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**The Book of Gomorrah**

***St. Peter Damian’s Letter 31 (1049)***

***And***

Pope St. Leo’s IX’s Decree on Sodomy

Translated by Owen J. Blum, O.F.M[[1]](#endnote-1)

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Letter 31 (1049)

By The Humble Monk, Peter Damian

(1) To the blessed Pope Leo, Peter, the monks’ least servant, sends the homage of his proper devotion.

(2) Since we know from the mouth of Truth itself that the Apostolic See is the mother of all churches, it is proper that if any doubt should arise in matters pertaining to the welfare of souls, one should have recourse to her as to the teacher and, as one might say, to the source of heavenly wisdom, so that from this unique principle of ecclesiastical discipline a light may go forth by which the entire body of the Church is bathed in the utter brilliance that Truth imparts, once the darkness of uncertainty has been dispelled. In our region a certain abominable and most shameful vice has developed, and unless it be prevented as soon as possible by the severest punishment, it is certain that the sword of divine fury will be unsheathed, leading in its unchecked violence to the destruction of many. One is nauseated with shame and embarrassment to speak of things so disgracefully foul, or even to mention them within earshot of Your Holiness. But if a physician is appalled by the contagion of the plague, who is likely to wield the cautery? If he grows squeamish when he is about to apply the cure, who will restore health to stricken hearts?

The befouling cancer of sodomy is, in fact, spreading so through the clergy or rather, like a savage beast, is raging with such shameless abandon through the flock of Christ, that for many of them it would be more salutary to be burdened with service to the world than, under the pretext of religion, to be enslaved so easily under the iron rule of satanic tyranny.[[3]](#endnote-3)

It would be better for them to perish alone as laymen than, after having changed their attire but not their disposition, to drag others with them to destruction, as Truth itself testifies when it says, “But if anyone is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones, it would be better for him to be drowned in the depths of the seas with a great millstone round his neck.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Unless immediate effort be exerted by the Apostolic See, there is little doubt that, even if one wished to curb this unbridled evil, he could not check the momentum of its progress.[[5]](#endnote-5)

*On the Variety of Sodomites*

(3) But that the matter be completely clear to you and be properly presented, there appears to be four varieties of this criminal vice. There are some who pollute themselves; there are others who befoul one another by mutually handling their genitals. Others still who fornicate between the thighs; and others who do so from the rear. Of these, as we proceed through the various degrees, the two latter are to be judged more serious than the others.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Certainly, a greater penance must be imposed on those who sin with others, than on those who masturbate alone; and a more severe judgment is to be passed on those who couple between the thighs. The ingenious artifice of the devil contrived these states of corruption, so that the higher the unhappy soul rises in the scale of vice, the deeper it is likely to be buried in hell.[[7]](#endnote-7)

*That Improper Leniency on the Part of Prelates Does Not Check Those Who Deviate from Right Conduct*

(4) It often happens that those who are guilty of this abandoned behavior come to their senses through the generosity of divine mercy, are led to repentance, and devoutly submit to public penance, no matter how severe, but dread to face the loss of ecclesiastical status. Some prelates, however, acting perhaps more leniently than they should, in respect to this vice flatly decide that no one need be deposed from orders because of the first three degrees we listed earlier; they do not refuse to degrade only those who are known to have committed anal intercourse. In other words, should one prompt an ejaculation by his own effort, or pollute another by manipulating him with his hands, or lie with another between the thighs in the manner of the different sexes, so long as he avoids violating his partner from the rear, he should be given a penance commensurate with his crime, but not deprived of clerical status. Thus it happens that a man is known to have committed this sin with eight or even ten equally foul companions, is still permitted to continue in his rank. Without a doubt, such permissive indulgence hardly excises the lesion but only stimulates its growth; it does not promote in the culprit bitter regrets over his daringly illicit acts, but rather grants him freedom for future ventures. It would seem that an erotic cleric, whatever his rank in orders, dreads more to be despised by men than to be condemned under the scrutiny of the divine Judge. As a result, he prefers any penance, no matter how severe or enduring, to the danger of losing his stature. And while because of this imprudent discretion he does not fear to lose his benefice, he is challenged both to dare novel sins and to persist the longer in deeds for which he has come off unscathed. And so, to put it another way, so long as he is not struck in the place where his illness is more severe, he sensuously wallows in the foul slough of obscenity into which he has fallen.[[8]](#endnote-8)

*That Those Who Are Addicted to Impure Practices Should Be neither Promoted to Orders nor, if Already Ordained, Be Allowed to Continue*

(5) On the other hand, it seems to me to be utterly preposterous for those who are habituated to this filth of this festering disease to dare to present themselves for orders, or to remain in them if they have been ordained. It is clearly contrary to reason and opposed to the canonical decrees of the Fathers. I state this, not to render a definitive opinion in your august presence, but only to make my position clear. It is not without cause that this shameful deed is considered to be the worst of crimes, seeing that Almighty God is always read to have detested it, even when he had not yet curbed other vices, he already kept condemning this one with the precepts of the Law, under pain of the strictest penalty. Passing over the fact that with sulfurous fire from heaven he destroyed the two eminent cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the surrounding countryside;[[9]](#endnote-9) he struck down Onan, the son of Judah, because of the enormity and brought him to an untimely death, as Scripture relates: “But Onan, knowing that the offspring would not be his, spilt his seed on the ground every time he slept with his brother’s wife, to avoid providing children for his brother. And therefore, the Lord killed him because he had done a detestable thing.”[[10]](#endnote-10) In the Law it also says, “If a man lies with a man in the same way as with a woman, both have done a hateful thing; they must die, their blood shall be on their own heads.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

(6) He, moreover, who has committed this crime for which the Old Testament prescribes the death penalty, should not be promoted to ecclesiastical orders. This is borne out in the letters of Pope Gregory, writing to Passivus the bishop: “You, my brothers,” he says, “are well aware how long the Abruzzi has been without pastoral care. For a long time we have sought for someone worthy of ordination from that district, and were totally unable to find one. But since Importunus[[12]](#endnote-12) is highly recommended to me because of his moral life, his zeal for chanting the psalms, and his love of prayer, and is reported to lead a holy life, I wish that you, my brother, would have him visit you and that you would provide him spiritual advice so that he may progress in virtue. And if it is clear that he is innocent of any sins that according to the tenor of the Law are punishable by death, let him be ordained, either to become a monk, or raised by you to the subdiaconate, and after some time, God willing, let him be promoted to the cure of souls.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

(7) Notice that in this context it is clearly understood that any man who sins with a man by intercourse as with a woman, that is, between the thighs, which crime, as we stated above, was punishable by death in the Old Law, even though he enjoys a good reputation, is zealous in promoting psalmody, is preeminent for his love of prayer, and is held in high esteem for his holy life; such a man can indeed receive full forgiveness of his guilt, but nowise can he be permitted to aspire to ecclesiastical orders. At the same time that Importunus, a venerable man, is praised and acclaimed, is honored and highly regarded for his upright and holy life, and esteemed for his many virtues, it is, nonetheless, later written of him, “If it is evident that he is innocent of any sins which, according to the tenor of the Law are punishable by death, then let him be ordained.” It is perfectly clear that when a capital crime has degraded a man, no subsequence holy life will reform him to the point where he might receive orders and ecclesiastical status. No one may aspire to reach the heights of preferment who has surely fallen into the depths of mortal sin. Hence, it is as plain as day that anyone proven guilty of fornicating with a man between his thighs, which, without a doubt is a mortal sin, will be promoted to ecclesiastical orders in total opposition to the norms of Holy Scripture and in complete disregard of the regulations ordained by God.[[14]](#endnote-14)

*Whether Such Men May Be Permitted to Discharge This Office if Ecclesiastical Necessity Demands*

(8) But perhaps someone will say that necessity demands and that no one is present who can celebrate divine services in the Church: consequently, the decision, which, as justice required, was at first appropriately severe, is now softened in the face of practical necessity. I am going to reply to this in a summary way: Was it not a pressing matter, and one fraught with necessity, at the time when the Apostolic See was without a shepherd? Shall we wipe out a vigorous judgment to benefit an individual, but retain it unchanged even to the deprivation of an entire people? If we do not sacrifice a principle to benefit a vast multitude, shall we violate it to promote one man’s advantage? Let the eminent preacher come forward and explain what he thinks about this vice. In his letter to the Ephesians, he says, “For you can be quite certain that no one who indulges in fornication or impurity or avarice can inherit anything of the kingdom of Christ and of God.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Therefore, how can he be so arrogant as to presume a position of honor in the Church, which is surely the kingdom of God? Will he also fear to despise the Divine Law, which he disregarded by steeping himself in crime, when he assumes the dignity of ecclesiastical office? Indeed, he saves nothing for himself, because at every turn he was not afraid to be in contempt of God.[[16]](#endnote-16)

(9) This Law was imposed especially on those who violated it, as Paul attests when writing to Timothy: “The Law is not irreligious and for sinners, for the sacrilegious and defiled; it is for people who kill their fathers or mothers and for murderers, for those who are immoral with women or with men, for slavers, for liars and perjurers, and for everything else that is contrary to sound teaching.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Hence, as we have demonstrated, since the Law was instituted for those who are immoral with men to prevent them from daring to dishonor holy orders, by whom, I ask, should it be observed if it is despised in particular by those upon whom it is enjoined? No doubt , if he is such a capable person, it is obvious that the more prudent he is in choosing means to an end, the more careful he should be in observing the precepts of valid law.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The more aware a person is, the more reprehensible is his offense, because anyone who, had he wished, could prudently have avoided sin, will inevitably deserve punishment. For as James says, “Everyone who knows what is the right thing to do and does not do it commits a sin.”[[19]](#endnote-19) And Truth itself says, “Everyone to whom much is given, of him more will be required.”[[20]](#endnote-20) If a learned man violates the right order of ecclesiastical law, it would be surprising if an ignorant man observed it. If, however, just any educated man were irregularly ordained, it seems that he is, in a sense, paving the way to error, which he so arrogantly set out to tread, for those who follow him, who are, I am sure, less gifted. Moreover, he is to be condemned, not only because he sinned, but for the further reason that by example of his own presumption he has others to emulate his sin.[[21]](#endnote-21)

*That Those Who Desire Ordination After Incurring This Vice Have Become Depraved*

(10) Who can turn a deaf ear, or, more to the point, who does not tremble through and through at the words Paul, like a mighty trumpet, blasts at such as these? “God abandoned them to their hearts’ desire and to the practices with which they dishonor their own bodies.”[[22]](#endnote-22) And almost immediately following he said, “that is why God has abandoned them to degrading passions. For their women have turned from natural intercourse to unnatural practices, and their menfolk likewise have given up natural intercourse with women to be consumed with passion for each other, men doing shameless things with men and getting an appropriate reward for their perversion. And since they refused to see that it was rational to acknowledge God, God has abandoned them to their depraved ideas to do that which was reprehensible.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Why is it that they are so eager to reach the top in ecclesiastical rank after such a grievous fall? What should we think, and what conclusion should we draw but that God has abandoned them to their depravity?

