Only in freedom can one decide to follow this counsel and persevere in it until one gains the palm of victory.

Theopatra

It is certain that there is nothing more effective than purity to turn men toward paradise, to restore the incorruptibility of mankind, to reconcile them with God, and to open the sure road toward eternal health.

Waves of frivolity can easily wash over the sentiments of our souls, stir up fierce passions, and thereby impede the progress of our spiritual life. However, thanks to the goodness of God, which we praise in Psalm 136, we can see that God transplants our souls from this miserable earth so that they can run with Christ in paradise where there is happiness without end.

In the Old Testament we can see the prefiguration of our salvation won for us by Christ. Pharaoh in Egypt is a figure of the devil, a tyrant. With ferocious cruelty, he ordered the death of the Hebrew infant boys while allowing the girls to live. The devil, in like manner, exercised his tyrannical imperialism in this "Egypt" of the world from Adam to Moses. He used our suffocating and raging carnal and irrational passions to battle the thoughts and dictates of our souls.

Looking at Ps. 136 again, we can see that the harps which were hung up on the trees are symbols of our carnal nature. The rivers of Babylon are nothing more than rivers of evil, with one wave after another of perversity without cease. We constantly cry to the Lord because we are filled with fear, begging Him with tears, not to let our carnal nature be caught up in the voluptuousness of the evil current, while we hang up our harps (our bodies) on the tree of purity. The Sacred Scriptures present the willow tree as a symbol of virginity. It grows near the water; and although the level of the water may surge higher and higher, its branches are high and ample enough to preserve purity. Purity is encouraged to grow through the fountains of Christ, soaking it, as it were, in the waters of wisdom. Just as the willow tree grows and flowers in the current of waters, so also virginity needs the food of divine teaching in order to live and flower. Without sufficient divine teaching, we will not be able to "hang up our harps [bodies] on the willow tree [virginity]," that is, we will not be able to sustain virginity in our bodies. Just as the willow tree is a means to conserve the harps intact and save them from the raging river, so virginity preserves the body from incontinence and the open sores of sin.

The law of God is like the blood of the lamb which protected the Israelites from death when the angel of death passed over Egypt.

We should not work for the vain things of this world, which pass away so quickly, like flattery and pleasures. They try to seduce us from adhering to the true God.

The more that virgins dress themselves in the tunic of purity, joy, piety, and the nobility of virginity, the sooner they will neither seek the delights of the flesh nor misinterpret the divine precepts. They will rise above all these ruins of the earth and look only at heaven, which will be apportioned to each according to her longings. The heavenly Jerusalem is where immaculate souls, delighting with pure lips in the austerity of virginity, will celebrate their wedding with the divine Bridegroom, having triumphed in the combat below in order to win the immortal crown. The heavenly Jerusalem is where all holy souls will gather, where the light will never be extinguished, where the white dress of virginity will never be stained by dull sentiments and thoughts.

Precious virgins, entrust yourselves to our Captain and Pastor Jesus, our Protector and Spouse, to protect you until the end! It will never be easier to find a guarantee more sure for men nor more

pleasing and acceptable to God.

Talusa

Among all the vows one can make to God, none is greater than to offer one's entire self to God in freedom and with one's entire will. One's riches or one's house cannot match the offering of one's very self to God. One who holds back anything or tries to evade obligations is not entirely dedicated to God. If one truly wants to dedicate herself to God perfectly, she must do so with all she possesses, with all her body, and with all her soul so that she will be a perfect and integral holocaust, lacking nothing.

Abraham offered not only his soul, but also his feelings and reason to God. When he was told to offer an animal three years old, the three years can be seen as a symbol of virgins who offer their three ages to God: the vigor of their youth, the mental and physical strength of their middle years, and their old age.

In order to foster the virtue of purity, it is most effective to start inculcating it even from childhood. One should start right away to explain to children what the dedication to God is. If one is to say she is totally dedicated to the Lord, then she should be pure and uncontaminated in body, free from carnal relations, and entirely unstained by vices and any other dullness. The eyes should be pure and consecrated to God; the ears should not hear murmurs and calumnies but listen to the word of God and the works of wise teachers; the hands should not engage in sordid business matters, avarice, or lewdness, but should be chaste and dedicated to God; the feet should not walk perverse roads, public places where fallen or insensate people congregate, but they should be employed in works of virtue to build according to the commandments of God. If one is chaste in spirit, she will direct all her thoughts to God, not admitting any lesser ideas or judging according to worldly standards.

The Old Testament Jews announced only the shadow of the image, but we, on the other hand, celebrate the clear image of the heavenly world because the pure and only truth has been revealed to us exactly since the Resurrection of Christ.

Agueda

Souls that are given to God in virginity have a beauty that is forever young, without the possibility of deterioration.