While they are slaves to sin he does not permit them to see what they need to do. Since the sun, that is, he who rises over death, has set for them, and after losing the sight furnished by their conscience, they are unable to judge the malice of the filthy acts that they perform, and to conclude that it is even worse that they desire ordination uncanonically, against the will of God. Accordingly, as is usually the case according to God’s decrees, they who defile themselves with this corrupting vice are smitten with a due judgment of punishment and incur a benighting blindness. Thus we read of the primitive originators of this foulness: They were about to use violence against the upright Lot and were at the point of breaking down the door. “But then, Scripture says, “the men reached out, pulled Lot back into the house, and shut the door. And they struck the men outside the house with blindness, from the youngest to the oldest, so that they could not find the doorway.”[[24]](#endnote-24) It is evident, moreover, that the two angels who, we read, were sent to blessed Lot, aptly represented the persons of the Father and the Son. This becomes clear from what Lot said to them: “I beg you my lord, your servant has won your favor and you have shown great kindness to me in saving my life.”[[25]](#endnote-25) Certainly, one who speaks in the singular to two people as you would to one, is surely honoring one substance in two persons.

(11 ) Consequently, sodomites attempt violently to break in on angels when impure men attempt to approach God through holy orders. Surely, they are struck with blindness, because by the just decree of God they fall into interior darkness. They are thus unable to find the door because in their separation from God by sin they do not know how to return to him. One who tries to reach God by the tortuous road of arrogance and conceit, rather than by the path of humility, will certainly fail to recognize the entrance that is obviously right before him, or even that the door is Christ, as he himself says: “I am the door.”[[26]](#endnote-26) Those who lose Christ because of their addiction to sin, never find the gate that leads to the heavenly dwelling of the saints.

(12) They have become confirmed reprobates, since in failing to measure the exact weight of their guilt in the balance of personal judgment they conclude that the leaden burden of their punishment is but light and trivial. Now the Apostle explains what was previously said, viz. “They struck the men who were outside the house with blindness,[[27]](#endnote-27) when he states, “God abandoned them to their reprobate ideas.”[[28]](#endnote-28) He obviously comments on the following phrase: “And they could not find the doorway,” when he continues, “To do that which is reprehensible,” as if he were saying that they were trying to enter a door that was closed to them. To be sure, one who is unworthy of holy orders and tries to break into the service of the altar does the same as he who abandons the obvious gateway and tries to enter through some impassable obstacle of the wall. Since such persons, moreover, are denied free access, while promising themselves that they will enter the sanctuary, they are forced instead to remain in the forecourt, frustrated by their presumption. They can go ahead and bang their head against the rocks of Sacred Scripture, but they will never be able to enter by way of this divine authority. And while attempting to break in where they are not permitted, they can do nothing but vainly grope their way along the hidden walls. To such as these one may aptly apply the word of the prophet: “They grope their way along at noon day as if it were night.”[[29]](#endnote-29) Since they are unable to cross the threshold in straightforward fashion, they wander about in circles, dizzied by the maddening rotation. Of such the psalmist says, “My God, make them like a wheel,”[[30]](#endnote-30) and again, “the wicked walk in a circle.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Paul also speaks of them in the passage cited above, as he continued, “Those who do such things deserve to die, not only they who do them, but they also who approve those who practice them.”[[32]](#endnote-32)

(13) Unquestionably, one who is not awakened by this awful thunder of apostolic invective must be thought more likely to be dead than asleep. And since the Apostle makes such an effort to intensify the severe punishment of this sentence, and that, not for the faithful among the Jews, but for the gentiles and for those ignorant of God, what, I ask, would he have said had he beheld this deadly wound reeking in the very body of the Holy Church? And especially, what grief, what fire of compassion would kindle his devout heart upon learning that this destructive plague was raging even among those in sacred orders? Listen, you do-nothing superiors of clerics and priests. Listen, and even though you feel sure of yourselves, tremble at the thought that you are partners in the guilt of others; those, I mean, who wink at the sins of their subjects that need correction, and who by ill-considered silence allow them license to sin. Listen, I say, and be shrewd enough to understand that all of you alike are deserving of death, that is, not only those who do such things, but also they who approve those who practice them.

*Of Bishops Who Practice Impure Acts With Their Spiritual Sons*

(14) What an unheard of crime! What a vile deed, deserving a flood of bitter tears. If they who approve of these evildoers deserve to die, what condign punishment can be imagined for those who commit these absolutely damnable acts with their spiritual sons? Who can expect the flock to prosper when its shepherd has sunk so deep into the bowels of the devil? What man will continue to be under his authority, knowing that he is so hostilely estranged from God? Who will make a mistress of a cleric, or a woman of a man? Who, by his lust, will consign a son whom he has spiritually begotten for God to slavery under the iron law of satanic tyranny? If a man violates a woman for whom he has stood as godfather, will anyone hesitate in deciding that he be deprived of Holy Communion, or in ordering that he undergo the ordeal of public penance according to the norms of the sacred canons? For it is written that “spiritual begetting is greater than physical.”[[33]](#endnote-33) Indeed, there is scarcely any difference between receiving a person from the lay state into the clerical order and thus begetting a spiritual son to God, and baptizing or standing as godfather for one baptized. To be sure, the canonical institution of orders is a renunciation of the world and as such is, in some way, a second baptism.

(15) It follows, therefore, that the same sentence is rightly inflicted on him who assaults his own daughter, or who by sacrilegious intercourse abuses his spiritual daughter, and on him also who in his foul lust defiles a cleric whom he has ordained. Perhaps we should distinguish here the quality of both crimes: in the two prior cases, even though he practices incest, he is sinning naturally, because he sinned with a woman; in the latter case, by his shameful action with a cleric he commits a sacrilege on a son, is guilty of the crime of incest on a man, and violates the law of nature. It seems to me that it is more excusable to indulge in lustful acts with an animal than with a man for one should be judged less severely for losing his own soul than for dragging another with him to destruction. What a sorry state of affairs that one’s ruin depends upon another, so that when one dies, the other must necessarily follow.

*Of Those Who Confess Their Crimes to the Same Person with Whom They Have Sinned*

(16) So that we are not unaware of the devil’s clever devices, let me put before you some of the tools that he and his council have designed in his ancient laboratory of evil. I would be remiss if I allowed the fact to be hidden, that some of those who are shot through with the poison of this crime, when their conscience begins to trouble them, confess to one another lest their guilt come to the attention of others. Despite the fact that, as actual culprits, they are ashamed to look others in the eye, they themselves become judges and each happily grants to the other the blanket forgiveness that he aspires for himself. It follows, then, that they have become penitents involved in great crimes, and still their lips are not pale from fasting nor are their bodies wasted by self-denial. Moreover, since they do not hesitate to gorge themselves, their passions are basely aroused to their usual lust. Thus it happens that he who has yet to weep for the sins he has committed, is guilty of still more lamentable crimes.

(17) The Law commands, however, when one has contracted leprosy, he should show himself to the priests.[[34]](#endnote-34) But when an unclean man confesses to another, defiled by evil that they have committed in common, it is a case of a leper showing himself to a leper and not to the priests. Now, since confession is by definition a revelation, what does he reveal, I ask, who tells his hearer something already known. Or, in what sense can this be called a confession, where nothing is revealed by the penitent but what the hearer already knows? By what right or what law can one bind or loose the other when he is constrained by the bonds of evil deeds common to them both. He who is himself tied in chains, labors in vain to release another from his shackles. He who would guide a blind man on his way must himself have sight, or he will be the cause of his client’s fall, as the voice of Truth declares when it says, “If one blind man leads another, both will fall into the pit.”[[35]](#endnote-35) And again, “Observing the splinter in your brother’s eye, you never notice the plank in your own.” Hypocrite! “Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see how to take out the splinter that is in your brother’s eye.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

(18) By these texts from the Gospels it becomes perfectly clear that he who is oppressed by the same guilty darkness tries in vain to invite another to return to the light of repentance. While he has no fear of extending himself to outstrip the other in erring, he ends up accompanying his follower into the yawning pit of ruin.[[37]](#endnote-37)

*That He Who Prostitutes a Monk Is to Be Legally Deposed Just like One Who Violates a Nun*

(19) But now we meet face to face, you sodomite, whoever you might be. Do you refuse to confess your deeds to spiritual men because you are afraid to lose your clerical status? Yet, how much more salutary it would be to suffer passing shame in the community of men than to undergo eternal sentence before the tribunal of the heavenly Judge. Perhaps you will tell me: If a man sins with a man only by femoral intercourse, he is certainly in need of penance, but from motives of human compassion he should not unalterably be denied sacred orders. But I ask you: If a monk should have relations with a nun, in your judgment, should he remain in the order? It follows, therefore, that what you admit as reasonable for the nun, you should also logically allow as applicable to the monk. And since you apparently concur in this judgment regarding monks, by the same token you must include clerics in your determination. As I said before, however, we must be discriminating; your case should be judged the worse in that, since both are of the same sex, it is palpably contrary to nature. Since, moreover, in passing judgment on sins one rightly always inquires into the free decisions of the sinner, it follows that he who fouls a man’s thighs would, if nature so allowed, achieve with the man with the same act of insane, unbridled lust as he would with a woman. He did what he could, going as far as nature would allow. And so he was unwilling in setting a limit to this crime, in that the law of nature had placed a functionally impassable barrier. Therefore, because the same law obtains for monks of both sexes, we must conclude that since one who violates a nun is rightly deposed, so also one who corrupts a monk must absolutely be prevented from exercising his office.