We should be aware that Satan and his fallen angels wage an all-out spiritual war against a soul that is given to the Divine Word.

A soul that is adorned with holiness and sanctity forms a part of the nuptial cortege of the Son of God because she keeps her lamp burning. Take the example in the parable of the Ten Virgins. Although all ten were prepared at the outset for the coming of the Bridegroom, only the five wise ones took enough oil with them to keep their lamps burning during the night. This oil is their

watchfulness to keep their eyes, ears, taste, hands, and mind free of sin and to fill their hearts, minds, and very lives with the wisdom of God and His holiness. When a soul is open to the outpouring of God, He fills that soul with an outpouring of grace for its life of virtue and good works.

The torch of the virgins in the parable is the language of the prophets, which spoke of trust in living a life of chastity that is fed by good works for the people of God. The delay of the Bridegroom's appearance at the wedding feast is an image in the parable of our present life here on earth, while we wait for the Second Coming of Christ. To live properly now while waiting for the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, we should live chastely in our bodies, carrying high our lamps which are not adorned with earthly riches but with prudence and wisdom so that they will radiate the heavenly chastity and divine splendor that will come in all its fullness at the end of time.

Procilia

God's people sail in different ships to His port of heaven. Our particular ship is the state of virginity.

We can also compare virginity to a lily in a garden, pure and grace-filled. Virginity is the flower of springtime, which without ceasing exhales the fragrance of incorruption from its white petals.

Those who keep their virginity for Christ as His spouse should be truly united to Him and take His name, as their Spouse. They should radiate the fragrance of Christ, as sweet flowers in a garden.

Another image for virginity is a pearl, which captivates the heart of Christ when he looks upon it. The heart of the virgin should be so attractive in her interior dignity to Christ that it steals His heart, so to speak.

Not all souls will receive at the end of time the same degree of honor and glory. Those who have suffered from the sins of others all their lives; have won the true olympic contest of chastity; those who have conquered the battles of passions, fear, sorrows, and other evils from human malice will receive the first prizes and be seated on the more dignified eternal thrones that have been promised to faithful men. There are many young women in the Church who will attain the crown of heaven, but some will be among the chorus of virgins in heaven.

Some in heaven will be queens, others will be faithful servants, and others will be known as maidens, but there is only one Bride. That Bride is the Church itself. None can compare with the Church herself, perfected and above all groups in heaven. She was founded on the Apostles, she is the beloved spouse, and she is forever fresh and young and filled with the fragrance of her virginity. We should look to the words of the Bridegroom who has said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see and the ears that hear what you hear." In Psalm 44 we see Christ introducing His Spouse to the Father; His Bride is dressed in gold brocade, a symbol of virginal incorruption, and the virtues of chastity, prudence, faith, charity, patience, and all other good

works adorn her. The chorus of virgins will be seated close to the throne of the All-powerful God in heaven.

Tecla

The woman who appears in the heavens, clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, and having the moon as her footstool is about to give birth in pain but with great longing. She is our mother whom the prophets saw in vision for the future; she was called the Spouse, the mountain of Sion, and the temple and tabernacle of God. She is the Church whose children are almost beyond numbering and who will be gathered together from all parts of the world, thanks to Baptism, after the Resurrection. Come and contemplate this pure mother, stainless, and of such heavenly beauty that she obscures the rays of the sun.

It is our election by God to be part of the Church, according to this symbol, which is suffering the pangs of birth until all peoples have become part of her, as members of the Church. We participate in this giving birth to all men who are ignorant or who just think along human terms; we participate in the labor of transformation of the men who are already filled with the Spirit. Those who are called to the Word are conceived in the womb of the Church, formed in like manner to the likeness of Christ over the centuries, and go on preparing that happy generation of those blessed for all eternity. The child who was born of the woman in the Apocalypse is not Christ, but the faithful who were given new life through Baptism. Through Baptism, the faithful are men similar resembling Christ, and the saints are "other Christs." Those who have been made "Christs" were reborn through water and the Holy Spirit; they have been baptized in Christ. They have contributed their part to the Church through their illumination and transformation in the Word.

The Son of God, although He is eternal, continues to be born in the souls of the faithful. Before a man knows Christ, before He has been manifested to him, he is merely living on a human level. But once he has experienced the mystery of grace, then Christ will be born in him when he is converted and embraces the life of faith; faith communicates a higher understanding and intelligence to him. This is why it is said that the Church always engenders and forms the Incarnate Word in those who are baptized.