*That Both He Who Sins with His Daughter or Goddaughter, and He Who Defiles His Son by the Sacrament of Penance, Is Guilty of the Same Crime*

(20) But now let us go back in our discussion to those holy, I mean, those cursed confessors. If any diocesan priest should sin with a woman whose confession he has heard even once, no one would doubt that he deserves to be degraded by syn or to whom he had gone as synodal decree. However, if he should sin with a priest or with a cleric in major orders, whose confession he had heard or to whom he had gone as a penitent, shall he not in justice be deprived of the benefice attached to his status? For it is the common expression to call him a “son of penance,” just as we say also “son of baptism.” Thus we read of blessed Mark the Evangelist, “He is Peter’s son in baptism.”[[38]](#endnote-38) And the famous preacher who said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Good News,”[[39]](#endnote-39) also said on another occasion, “What is it that we are proud of before the Lord, if not you? It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus by preaching the Good News.”[[40]](#endnote-40) And again he said this to the Galatians: “My children, I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you.”[[41]](#endnote-41) Therefore, if he who has sent not to baptize but to preach the Good News, and, in so doing, to incite to penance, begot and endured the pains of childbirth, then he is properly called a son who receives penance, and a father who administers it. Now, then, if we pay close attention to what is said above, it will become perfectly obvious that both he who seduces his own daughter or his daughter by baptism, and he who sins shamefully with his son begotten in sacramental penance, are guilty of the same crime. And just as it is proper in law, that he, who sinned with a woman whom he had begotten, or of whom he is godfather, or to whom he had administered sacramental penance, should be kept in every way from exercising his office; so too should he be treated who commits unclean acts with his son by the same sacrament.

*On Spurious Canons Which Mislead Completely Those Who Rely on Them[[42]](#endnote-42)*

(21) But since a certain amount of nonsense is found mixed in with the sacred canons, and on this nonsense desperate men rely, let me quote some of it that I might presumptuously rely, let me quote some of it that I might clearly prove that these and similar documents, wherever they turn up, are false and completely apocryphal. Among the other items, note the following: A priest, not in monastic vows, who sins with a girl or a prostitute,[[43]](#endnote-43) shall do penance for two years and three Lents, always fasting on dry bread on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays; if he sins with a nun or with a man, and if this is habitual, a fast of five years should be added.[[44]](#endnote-44) In like manner, deacons who are not monks, as well as monks who are not ordained, must do penance for two years. A few lines down one reads this: A cleric, not in monastic vows, who has intercourse with a girl, shall do penance for two half a year;[[45]](#endnote-45) if he sins frequently, let him do penance for a year. Likewise if he is a canon; if he sins frequently, two years.

(22) Again, if one should sin like a sodomite, some say he should do penance for ten years; he who is habituated in this sin must be more severely punished; if he is ordained, let him be degraded and do penance as a layman. One year of penance is assigned if a man should fornicate between the thighs; if he repeats the act he must do penance for two years; if he should practice anal intercourse, he must do penance for three years; if a boy, the penance is for two, a deacon, three, a cleric two years. Whoever fornicates with cattle or draught animals must do penance for ten years. A bishop who sins with quadrupeds must do penance for ten years and be deprived of his office; a priest, five; a deacon three, a cleric, two. Many other deceitful and sacrilegious elements can be found interpolated into the sacred canon by the devil’s cunning, which I would rather destroy than copy, rather contemptuously spit upon than make lists of such wanton claptrap. Now, it is on these fantasies the sodomites reply, they place their trust in them as if in revelations given in dreams, and thus delude themselves with an illusory assured hope. But let us see whether these documents agree with canonical authority and demonstrate textually and in real life whether they should be accepted or rejected.[[46]](#endnote-46)

*A Conclusive Rejection of Aforementioned Canons*

(23) Now, to go back to the beginning of this deceptive chapter. It states that a priest not in monastic vows, who sins with a girl or with a prostitute, shall do penance for two years.

Who is there so stupid or so irrational as to think that a penance of two years is a fitting penalty for a priest convicted of fornication? Anyone who has only a smattering of canonical science, or who has been barely introduced to the subject would obviously know that the penance assigned for a priest who sins by fornication is at least ten years, to say nothing of more severe penalties. A penance of two years for fornication should be considered too light, not only for priests, but even for laymen, for whom the sentence is three years if, after their fall they are willing to make amends.

Next, it is said: If one (that is, if a priest) should sin with a nun or a man, and if this is habitual, a fast of five years should be added. In like manner, deacons who are not monks, as well as monks who are not ordained, must do penance for two years.

There is an item at the beginning of this senseless statement which I am explicating, that caught my eye and thoroughly interested me, namely, where it says, “If … with a nun or with a man.” Now my good sodomite, look closely at this passage of yours that you love so dearly, embrace so eagerly, and thrust forward as a shield for your defense, and notice that it does not matter whether one sins with God’s handmaid or with a man, for the sins are equated and the sentence imposed is the same. So now there is nothing over which you can contend with me, nothing in which you can rightly dissent from my allegations.[[47]](#endnote-47)

(24) But who would be so insanely foolish or become so utterly blind that he would decide to impose a penance of five years on a priest who sinned with a handmaiden of God, that is, with a nun, or a penance of two years on a deacon or a monk? Is this not the noose awaiting those who are about to die? Is this not the snare for erring souls? Who indeed could censure such a statement as this: “That a cleric not in monastic vows, who has intercourse with a girl, shall do penance for half a year”? And who is such an expert in the science of Sacred Scripture or so resourceful in the subtle art of dialectic that he would presume to condemn such a penalty imposed by the law, or the judicial decision of an authority so deserving of contempt? What is the source that prescribes three years for a layman while deciding that a cleric is to do penance for six months? Clerics who commit fornication are indeed fortunate if they are subject to the decision of sodomites, for the very same amount they measure out to others they seek to measure out to themselves.[[48]](#endnote-48) **This author of error is so hungry to win souls for the devil that, while attempting to cause the destruction of monks, he expands his perverse doctrine to include the clerical ranks** (bold added)**.** This murderer of souls, unable to glut his vicious appetite only by the death of monks, lusts to stuff himself at the expense of the other.[[49]](#endnote-49)

(25) But now let us see what follows: “If one should sin like a sodomite, some say he should do penance for ten years; he who is habituated in this sin must be more severely punished; if he is ordained, let him be degraded to do penance as a layman. One year of penance is assigned if a man should fornicate between the thighs; if he repeats the act, he must do penance for two years; if he should commit anal intercourse, he must do penance for three years.” But since sinning like a sodomite, as you yourselves assert, is the same as having anal intercourse, how is it that your canons in just one line show such disparity, enjoining a penalty of ten years for those who sin like sodomites, but restrict penitential practices to a short three years on those who have anal intercourse, which is the same thing. **Are they not rightly to be compared to those monsters, not produced by nature but devised by human craft, some of which have the head of a horse and the hooves of a goat?** (bold and underline added). With which canons or decrees of the Fathers do these ridiculous ordinances agree, in that they are so self-contradictory and leap about like horn-headed creatures? If they do violence to one another, by which authorities will they be supported? “Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin, and a house divided against itself shall fall. And if Satan is divided against himself, how can his teaching stand?” [[50]](#endnote-50) At one point, indeed, they seem to inflict a sentence, another they display a certain cruel mercy. Like some chimerical monster it will roar frightfully in the form of a menacing lion, and then humbly bleat like a poor little she-goat. By such varieties of forms they cause a person to laugh rather than feel penitential compunction.[[51]](#endnote-51)

(26) The items that follow are also similarly marred by error: “Whoever fornicates with cattle or draught must do penance for ten years. Also, a bishop who sins with quadrupeds must do penance for ten years and be deprived of his office; a priest, five; a deacon, three; a cleric two.”

Since first of all it says that anyone who fornicates with cattle or draught animals will be punished with ten years of penance, how do we arrive at the statement that follows, that for lying with animals a priest should be assessed five years of penance, a deacon three, a cleric two? The source that holds everyone, also every layman, to a penalty of ten years, is the same that imposes five years on a priest, that is, that remits half of the total punishment. Now, I ask, with what page of Holy Writ are these lightheaded dreams that are obviously self-contradictory in agreement? Who does not realize, does not see at a glance that these and similar texts, falsely inserted into the sacred canons, are forgeries of the devil, cleverly manipulated to deceive unsuspecting souls? Just as poison is deviously mixed with honey or with any other more delicious foods, so that while their flavor entices one to eat, the deadly poison is disguised to enter more readily into one’s system; so too these cunning and deceitful fictions are inserted into the Sacred Writings to avoid the suspicion of forgery. They are covered over, as it were, with honey, in that they are supplied with the flavor of feigned piety. But beware of them, whoever you are, lest the Sirens’ song allure you with its deadly sweetness, and your soul, like a ship, go down in the whirlpool off the Scyllaean rock. Do not be terrified by the sea of exaggerated austerity found in the holy councils, and do not allow the shallow Syrian sandbanks of apocryphal canons to attract you by the promised gentleness of their waves. A ship avoiding rough waters often suffers shipwreck by coming too close to the sandy shore, while, on the other hand, by plowing through heavy seas, it sails out safely without loss of cargo.[[52]](#endnote-52)

*That These Ridiculous Statutes, Because They Seem to Have No Certain Author, Are Rightly to Be Excluded from the List of Canons*

(27) But who is responsible for forging these canons? Who has dared to sew sharp-spined thorns and thistles in the purple grove of the Church? Everyone knows that every authentic canon is found either in the revered decrees of the councils or in the pronouncements of the holy fathers, the pontiffs of the Apostolic See. No man on his own authority is allowedto publish canons, for this privilege belongs to himalone who is currently presiding in the chair of Blessed Peter. But these spurious canonical suckers to which I refer are obviously unrelated to the holy councils and are demonstrably foreign to the decrees of the Fathers. It follows therefore, that since they clearly derive neither from the decretals of the Fathers, nor from the sacred councils, they are in no way to be included among the canons. Accordingly, whatever is not included among the species is without doubt also alien to the genus. Now if we inquire about their author, he cannot be named for certain, since there is no uniformity of authorship in the various codices. In some it is written, “Theodore says”; in others, “The Roman Penitential says”; in another, “The Apostolic Canons.” In some places they are entitled in one way, and elsewhere, in another, and while they are not credited with having one author, they doubtlessly lose all authority. Since they totter on such flimsy authorship, they demonstrate nothing with clear authority. And so it is necessary that these forgeries, which produce in their readers the darkness of doubt, stop basking in the light of sacred writings, where all doubt has been removed. Now, therefore, that we have eliminated from the canons this dramatic nonsense on which the sodomites have relied, and having clearly convicted them with reasonable arguments, I will now set before you canons about whose fidelity and authority there cannot be absolutely no doubt.[[53]](#endnote-53)

In the Council of Ancyra [314 AD] is found the following:

*“Of Those Who Commit Fornication Irrationally, That Is, Who Commit Immoral Acts With Animals, or Who Defile Themselves with Men”*

(28) “Of those who have acted irrationally, or who are now acting in this way: Whoever have committed such a crime before their twentieth year, after spending fifteen years as penitents, may then participate in common prayer; then after five years in this state, they may finally receive the Eucharist. Their manner of living during the years they are penitents must also be examined, and only after that may they be pardoned. But if they were grossly addicted to these crimes, they must submit to a longer period of penance.