In the symbolism of the woman in the Apocalypse, we see that the dragon is the devil and the stars which fell because of his tail are the perverse heretical sects of history. That huge dragon, the color of fire, is smart and has many limbs. He has seven heads and ten horns, and with his tail he has knocked down one third of the stars. He lies in ambush to devour the new-born child of the woman; he is the devil who is in perpetual battle against those born of the spirit of Christ. He wants to chew them up, destroy in them the image of Christ and the resplendent mark of the Word of God. One heresy denied the omnipotent Fatherhood of God, another said that the Incarnate Son was really a spirit, and another claimed that the prophets spoke only under their own impulses and not under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Virgins! Imitate your mother, the holy Church, and do not lose your peace no matter how many irritations and contradictions come your way in life. At the end, with your lighted lamp in hand

you will know the radiance of joy and rejoicing when you meet your divine Spouse in your heavenly nuptials.

The seven heads of the dragon and his ten horns can be summarized by the vices of intemperance, luxury, idleness, cowardice, lack of faith, and all the remaining sins against the Ten Commandments. The worst of all, however, is to attribute all one's sins to fate, to the attitude that one cannot help what she does, that she is not responsible for her sins.

Tisiana

Just as the Law was a figure and image of the Gospel of our day, of our centuries since the coming of Christ, so also our days are only a part of what is yet to come--our resurrection from the dead with a glorified body. Both soul and body will be reunited in a true glorified body. Virgins with lighted lamps will celebrate the honor of their Lord, adorning His tabernacle with good works as virgins who are prudent and wise. Think of the good works you do as materials by which you construct your holy life, your sanctity. Holy doctrine, charity, and prudence are distributed in their proper time to those who come to the waters of redemption. Use these gifts of the Spirit. The Gospel is the enduring truth and the reality of life. To maintain purity, one must live in faith, meditate on the Scriptures, and practice charity. Charity is a tree that bears more fruit than any other virtue.

Put your minds on the coming of the Lord, when He will fulfil His promises and lead you into the city of God, into His holy temple. Right now it is as if we are in the desert where the woman of the Apocalypse was led in order to save her child from the dragon. Here we must take advantage of the time given us to prepare for the solemnity of the last day, for the general resurrection from the dead, for the time when Christ will celebrate the heavenly nuptials. Keep your vision on the things of heaven, and do not occupy yourselves so completely with transitory things of the earth.

Domnina

Through the Scriptures we see the mercy and clemency of God's reign as symbolized by the olive. Olive oil has many applications: it sustains and fosters health of the body, it smoothes out and helps implements to work, it soothes pain, and provides fuel for lamps. In the same way, the mercies of God have provided for us--He has freed us from death, destroyed sin, and enlivened the light of our hearts.

In contrast, we see the grapevine. The wine, because of the good cheer and pleasure it can produce, made men think of themselves as free of the punishment of the flood. This episode indicated how earthly-bound their sentiments were, which eventually ended up in terror and anguish.

The briar and the agno-cactus are symbols of purity: the briar for its firmness against all delights, and the agno-cactus for its permanence in purity. The prickly-pear is the Law.

At times we see the vine as referring to Christ himself and the prickly-pear to the Holy Spirit in

order to indicate that Christ the Lord is the joy of our hearts and the Holy Spirit heals us. The fruits of the Spirit are divine gifts which are called figs because of their sweetness. It is certain that those who take refuge under the protection of the Holy Spirit and the Word will never be disturbed by dread nor shudder at that which can disturb hearts.

The branches of the spiritual olive tree are the Law and the Prophets. No one can ever reach a perfect understanding of Christ and the Holy Spirit without living a pure life.

Arete

No one can even think to maintain purity of the body if she does not keep guard over her tongue, over her eyes, over her hands. How could one keep the body clean if one does not keep all the members of that body clean from sin? Our virginity must be guarded not only by our conduct, but also by our speech.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit will continue to dwell in us and keep us holy only if we stay away from sin and occasions of sin. The Lord declared that those who keep faith in Him will see God and that nothing will obstruct nor disturb the eyes of the soul. Totally free of the desires of this world and keeping our bodies pure and our hearts uncontaminated, we will become a veritable temple of the Holy Spirit. We must keep our head lifted up toward Christ. There is no merit in virginity without temptations and contradictions. However, the resistance is in the power of virtue. It is a greater power than the unholy desires and disturbances. It is a greater soul who conquers temptations and disturbances than one who has never experienced them at all.

ST. NICETAS OF REMESIANA

Paraphrased and summarized: "On the Fall of a Consecrated Virgin"

In the Greek world, it was St. Basil who lamented the fall of a consecrated virgin; in Latin literature, it was the bishop St. Nicetas who did the same.

For a consecrated virgin to have fallen by the sin of weakness it is a profanation of the Church, who is also the Bride of Christ. People who are against the Church for one reason or another rejoice over the sin of the consecrated virgin.

Christ, however, asks her to come back to Him. To cure such an ulcer, it takes patience and care. For such a sin a great reparation is necessary.