Those who are over twenty years of age and are married, and have fallen into this sin, may participate in community prayers after spending twenty-five years in penance. Following five years in this state, they may finally receive the Eucharist. If married men over the age of fifty should sin in this fashion, they may receive Holy Communion at the end of their lives.”

(29) Notice that in the very title of this revered authority we see clearly that not only those who practice anal intercourse, but also those who sin with men in any form are compared throughout with those who practice bestiality. Moreover, if we look to the choice of words, we observe that they are used cautiously and with great discretion, as when it is said, “Those who have intercourse with animals or who defile themselves with men.” Now, if by the phrase, “those who defile themselves with men,” the council had meant those who practice anal intercourse, it would have been necessary to use two words, since it could have expressed the idea well enough with the one phrase, “to have intercourse.” Indeed for economy of style it would have sufficed to express the whole sentence in one word, namely, “those who have intercourse with animals or with men.” For those who fornicate with animals and those who have anal intercourse with men copulate in the same way. But since he speaks of some who have intercourse with animals, and of others who do not have intercourse but are defiled with men, it is obvious that at the end of the sentence he is speaking of those who defile men and not of those who corrupt them. It should be noted, however, that this conciliar regulation was directed especially to laymen, which by inference can easily be gathered from what follows: “Those who are over twenty years of age and are married, and have fallen into this sin, having spent twenty-five years as penitents, may participate in community prayer, in which state they must remain for five years. Then finally they may receive the Eucharist.”[[54]](#endnote-54)

(30) **Now, if laymen guilty of this crime, who after performing twenty-five years of penance are to be admitted to common prayer, but not as yet to the reception of communion, how can a priest be judged worthy, not merely of receiving but of offering and consecrating these sacred mysteries? If the former is scarcely permitted to enter a church and pray with others, how can the latter be allowed to approach the altar of the Lord to intercede for others** (bold added)? If a layman is not worthy to hear Mass until he has endured such a lengthy period of penance, how is the priest to be thought deserving of celebrating the sacred mysteries? If the former, who has sinned less grievously, in that his life is spent on the broader paths of the world, is unworthy to receive the heavenly gift of the Eucharist in his mouth, how will the latter be judged qualified to take such a tremendous mystery into his polluted hands? But let us continue considering the Council of Ancyra and its second definition in regard to this crime.[[55]](#endnote-55)

*“Of Those Who Once Defiled with Animals or with Men, or Who Still Succumb to This Vice”*

(31) “This holy synod has commanded that those who have committed acts of bestiality and have polluted others with the leprosy of unnatural vice, must pray among those possessed by an unclean spirit (demoniacs).” Obviously, since the text does not say, “Who have *corrupted* others with the leprosy of unnatural vice,” but “who have *polluted* them,” which also concurs with the wording of the title that speaks of pollution and not corruption, it follows that a man, driven by lust, who is defiled in any manner with another man, is commanded to pray with those possessed by the devil and not with Catholic Christians. Hence, if sodomites of themselves are unable to discern their own identity, they may at least be enlightened by those with whom they are assigned to a common confinement for prayer.[[56]](#endnote-56)

(32) Certainly, it is quite proper for those who, contrary to natural law and right reason, hand over their flesh to demons by such foul practices should share a common nook to pray with the diabolically possessed. Moreover, since human nature itself rebels at these evil deeds, and since the problem of not being of different sex is repugnant, it becomes perfectly clear that they would never undertake such queer and repulsive deeds unless evil spirits had completely possessed them like “vessels of wrath made for destruction.”[[57]](#endnote-57) But once they begin their possession, they pour out the hellish infection of their malice into those they have seized, so that now they passionately desire, not what the natural emotions of the flesh might demand, but only that which the devil’s urging suggests. For when a man assaults another man to practice sodomy, this is not a natural urging of the flesh but only an incitement of diabolical origin. The holy fathers, therefore, were careful to ordain that sodomites should pray in the company of demoniacs, since there was never any doubt that they had become prey to the same satanic spirit. But how can a mediator, exercising the priestly office, stand between God and the people if he is excluded from associating with the congregation of the people and is never allowed to pray except with those possessed by the devil? However, since we have taken pains to use two texts from the same holy council, let us also quote what the great Basil thought about the vice we have been discussing, “that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”[[58]](#endnote-58)

*Of Clerics or Monks Who Are Seducers of Men*

(33) For he says,[[59]](#endnote-59) “Any cleric or monk who seduces young men or boys, or is apprehended in kissing or in any shameful situation, shall be publicly flogged and shall lose his clerical tonsure. Thus shorn, he shall be disgraced by spitting into his face, bound in iron chains, wasted by six months of close confinement, and for three days each week put on barley bread given him toward evening. Following this period, he shall spend a further six months living in a small, segregated courtyard in the custody of a spiritual elder, kept busy with manual labor and prayer, subjected to vigils and prayers, forced to walk at all times in the company of two spiritual brothers, never again allowed to associate with young men for purposes of improper conversation or advice.”[[60]](#endnote-60)

(34) Here the sodomite should seriously consider whether he is worthy to serve in ecclesiastical office. Since this sacred authority judges him to be deserving of such ignominious and degrading treatment. Nor, for all that, should he flatter himself for never having violated anyone by anal intercourse or by coitus between the thighs, since it is apparent from this document that anyone apprehended only in kissing or in some shameful situation will be rightfully forced to suffer all these disconcerting disciplinary indignities. But if a kiss is punishable by such severe penalties, what does femoral intercourse deserve? For punishing such a crime or such a monstrous deed, would it suffice to prescribe public flogging, or losing one’s tonsure, or shameful shaving of the head, or besmirching one with spital, or lengthy confinement in prison, or loading one with iron chains? And last of all, he is to be put on a diet of barley bread, because he who “has become like a horse or a mule”[[61]](#endnote-61) is quite properly deprived of human fare and fed on the fodder of animals.[[62]](#endnote-62)

(35) Moreover, if we neglect to weigh the gravity of this sin, it will become perfectly obvious at least from the sentence by which penance is imposed. For whoever is compelled by canonical censure to undergo public penance, is surely adjudged by the Fathers to be clearly unworthy of ecclesiastical office.

Thus among other things blessed Pope Siricius wrote the following: “It was also proper for us to decide that just as it is forbidden that any layman obtain the dignity of the clergy after he has done penance and been reconciled. Although now cleansed of the stain of every sin, those who were once vessels of vice must not take in hand the instruments for administering the sacraments.”[[63]](#endnote-63) Therefore, since Basil commands that he who is guilty of this sin must undergo severe public penance, and Siricius forbids a penitent to enter the clerical state, it evidently follows that whoever is sullied with the ugly filth of homosexual vice is unworthy of service in ecclesiastical offices. They, moreover, who were once vessels of vice, as we said, are unfit to celebrate the divine mysteries.[[64]](#endnote-64)

*A Fitting Denunciation of the Vice of Sodomy*

(36) Unquestionably, this vice, since it surpasses the enormity of all others, is impossible to compare with any other vice. Without fail it brings death to the body and destruction to the soul. It pollutes the flesh, extinguishes the light of the mind, expels the Holy Spirit from the temple of the human heart, and gives entrance to the devil, the stimulator of lust. It leads to error, totally removes truth from the deluded mind, prepares a trap for the traveler and secures the pit and makes it impossible for the victim to escape. It opens up hell and closes the gates of paradise, changes a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem into an heir of Babylon, and turns a heavenly star into chaff for eternal fire; it cuts off a member of the Church and hurls him into the depths of the devouring flames of hell. This vice attempts to destroy the walls of our heavenly fatherland and tries to rebuild the defenses of Sodom that were razed by fire. It is this vice that violates temperance, slays modesty, strangles chastity, and slaughters virginity with a knife dipped in the filthiest poison. It defiles all things, sullies all things, pollutes all things; and as for itself, it allows nothing to be pure, nothing to be spotless, nothing to be clean. “To the pure,” as the Apostle says, “all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure.”[[65]](#endnote-65)

(37) This vice excludes a man from the assembled choir of the Church and forces him to pray with those possessed and obsessed by the devil; it separates the soul from God to associate it with demons. This utterly diseased queen of Sodom renders him who obeys the laws of her tyranny infamous to men and odious to God. She mobilizes him in the militia of the evil spirit and forces him to fight unspeakable wars against God. She detaches the unhappy soul from the company of angels and, depriving it of its excellence, takes it captive under her domineering yoke. She strips her knights of the armor of virtue, exposing them to be pierced by the spears of every vice. She humiliates her slave in the church and condemns him in court; she defiles him in secret and dishonors him in public; she gnaws at his conscience like a worm and consumes his flesh like fire. He yearns to glut his appetite, but fears, on the other hand, to be seen in public, to draw attention, or be known by people. Whom can such a man trust, since he is haunted by a dread suspicion of his own accomplice who shares their common fall? Of course, not even the one who is his companion in sin may become the judge of his crime in confession, where he may be free of hesitation in confessing not only the sin he has committed, but also revealing the person with whom he has fallen. Thus, just as one was unable to die in sin without causing the other’s death, so also when he rises, he may become the occasion of the other’s resurrection. The flesh burns with the fury of lust, and the soul trembles under the icy chill of suspicion, and something like an infernal chaos starts to boil up in the breast of this unhappy man as every thought that pricks his conscience becomes, as it were, an excruciating punishment. Once this poisonous serpent has sunk its fangs into this unfortunate man, he is deprived of all moral sense, his memory fails, and the mind’s vision is darkened. Unmindful of God, he also forgets his own identity. This disease erodes the foundations of faith, saps the vitality of hope, dissolves the bond of love. It makes way with justice, demolishes fortitude, removes temperance, and blunts the edge of prudence.[[66]](#endnote-66)

(38) Shall I say more? At times it expels the entire squadron of virtues from the court of the human heart and lets in the whole barbarian host of vices as if it had removed the bolts from the doors. The statement of Jeremiah, spoken in reference to the earthly Jerusalem, seems apt in this case: “The oppressor,” he says, “has laid his hands on all she treasured; she has seen the pagans enter her sanctuary, men whom you had forbidden to enter into your assembly.”[[67]](#endnote-67)Surely, once this savage beast has seized a man in his cruel jaws, it restrains him with its chains from performing any good deed, and then lets him rush unchecked in wild descent into the worst depravity. Then once one has fallen into the depths of utter degradation, he becomes an outcast from his heavenly home, is severed from the Body of Christ, is rebuked by the authority of the whole Church, is condemned by the judgment of all the holy fathers, is despised among men on earth, and is rejected from the company of the citizens of heaven. For him it will be “a heaven of iron and an earth of bronze.”[[68]](#endnote-68) Burdened by the weight of his crime, he is unable to ascend to heaven, nor on earth can he any longer conceal his wickedness under the guise of ignorance. He cannot be happy while he lives, nor hope for heaven when he dies, for now he must bear the derision of men and afterwards the torments of eternal damnation. To such a soul the voice of the prophet in the *Lamentations* is well applied, when he says, “Behold O Lord, how great is my anguish! My soul shudders; my heart is turned within me, for I am full of bitterness. Without, the sword slays at will, and within, it is like death.”[[69]](#endnote-69)

*A Tearful Lamentation for the Soul Steeped in the Mire of Impurity*

(39) How I weep for you, unhappy soul,[[70]](#endnote-70) and regret with all my heart the infernal fate that awaits you. I grieve for you, I say O miserable soul, addicted to the filth of impurity, for whom a sea of tears should flow. Alas, “who will turn my head into a fountain, and my eyes into a spring of tears?”[[71]](#endnote-71)It is more appropriate that this doleful cry should rise from my grief for you than that it came from the prophet himself. I do not lament the destruction of a fortified town with its towers of stone, nor the wasted walls of a temple made by hand, nor do I weep for long lines of wretched men that were subject to the yoke of the king of Babylon. Rather I mourn for the noble soul made in the image and likeness of God, purchased by the precious blood of Christ, more illustrious than many buildings and truly superior to all the mightiest structures of the earth. I deplore the fall of this illustrious soul and the ruin of this temple in which Christ has dwelled. May my eyes grow weak from weeping, may they shed torrents of tears, and in overwhelming sadness bathe my cheeks with constant grieving. With the prophet, “let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease, since a crushing blow has fallen on the virgin daughter of my people, a terribly grievous injury.”[[72]](#endnote-72) Truly the daughter of my people has suffered a grievous injury, because a soul that has been the daughter of Holy Church has been cruelly wounded by the enemy of the human race with the shaft of impurity. She who had once been mildly and gently nourished on the milk of sacred wisdom at the court of the eternal king, is now viciously infected with the poison of lust and lies rigid and distended in the sulphurous ashes of Gomorrah. “Those who used to eat only the best, now lie dying in the streets; those who were reared in the purple, claw at the rubbish heaps.”[[73]](#endnote-73) And why? The prophet continues, “**Because the wickedness of the** **daughter of my people has outdone the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment.”[[74]](#endnote-74) The wickedness of a Christian soul surely outstrips the sin of Sodom, because now one falls more seriously in proportion to his failure to reverence the laws of grace contained in the gospel. And lest he find a remedy in subterfuge that might excuse him, his knowledge of the Law of God is his real accuser** (bold added).[[75]](#endnote-75)

(40) Poor unhappy soul, why do you not reflect on the altered dignity from which you have been cast down, or on the beautiful splendor and glory of which you have been stripped? “Oh, how the Lord in his wrath has brought darkness on the daughter of Zion, has flung the glory of Israel from the heaven to the ground, and how all her beauty has departed from the daughter of Zion.”[[76]](#endnote-76) With compassion for you in this calamity and weeping bitterly over your disgrace, I say, “My eyes wasted away with weeping, my soul shutters, my heart is poured out to the ground because of the ruin of the daughter of my people.”[[77]](#endnote-77) And you, neglecting to ponder the evils that have befallen you, and taking courage from your crime, reply, “I am a queen on my throne and I am no widow.”[[78]](#endnote-78) Pitying your enslavement, I cry out, “Why was Jacob carried off as a slave, and why has Israel become prey?”[[79]](#endnote-79) And you say, “I am rich. I have made a fortune, and have everything I want. But you do not realize that you are wretchedly and miserably poor, and blind and naked too.”[[80]](#endnote-80)

(41) Ponder, O miserable man, the darkness that oppresses your heart and the dense fog of blindness which surrounds you. Has wanton passion aroused desire in you for the male sex? Has the fury of lust excited you to be intimate with your own kind, that is, man to man? Does a buck, overcome by passion, ever leap upon another buck? Does a ram ever go mad with desire for coitus with another ram? A stallion can feed calmly and peacefully at the same trough with another stallion, but let it see a mare and at once it becomes crazy with lust. Never has a bull wantonly desired to mate with another bull, never an ass brayed longingly for intercourse with another ass. But dissolute men have no fear of doing what dumb animals indeed abhor, and irrational animals pass a judgment of condemnation on that which human depravity dares to commit. Tell us, you unmanly and effeminate man, what do you seek in another male that you do not find in yourself? What difference in sex, what varied features of the body? What tenderness, what softness of sensual charm. What smooth and delightful face? Male virility, I say, should terrify you, and you should shutter at the sight of manly limbs. **For it is the function of the natural appetite that each should seek outside himself what he cannot find within his own capacity. Therefore, if the touch of masculine flesh delights you, lay your hands upon yourself and be assured that whatever you do not find in yourself, you seek in vain in the body of another** (bold added).[[81]](#endnote-81) Woe to you, unhappy soul, at whose death the angels weep and the enemy scoffingly applauds. You have become prey of demons, the plunder of cruel men, and the spoils of the wicked. “All your enemies open their mouths in chorus against you; they whistle and grind their teeth and say, ‘we have swallowed her up; this is the day we were waiting for; now we have it; we see it.’”[[82]](#endnote-82)

*That We Should Be Sorry for the Soul That Does Not Lament*

(42) Therefore, miserable soul, I weep for you with unrelenting grief because I do not see you weeping. For this reason I lie prostrate on the ground for you because I see you wickedly standing erect after your grievous fall and even striving for the highest rank that the ecclesiastical order may offer. If, on the other hand, you had restrained yourself with humility, I should have rejoiced with the Lord with all my heart, assured of your reform. If compunction, which is the property of heartfelt contrition, had shaken your soul to its foundation, I would have rightly cheered and danced for joy. But as it is, you are truly to be wept over because you do not weep; and thus you need the grief of others because you do not grieve over your perilous calamity. And since you appear to be undisturbed by any personal sad feelings of regret, you need all the more the bitter tears and compassion of your brothers. Why do you merely neglect to gauge the measure of your damnation? Why not stop heaping up vengeance for yourself on the day of wrath[[83]](#endnote-83) by plummeting on occasion into the depths of sin and at other times soaring with conceit? I tell you, the curse that David hurled at Joab and at his house when he shed Abner’s blood, falls upon you. This disease, called gonorrhea, which brought vengeance to the house of Joab because of this savage assassination, now infests your body. When Abner was slain, David cried, “I and my kingdom are innocent forever of the blood of Abner son of Ner; may it fall on the head of Joab and all his father’s house! May the House of Joab never lack men suffering from gonorrhea,” for which another version reads, “suffering from a discharge of semen, or from leprosy, or only fit to hold a distaff, or falling by the sword, or short of bread.[[84]](#endnote-84) Truly, to be covered with leprosy is to be afflicted with the stain of serious sin. And to hold distaff means abandoning the brave deeds of a manly life to engage in the alluring softness of feminine behavior. One falls by the sword if he incurs the fury of divine wrath. One is short of bread if, as a punishment for his sin, he is compelled to abstain from receiving the Body of Christ, for “he is indeed the living bread which has come down from heaven.”[[85]](#endnote-85)

(43) Therefore, unworthy priest, if after the discharge of semen you became a leper and were forced by the Law to live outside the camp,[[86]](#endnote-86) why are you still attempting to reach even the highest positions of honor within the camp? Did not king Uzziah though he proudly planned to offer sacrifice on the altar of incense, patiently allow the priests to drive him from the temple after recognizing that he had been divinely struck with leprosy, and even of his own accord did not hurry to leave? This is what is written: “When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him they saw the leprosy on his forehead and they quickly drove him out.” And then shortly thereafter we read, “And he himself hurried to leave in fear because he was instantly aware that the Lord had struck him.”[[87]](#endnote-87)

(44) If a king afflicted with bodily leprosy does not bridle at being ejected from the temple by the priests, why do you, with leprosy on your soul, not allow yourself to be removed from the holy altar by the judgment of so many holy fathers? If the former, after relinquishing his royal dignity and command, was not ashamed to reside until death in a private home, why should you be disturbed at stepping down from the eminence of priestly rank to bury yourself in penance and eagerly to accept yourself as a dead man amidst the living?

But to return to the allegorical history of Joab: If you yourself have fallen by the sword, how will you be able to lift up another by the grace of the priesthood? If you yourself, as you rightly deserve, are in need of bread, that is, if you are forbidden to receive the Body of Christ, how will you be able to provide others with food from the heavenly table? If you have been struck on the forehead with the leprosy of Uzziah, that is, if you bear the marks of infamy on your face, how will you be able to purge others from the accumulated deposit of crimes they have committed? Shame on your pretentious pride! Let it not seek vainly to rise above itself for the burden of its own guilt weighs it down far below itself. It should learn to assess its ills with careful scrutiny and humbly discover how it compels itself to live within the bounds of its own limitations, not arrogantly seizing what it is in no position to attain. Indeed, it may lose forever that which true humility might hope to achieve.[[88]](#endnote-88)

*That the Services of an Unworthy Priest Will Spell Ruin for the People*

(45) For God’s sake, why do you damnable sodomites pursue the heights of ecclesiastical dignity with such fiery ambition? To what purpose are you so eager to ensnare the people of God in the meshes of your own perdition? Is it not enough that you yourself are plunging headlong into the depths of sin? Must you also expose others to the danger of your fall?

If perhaps someone should come to me and ask that I intercede for him with a powerful man who is angry at him, but unknown to me, I should reply: It is impossible for me to negotiate because I do not know him very well. Therefore, if one is embarrassed to act as intercessor with a man with whom he is not at all acquainted, how can one dare to act as an intercessor for the people before God if, in view of his life, he knows that he is not on friendly terms with the grace of God? Again, how can one ask him to pardon others if he does not know if God is well disposed towards him? In this matter one must doubly fear this further complication, that he who is thought competent to appease God’s anger might himself deserve to feel its effects because of his own guilt. Certainly all of us are aware that when one who has caused displeasure is sent to negotiate, the disposition of the offended party is provoked to an even uglier response.[[89]](#endnote-89)

(46) Let him, therefore, who is still bound up in earthly desires, beware lest, reveling in his pride of position, he become the cause of destruction for his subjects for having more grievously inflamed the anger of a rigorous judge. Everyone, in fact, should discreetly judge himself and not dare to accept the office of the priesthood if accursed vice still has power over him. Nor should he who is a victim of his own depravity aspire to become an intercessor for the sins of others. Forbear, I beg you, and dread to inflame the inextinguishable fury of God against you, lest by your very prayers you more sharply provoke him whom your wicked life so obviously offends. If you are willing to accept your own destruction, beware of being responsible for the damnation of others. Remember this: The more circumspect you are about your present lapses into sin, the more readily will you rise in the future when God in his mercy extends his hand, inviting you to penance.