PSEUDO-CLEMENT OF ROME

Paraphrased and summarized: "Letter to Virgins"

He who professes perpetual chastity for Kingdom of God and she who professes perpetual virginity ought to take all available means to be worthy of reigning in the kingdom of heaven. The road to heaven is faith--a faith which is not just words in order to discipline oneself, but a faith which shows itself and grows by works. A person is truly justified by faith, a faith that is efficacious, that never gives in to doubt, that is never vacillating. It is a faith that manifests itself by good works done for the glory of the Lord God of the whole universe. It is necessary that the man of God work toward making himself perfect in word and action according to will of God.

Only he who is truly faithful in all things will attain salvation; but he who only believes but does not do good works because of his faith is, in reality, not a believer at all. Even if one is called a virgin but at the same time does not have all the corresponding virtues, she is a foolish virgin, as our Lord refers to in His parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

Great fortitude is necessary in order to overcome the difficulties of this state in life. Only she who walks the path of virginity in perfect faith and without fear can attain the crown of virginity. This state in life is an enterprise that requires a great deal of work, but also carries with it a great reward.

Note that our Lord was made man in the womb of a virgin and He Himself always remained perpetually chaste. From His example one can learn the glory of virginity. Therefore, those who have offered themselves to God in perpetual chastity imitate Christ Himself. Think of Sts. Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy of the New Testament. In the Old Testament we find Elias and Elisias and many others who lived lives pure and immaculate. If you desire to be like these saints, imitate them with all your strength.

Those who truly follow Christ in this state of life sincerely imitate Him with all their strength. Those who truly turn to Christ conform themselves to the image of Christ in all their works--in their life, in their conduct, in their purposes and motivations, in their words, in their acts, in their patience, in their fortitude, in their prudence, in their fairness, in their forbearance, in their tolerance of injuries, in their piety, in their holiness, in their continence, in their faith, in their hope, and in their perfect charity for the sake of God. To serve the Lord in the spirit of God means to live ones life purely and immaculately in constancy, that is, without being distracted this way or that.

Those who look toward ornate things of this world, the vanities, or who seek honors, acclaim, or arrogance can be termed by the true name of this plague--pride. It is pride that the Lord resists.

The true follower of God, be that person a man or woman, does not give himself over to desires of the flesh, but works for the fruits of the Spirit and of salvation. He realizes that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit where the Lord dwells, just as He dwells in the holy city of heaven.

Virgins ought to be aware of certain dangers to their professed vocation: occasions of sin by

eating and drinking that lead to lust, excessive frivolity, and dullness. Such behavior is not suitable for any Christian, much less for those who have professed the state of perpetual virginity. There are others who look for companions in vain and futile conversations, with indecent laughter and mean criticisms of others, going in pursuit of murmuring against others and showing themselves to be lazy. With people like this, one should not join in any meals and conviviality.

The lazy man has nothing to keep him busy, not even anything to do that is useful. They engage themselves in idle talk, gossip, and vanities, while going from place to place without even any fear of God. They even pretend to explain diverse doctrines under the pretext of teaching. They pretend to be erudite doctors of the faith, when in reality they are agents of iniquity against the name of Christ.

On the other hand, the holy man keeps guard over his tongue lest he be provoked to anger and endanger the salvation of his soul. The man who is not holy has soothing and kind words which touch the heart of the simple and unsophisticated by calling them blessed, but in reality the unknowing are being led into error.

One must be aware of these "doctors" of the faith, i.e., those who teach but do not work. They deceitfully assume the name of Christ, but teach false doctrines. However, one must act differently, i.e., one must give thanks to God for the spiritual charisms he has received, be they teaching, prophecy, or ministry. These charisms are given so that they might help all men abundantly. With these charisms one should serve her spiritual sisters in whatever way possible and through whatever words God provides. Everyone should know that she has to give an account at the end of time for the charisms received for the edification of the brothers and sisters in Christ. One should do all with total humility and meekness. Such gifts as one has received are really given for the good and usefulness of others.

A beautiful and useful way to serve is to "visit orphans and widows in their afflictions," and those poor people who have many children, especially those of the household of the faith. These works are undoubtedly proper for the servants in the household of God, and to do these works is both laudable and honorable for all.

Also beautiful and useful to do for all the brothers in Christ is to visit those who have spiritual illnesses and to pray for them to the Lord. Our Savior Himself has said that such illnesses can only be driven away by prayer and fasting. One should visit them and pray for them sincerely and diligently, without the odiousness of malice, without looking for any remuneration, without causing any disturbance, without deceit, without a lot of words, without false piety, without pride. Before all one should have the modesty and very humility of Christ. In sum, a beautiful activity is to help the sick.

It is beautiful in the eyes of God and men to give oneself to the poor and to offer hospitality to pilgrims, especially those of the household of the faith, for the love of God and for those He has created.

Each one should try to strengthen the faith of his brothers in the one God by edifying and

confirming them in the faith.