(47) But if Almighty God himself refuses to accept the sacrifice from your hands, whom do you think you are in presuming to thrust them upon him against his will? “The sacrifice of the unclean is abhorrent to the Lord.”[[90]](#endnote-90) But those of you who are furious with me and sneer at heeding my writing, should at least listen to the prophetic voice that speaks to you; give him a hearing, I tell you, as he preaches and proclaims, as he rejects your sacrifices, and openly cries out against your prayers. Here are the words of Isiah, renowned among the prophets, or rather the Holy Spirit speaking by the mouth of Isiah: “Hear,” he says, “the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the command of our God, you people of Gomorrah. What are your endless sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I am sick of the holocausts of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts, and the blood of bulls and sheep and of goats revolts me. When you come to present yourselves before me, who asked you to trample over my courts? Bring me your worthless offerings no more, the smoke of them fills me with disgust. New Moons, sabbaths, and other festivities I cannot endure; your assemblies are wicked. New Moons. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts I hate with all my soul. They lie heavy on me, and I am tired of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will turn my eyes away from you; when you multiply your prayers, I shall not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.”[[91]](#endnote-91)

(48) You will notice, consequently, that even though the sentence of God’s condemnation bears commonly on the evil inherent in all vice, it is principally leveled, however, at the leaders of Sodom and Gomorrah. If, perhaps, the rash opinion of those who would contest this view is not prepared to believe human evidence pointing to the moral quality of this vice, it should at least agree with the testimony of God.[[92]](#endnote-92)

(49) If, moreover, someone should object that in the statement of the prophet, it says in conclusion: “Your hands are covered with blood;”[[93]](#endnote-93) as if he preferred us to understand that this pronouncement of divine anger referred to murder rather than to carnal impurity, he should know that in Holy Scripture all sins are called blood, as David affirms when he says, “Deliver me from blood, O God.”[[94]](#endnote-94) In fact, if we also carefully study the nature of this vice and recall the statements of physical scientists, we find that the discharge of semen has its origin from blood.[[95]](#endnote-95) For, as by the agitation of the winds sea-water is converted into foam, so also blood is turned into liquid semen by handling the genitals.

(50) Consequently, we may be quite confident that it is not contrary to sound reason to assert that the statement, “Your hands are covered with blood,” seems to refer to the plague of uncleanness. And perhaps this is why the vengeance against Joab related only to the crime of shedding blood, namely, that he who has voluntarily spilled another’s blood would be suitably punished if against his will he had to tolerate the discharge issuing from his own blood.

(51) But since we have reached the point in this long disputation where we have clearly shown that the Lord abhors the sacrifices of the unclean and categorically forbids them, why should we sinners be surprised if we are despised by them because of our admonition? If we see the command of God’s voice belittled by gross hearted reprobates, why should we marvel that we who are of earth are not believed?[[96]](#endnote-96)

*That No Holy Oblation, Soiled by Impurity, Is Acceptable to God*

(52) Now, therefore, he who despises the revered Councils of the holy fathers, who distain the commands of the apostles and of apostolic men, who is not afraid to reject the prescripts of the canons, and make light of the solemn command of God himself, should at least be advised to conjure up before the day of his death; and should have no doubt that the more gravely he sins, the more severely he will be judged. As the angel says, speaking figuratively of Babylon, “As she exalted herself and played the wanton, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.”[[97]](#endnote-97) He should be admonished to consider that so long as he continues to be afflicted with this vicious disease, he does not deserve a reward even if it is evident that he has done something good. Neither monastic observance, nor mortification , nor a life of perfection has any value in the eyes of the supreme judge if it is stained by the shameful filth of impurity.[[98]](#endnote-98)

(53) But that we may prove the truth of what we say, I would suggest turning to the evidence of the Venerable Bede: “Whoever,” he says, “gives alms but does not abandon sin, does not benefit his soul which he allows to wallow in vice.”[[99]](#endnote-99)

The truth of this statement a certain hermit proved in deed. After living a life of high virtue with a companion, this diabolically induced thought entered his mind; that whenever he should be excited by passion, that he should eject semen by handling his organ, just as if he were blowing his nose. Because of this, when he died, his companion saw him handed over to the devils. This companion, not knowing his guilt and only remembering his virtuous deeds, was almost in despair, and said, “If this man was damned, can any man be saved?” But an angel appeared to him, and said, “Do not be disturbed. Even though this man had achieved much, he defiled it all by the vice which the Apostle calls impurity.”[[100]](#endnote-100)

*That All Four of the Methods Mentioned Above Are Sodomy*

(54) Therefore one should not flatter himself because he has not sinned with another, if while alone he abandons himself to this debasing lust. For we know that the unhappy hermit, who was handed over to the devil just before he died, did not defile another but destroyed himself by his impurity. Just as various branches sprout from the same clump of vines, so also the four shoots that we have enumerated above emerge from one defiling sodomy as from a poisonous root. No matter from which of them one should pick the baneful cluster of grapes, he will immediately die of poisonous infection. “Their stock springs from the vinestock of Sodom and their progeny from Gomorrah: Their grapes are grapes of gall, and their clusters are bitter.”[[101]](#endnote-101) The serpent we have sought to crush with the cudgel of our disputation is four-headed, and with whichever head it bites, it at once spews forth all its vicious poison.

(55) Therefore, if one defiles himself, or is convicted of sinning with another by touch, by femoral coitus, or by violating him from the rear, even though he does not indulge in these practices indiscriminately, he is, without a doubt, still guilty of the crime of sodomy. We do not read that the natives of Sodom practiced posterior intercourse only with strangers; more likely we can be sure that, given the urge of their unbridled lust, they indulged in various shameful methods on themselves as well as on others. Surely, if one were to show any leniency in dealing with this destructive vice whom would we more likely pardon than the poor hermit who sinned through ignorance and fell through simple inexperience, thinking that this was allowed him as an ordinary natural function? Let these miserable souls learn to inhibit this detestable vice, manfully conquer the wantonness of enticing lust, repress the lascivious urging of the flesh, and fear in their bones the terrible judgment of divine anger. Let them always recall the threatening words of the Apostle when he says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”[[102]](#endnote-102) They should also remember the menacing tone of the prophet when he says, “In the fire of the anger of the Lord all the earth will be consumed,[[103]](#endnote-103) and all flesh by his sword.”[[104]](#endnote-104)

(56) If carnal men are to be consumed by the sword of God, why do they now love their flesh to be damned for it? Why do they limply pamper the desires of the flesh? This is just the sword with which the Lord threatens sinners when he spoke through the words of Moses: “I will whet my sword like a bolt of lightning.”[[105]](#endnote-105) And again he says, “My sword shall feed on flesh,[[106]](#endnote-106) that is, my fury will swallow those who live on the delights of the flesh. Just as they who combat the monsters of vice are supported by the help of heavenly virtue, so on the other hand, those who have capitulated to carnal impurity are held for the special sentence of divine vengeance. To which point Peter also says, “The Lord knows how to rescue the good from ordeal, and to hold the wicked for their punishment until the day of Judgment, especially those who are governed by their corrupt bodily desires.”[[107]](#endnote-107) And elsewhere he rebukes them when he says, “They consider it among the delights of God to revel in the dissipation of pollution and disgrace, to carouse with you. They have eyes looking for adultery and endless sinning.”[[108]](#endnote-108)

(57) Nor should those who are sacred orders pride themselves if their lives are detestable; for the higher they stand in their eminence, the deeper they will lie when they fall. Just as now they are required to surpass others in holiness of life, so afterwards they will be required to bear more frightful punishments, as Peter says: “When angels sinned, God did not spare them; he sent them down to the underworld and consigned them to the pits of hell, to be held for punishment until the day of Judgment … And he reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes and destroyed them completely, as a warning to those who would act wickedly in the future.”[[109]](#endnote-109) Why is it, that after recalling the fall and damnation of the devils, the Blessed Apostle then turned his attention to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, unless it was his purpose to show that they who are now addicted to the vice of impurity will be condemned to eternal punishment together with the unclean spirits? He does this further to suggest that, along with the very author of all wickedness, the unquenchable flame will devour those who are tormented by the libidinous fires of sodomy. The apostle Jude who aptly concurs in this sentence, when he says, “The angels who had supreme authority and did not keep it and left their appointed sphere, God has kept down in the dark, in eternal chains, to be judged on the great day. Like Sodom and Gomorrah and the nearby towns in the same way fornicating and going after alien flesh, they have become a warning in paying for their crimes in eternal fire.”[[110]](#endnote-110) It is evident, therefore, that like the angels who did not keep their supreme authority and earned the punishment of hell’s darkness, those who fall from the dignity of holy orders into the abyss of sodomy deserve to plummet into the depths of everlasting damnation.[[111]](#endnote-111)

(58) Now, to bring this all to a brief conclusion, whoever shall have soiled himself with the sin of sodomy by any of the methods we have enunciated above, unless he has purged himself through effective penance, he can never obtain the grace of God, will never be worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ, will never cross the threshold of the heavenly fatherland. That is why John the Apostle clearly states in *Revelations*, when speaking of the glory of the kingdom of heaven: “No one unclean may come into it, no one who does what is loathsome.”[[112]](#endnote-112)

*An Exhortation to Reform for One Addicted to Homosexuality*

(59) Rouse yourself, I tell you, arise and be awake, you who were overcome by the sleep of pathetic pleasure; come alive at last, you who fell before the deadly sword of your enemies. The apostle Paul is here. Listen to him as he briskly demands a hearing, knocking at your door and calling to you in clearcut words: “Wake up from your sleep,” he says, “and rise from the dead, and Christ will revive you.”[[113]](#endnote-113) If you hear Christ who restores life, why do you feel uncertain of your restoration? Listen to his own words: “If anyone believes in me,” he says, “even though he dies he will live.”[[114]](#endnote-114) If life-endowing Life itself seeks to raise you up, why do you further tolerate lying dead? So beware of drowning in the depths of despondency. Your heart should beat with confidence in God’s love and not grow hard and impenitent in the face of your great crime. It is not sinners, but the wicked who should despair; it is not the magnitude of one’s crime, but contempt of God that dashes one’s hopes. If, indeed, the devil is so powerful that he is able to hurl you into the depths of this vice, how much more effective is the strength of Christ to restore you to the lofty position from which you have plummeted? “Shall he that has fallen never get up again?”[[115]](#endnote-115) If the ass of your flesh has fallen amuck under its load,[[116]](#endnote-116) it is the goad of penance that urges it and the hand of the spirit that manfully draws it free.

Because the mighty Samson wickedly revealed his secret to a flattering woman, he lost not only the seven locks of his hair by which his strength was nourished, but was also blinded after his capture by the Philistines. Yet when his hair grew out again, he humbly called for help to the Lord his God, destroyed the temple of Dagon, and killed a far greater number of his enemies than he had ever killed before.[[117]](#endnote-117)

(60) Then, if your impure flesh has deceived you with homosexual persuasions, if it has stolen the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, if it has extinguished not merely the light in your countenance but that of your spirit, do not be depressed and utterly despair. Once again collect your forces, bestir yourself like a man, dare to perform great deeds, and by so acting you will have the strength, through the mercy of God, to triumph over your enemies. **The Philistines, indeed, had the power to shave Samson’s locks but not to uproot them, which means that the evil spirits too, even though for a time, they may deprive you of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, they will never succeed in denying you the remedy of God’s forgiveness** (bold and underlined added). How, I ask, can you despair of the bountiful mercy of the Lord, who even reprimanded the Pharaoh because after his sin he had not sought refuge in the remedy of penance? Listen carefully to what he says, “I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he has not begged that it be healed and made strong enough to wield the sword again.”[[118]](#endnote-118)

(61) What shall I say of Ahab, king of Israel? After he had built idols,[[119]](#endnote-119) and foully murdered Naboth of Jezreel,[[120]](#endnote-120) he at last to some degree humbled himself and so was also in part shown mercy. As we read in Scripture, after hearing the warnings of divine terror, he “tore his garments, put sackcloth next to his skin and fasted, slept in sackcloth and walked with his head bowed down.”[[121]](#endnote-121) And what followed? “Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, and said: have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Since he has humbled himself on my account, I will not bring the disasters in his days.”[[122]](#endnote-122) Hence, if the repentance of this man was not despised, even though, as we know, he did not persevere, why do you doubt the generosity of God’s mercy if you strive with all your strength to persevere? Begin an unremitting struggle against the flesh, always standing armed against the dangerous disease of passion. If the flames of unclean desire burn in your bones, extinguish them at once by calling to mind the everlasting fire; if the sly tempter puts before your eyes an enticing vision of the flesh, address your thoughts at once to the tombs of the dead and take careful note of what you find there that pleases the touch or delights the eye.[[123]](#endnote-123)

(62) Consider, moreover, that the poison now causing such an intolerable stench, that the corrupting matter that breeds and nourishes worms, that everything seen lying there in arid dust or ashes was once thriving flesh that in its prime sustained passion like this. Notice finally the rigid sinews, the naked teeth, the disassembled array of joints and bones, the arrangement of all the members in horrible disarray. Thus, indeed, does the horror of this formless and confused vision dispel illusions from the heart of man. Think again of the peril of this exchange, that for momentary pleasure experienced at the moment of ejaculation, a punishment will follow that will not end for thousands of years. Ponder how sad it is that because one member is not satisfied to the full, the whole body together with the soul is afterwards tortured forever in a dreadful holocaust. By using the impenetrable shield of thoughts like these, drive off the evils that threaten you and purge past sins through penance. Break the pride of your flesh by fasting; nourish your soul at the banquet of constant prayer. Thus by disciplinary firmness the dominant spirit takes the lead in compelling its subject flesh and urges it daily to quicken its pace in striving for the heavenly Jerusalem.[[124]](#endnote-124)

*That It is Indeed Profitable to Consider the Rewards of Chastity as a Means of Subduing Passion*

(63) It is also well worth the effort that you constantly keep in mind the promised rewards of chastity and that, stimulated by their sweetness, you may with unencumbered faith overcome any obstacle thrown in your path by the wiles of the crafty plotter. If you are seeking the happiness that is not attained except by death, the pangs of dying become light, just as the ditchdigger eases the tedium of his work by eagerly anticipating the wage that is his due.Ponder, therefore, what the prophet says of the knights of chastity: “The Lord says this to the eunuchs who observe my sabbath and resolve to do what pleases me and to cling to my covenant: I will give them a place in my house and within my walls, and a name better than sons and daughters.”[[125]](#endnote-125) They are indeed eunuchs who repress the excessive demands of the flesh and cut away from themselves the longings for wicked behavior. Many of those who are in bondage to the delights of carnal pleasure long to perpetuate their own memory through their posterity. This they pursue every waking moment since they are sure that they will not be wholly dead in this world if they continue their name in a fruitfully surviving progeny.[[126]](#endnote-126)

(64) But much more eminently and happily do celibates achieve this objective toward which those that bear children strive with such burning ambition; and that, because they are always remembered by him who because of the condition of eternity is not restrained be the laws of time.On the word of God, a name better than that of sons or daughters is promised to eunuchs, because without any threat of oblivion they deserve to have their name remembered forever, something that generations of children succeed in achieving only for a brief time: “The just man, indeed, will endure in eternal memory.”[[127]](#endnote-127)And again John says in *Revelation*: “Because they are fit, they will come with me, dressed in white, and I shall not blot their names out of the book of life.”[[128]](#endnote-128) Again in the same work it says, “These are the ones who kept their virginity and not been defiled with women; they follow the Lamb, wherever he goes;”[[129]](#endnote-129) and they sing a hymn that can only be sung by the hundred and forty-four thousand.[[130]](#endnote-130) Only those, moreover, who have kept their virginity sing this unique song to the Lamb, because they, more than all the faithful, rejoice with him forever, also because of the integrity of their flesh. Indeed other just men cannot claim this, even though they are worthy to hear themselves ranked in the same blessed company; and this is true because, while through love they have joyously achieved their blessed state, they do not however attain the level of their reward.[[131]](#endnote-131)

(65) Wherefore, one must bear in mind and make every effort to reinforce the thought of high dignity and great excellence of being ranked at the top, where being even in the last place is perfect joy; rising there to the highest privilege, where it is most fortunate to enjoy a status equal to that of others. Of course, just as Truth itself testified, not everyone in this world can accept what I have said.[[132]](#endnote-132) So also, in the future not everyone achieves this glorious reward. Consider these points and many more like them, my dear brother, whoever you may be, ponder them in the secrecy of your heart, and with all your effort be quick to immunize your flesh from the attack of passion so that as the Apostle teaches us, “you may know how to keep your body in a way that is holy and honorable, not giving way to selfish lust like the pagans who do not know God.”[[133]](#endnote-133) If you still stand firm, beware of falling; if you have fallen, reach out with confidence for the anchor of repentance that is always at hand. If, like Abraham, you are unable to live away from Sodom, you might, like Lot, move out when the heat of the fire nearby becomes intense. And if you should be unable to reach port with your ship unharmed, it is enough to have endured the storm and escaped shipwreck. If, moreover, it is not your fate to reach shore without harm, you may, as you lie out of danger on the beach, wish to sing with an eager voice that rhythmic chant of blessed Jonah: “ All your waves and your billows, washed over me. And I said, “I am cast out from your sight, but I shall look again on your holy temple.”[[134]](#endnote-134)

*Wherein the Writer Commendably Excuses Himself*

(66) If, indeed, this small book should come into the hands of anyone whose conscience rebels and who perhaps is displeased by what is contained above, and he accuses me of being an informer and a delator of my brother’s crime, let him be aware that I seek with all my being the favor of the Judge of conscience. I have no fear, moreover, of the hatred of evil men nor of the tongues of detractors. I would surely prefer to be thrown innocent into the well like Joseph who informed his father of his brothers’ foul crime,[[135]](#endnote-135) than to suffer the penalty of God’s fury, like Eli, who saw the wickedness of his sons and remained silent.[[136]](#endnote-136)

For since the voice of God threatens in words of terror through the mouth of the prophet, “If you should notice your brother’s wickedness and you do not warn him, I will hold you responsible for his death.”[[137]](#endnote-137) Who am I, when I see this pestilential practice flourishing in the priesthood to become the murderer of another’s soul by daring to repress my criticism in expectation of the reckoning of God’s judgment? I should become responsible for another’s crime in which I was in no way involved. And since Scripture says, “Cursed be he who grudges blood to his sword,”[[138]](#endnote-138) are you suggesting the sword of my tongue should fail, put away in the scabbard of silence and rusting away, while failing to be profitable for others because it does not thrust through the faults of those who live wicked lives? Surely, grudging blood to one’s sword is tantamount to checking the blow of correction from striking one who lives by the flesh. Of this same sword it is also said: “Out of his mouth came a two-edged sword.”[[139]](#endnote-139)

How, indeed, am I to love my neighbor as myself if I negligently allow the wound, of which I am sure he will brutally die, to fester in his heart; if, moreover, I am aware of these wounds of the spirit and fail to cure them by the surgery of my words? This was not how I was taught by that famous preacher, who thought himself guiltless of the blood of his neighbor because he did not forbear to smite their vices, for he says: “And so here and now I swear that I am guiltless of the blood of all of you, for I have without faltering put before you the whole of God’s purpose.”[[140]](#endnote-140) Nor did John instruct me to act in this way, for he was commanded by the voice of an angel” “Let everyone who listens answer, “Come.”[[141]](#endnote-141) That is to say, he to whom the voice of conscience beckons, draws others to follow his inspiration by immediately crying out, lest he who was summoned should also find the doors closed in his face if he should arrive in the presence of the summoner with empty hands.[[142]](#endnote-142)

(67) Consequently, if you think it proper to reprimand me for reproving others, or to blame me for my presumptuous subtlety in argument, why do you not correct Jerome who contended with all sorts of heretical sects in highly corrosive language?[[143]](#endnote-143) Why do you not rail at Ambrose who spoke publicly against the Arians?[[144]](#endnote-144) Why not take Augustine to task for acting the stern prosecutor of Manichaeans and Donatists?[[145]](#endnote-145) You say to me: It was proper for them because they opposed heretics and blasphemers; but you dare to lacerate Christians.

(68) Let me say a few words in reply: As it was their intention to bring back deserters and the errant to the fold, so it is my purpose to prevent the departure of members, regardless of their quality. Those mentioned above were saying, “They came out of our number, but they had never really belonged; if they had belonged, they would have stayed with us.”[[146]](#endnote-146) But I say: They really belong to our member, but are ill-suited. We should see to it therefore that, if possible, from now on they remain with us and are well suited. I might also add, that if blasphemy is a terrible thing, I am not aware that sodomy is any better. The former indeed causes a man to err; the latter brings him to perdition. The one separates the soul from God; the other joins it to the devil. The former expels one from heaven; the latter buries him in hell. The one blinds the eye of the soul; the other hurls one into the abyss of ruin. And if we are careful to investigate which of these crimes is the weightier in the scales of divine scrutiny, a search of Sacred Scripture will provide a satisfactory answer. There, indeed, we find that the children of Israel who blasphemed God and worshiped idols were taken into captivity; but we notice that sodomites were devoured in the sulfurous flames of a fire from heaven.[[147]](#endnote-147) Nor do I mention these holy doctors for the purpose of presumptuously comparing a smoking torch to such bright stars, for I am scarcely worthy to quote such excellent gentlemen without offending them; but I say this because what they have done to repress and correct vicious living, they have also taught more recent men to do. If, moreover, in their day this disease had sprung up with such impudent license, I have no doubt that today we would possess many lengthy volumes which they wrote against it.[[148]](#endnote-148)

(69) So let no man condemn me as I argue against this deadly vice, for I seek not to dishonor, but to promote the advantage of my brother’s well-being. Take care not to appear partial to the delinquent while you persecute him who sets him straight. If I may be pardoned in using Moses’ words, “Whoever is for the Lord, let him stand with me.”[[149]](#endnote-149) That is to say, that everyone who calls himself a knight of God should earnestly arm himself to overcome this vice, not hesitating to fight with all his strength. He should strive to pierce and kill it with the sharp arrows of his words, wherever it is found. In doing so, while the enslaver is surrounded by the vast force opposing him, the captive is freed from the bonds to which he has been enslaved. As all together cry out unanimously against the tyrant, the victim being dragged away suddenly grows ashamed to become the prey of this fierce monster. Seeing, moreover, as so many are telling him, that he is being led to his death, he awakens to reality and without hesitation quickly returns to life.[[150]](#endnote-150)

*In Which the Lord Pope Is Again Addressed*

(70) And now, most holy Father, I return to you at the end of this work and address myself to you, so that he to whom the beginning of this piece was directed may rightly be the subject of its conclusion. I implore you, therefore, and humbly beg, if I may be so bold, that your grace scrutinize the decrees of the sacred canons, which, indeed, are well known to you; that you enlist the services of spiritual and prudent men to advise you in this urgent investigation; and that your answers to these questions be such that they will remove every shred of doubt from my mind. Nor, certainly, do I presume to suggest this, unaware that, by the authority of God, your profound skill alone is sufficient in this matter; but that in using the evidence of God’s word and in carrying through this matter with the consent and judgment of many others, the complaints which wicked men perhaps may brazenly mutter in opposition may be laid to rest. A case is not readily evident when settled by the decision of many. Frequently, however, a sentence that one man hands down from his reading of the Law, is judged by others to be prejudice.[[151]](#endnote-151)

(71) Therefore, after diligently investigating the four varieties of this vice enumerated above, may your holiness graciously deign to instruct me by solemn decree whether *[1]* one who is guilty of these crimes is to be expelled irrevocably from holy orders; *[2]* whether at the prelate’s discretion, moreover, one might mercifully be allowed to function in office; *[3]* to what extent, both in respect to the methods mentioned above and to the number of lapses, it is permissible to retain a man in the dignity of ecclesiastical office; *[4]* also, if one is guilty, what decree and what frequency of guilt should compel him under the circumstances to retire. May the light of your authority dispel the darkness of our uncertainty so that your reply sent to me alone may instruct many others laboring under the same ignorance. And to use a phrase, may the iron plow of the Apostolic See totally uproot the seed of all error from the soil of an indecisive conscience [brackets added for clarity]. [[152]](#endnote-152)

(72) Most reverend Father, may Almighty God be pleased during your pontificate to utterly destroy this monstrous vice, that a prostrate Church may everywhere rise to vigorous stature.[[153]](#endnote-153)

The End

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| **Pope Saint Leo IX** |
| [Bishop of Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_of_Rome) |
| [152-St.Leo IX](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:152-St.Leo_IX.jpg)  Depiction of Leo IX from 1850 |

**Letter of Pope Leo IX to Peter the Hermit Praises the Servant of God for the *Book of Gomorrah* and Sets Penalties for Clerics Who Are Guilty of Sodomy**

(Second Half of 1049)

LEO THE BISHOP,[[154]](#endnote-154) servant of the servants of God, to his beloved son in Christ, Peter the hermit, the joy of everlasting happiness.

(2) The short book which you have written against the four-fold defilement of carnal pollution in becoming prose, but with still more becoming reasoning, my dear son, manifests with obvious evidence that the concentration of your mind with loving zeal has arrived at the resplendent bed of sparkling purity. For one like you who has so raised the arm of the spirit against the obscenity of lust, has surely subdued the savagery of the flesh. This execrable vice sets one far apart from the author of virtue who, since he is pure, admits of nothing that is impure. Nor can one who will subject himself to sordid pleasure share in his company. Clerics, indeed, whose most impure life you in your prudence have lamentably and also intelligently discussed, verily and most assuredly will have no share in his inheritance, from which by their voluptuous pleasures they have withdrawn. If they lived purely, they would be called, not only the holy temple of the Lord, but also his very sanctuary, in which with snow white splendor the illustrious Lamb of God is offered, by whom the foul corruption of all the world is washed away. Such clerics, indeed profess, if not in words, at least by the evidence of their actions, that they are not what they are thought to be.

(3) For how can one be or be called a cleric, who of his own free will has no fear of defilement by his own hands, or by the hands of another, touching carnally his own private parts or those of others, or with detestable unnaturalness fornicating within the thighs or from the rear. Concerning such men, since you are motivated by sacred fury to write what seemed appropriate to you, it is proper that we intervene, according to your wishes, with our apostolic authority, so that all anxiety and doubt be removed from the minds of your readers. So let it be certain and evident to all that we are in agreement with everything your book contains, opposed as it is like water to the fire of the devil. Therefore, lest the wantonness of this foul impurity be allowed to go unpunished, it must be repelled by proper repressive action of apostolic severity, and yet some moderation must be placed on its harshness.

(4) And thus, all those who are defiled in any way by the four types of filth which have been mentioned, are, in consideration of due censure, deposed by our judgment and that of sacred canons from all the ranks of the Church which is immaculate. But acting more humanely, and relying on divine mercy, it is our wish and also our command that those who will with their own hands or with one another have practiced masturbation, or have sinned by ejecting semen within the thighs, but have not done so for any length of time, nor with many others, if they shall have curbed their desires and have atoned for their infamous deeds with proper repentance, shall be admitted to the same grades to which, while they were practicing these crimes, they had not devoted their lives.[[155]](#endnote-155)

We remove all hope of recovering their order from those who alone or with others for a long time, or for even a short period or with many, have defiled themselves by either of the two kinds of filthiness which you have described, or, which is horrible to hear or to speak of, have sunk to the level of anal intercourse.[[156]](#endnote-156)

Should anyone dare to criticize or to attack this decree bearing apostolic sanction, let him be aware that he does so with the risk of losing his rank. For he who does not attack vice, but deals lightly with it, is rightly judged to be guilty of his death, along with the one who dies in sin.[[157]](#endnote-157)

(5) But, dearest son, I rejoice indescribably that you promote by the example of your life whatever you have taught by your eloquence. **For it is greater to teach by action than by words** (boldadded). Wherefore, with the help of God may you attain the palm of victory and rejoice with the Son of God and of the Virgin in our heavenly home, abounding in many rewards, and crowned, in a sense, with all those who were snatched by you from the snares of the devil.[[158]](#endnote-158)

The End

1. The Letters of Peter Damian Letters 31-60, translated by Owen J. Blum, O.F.M., *The Fathers of the Church*, Mediaeval Continuation, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, pp. 3-53. The reader will note that in the Blum translation, the translator put Pope Leo IX’s 1049 decree condemning the “execrable vice” of sodomy at the front of the text. However, for practical purposes, this editor has placed it at the back of the *Book of Gomorrah* since no manuscript of the original document includes the letter of the pope, which was, in fact, a reaction to and not a preface to the work of Peter Damian. Also note that the endnotes to the text, including the editor’s comments, are differently numbered from the footnotes of the original Blum text and some lengthy and inaccessible ancient references reduced or omitted. The second volume of the Letters of Peter Damian containing . A special appreciation to Canadian artist Peter Graziano who designed our logo.. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The League of Saint Peter Damian was founded by Catholic author and prolife activist Randy Engel on February 23, 2019 – February 23rd being the feast day of Saint Peter Damian on the Old Calendar. Randy Engel is the author of *The Rite of Sodomy – Homosexuality and the Roman Catholic Church (2006)* [[New Engel Publishing](https://www.newengelpublishing.com/)], the most complete and documented text on the penetration and colonization of the Catholic Church by Homosexual Movement. Engel later founded the League to make the written works of Saint Peter Damian better known, especially *The Book of Gomorrah* written in 1049 that contains the most extensive treatment and condemnation ever written by any Church Father on clerical pederasty and homosexual practices. The League also seeks to ignite a universal campaign of spiritual warfare against the Forces of Organized Perversion which threaten our Faith, Family and Country – evils which can only be extinguished by prayer and fasting in the traditional Catholic manner. Almost 1000 years ago, the holy monk with the support of Pope St. Leo IX waged a successful war against clerical sodomy and pederasty. Today, his *Book of Gomorrah* provides a blueprint for action by the Catholic Church against these same evils. Readers are invited to read the various works of St. Peter Damian at [Home | League of Saint Peter Damian (stpeterdamian.com)](https://www.stpeterdamian.com/). The League is a special project of the U.S. Coalition for Life. Any and all correspondence concerning membership in the League and donations should be directed to the U.S.C.L. at Box 315, Export, PA 15632. A special appreciation to Canadian artist Peter Graziano who designed the League’s logo. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Blum, pp. 5-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Matt 18.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Blum, p. 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Damian does not mention the act of fellatio as a form of Sodomy in which one partner uses his mouth as a means of masturbating the other partner. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Blum, p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Gen 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Gen 38.9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Lev 20.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Also rendered as Oportunus. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Gregory I, Reg. 12.4.2, 350. Note the term *cure of souls refers to the*  exercise of a clerical office involving the instruction, by sermons and admonitions, and the sanctification, through the sacraments, of the faithful in a determined district, by a person legitimately appointed for the purpose. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Blum, pp. 9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Eph 5.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Blum, pp. 10-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. 1 Tim 1.9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Blum, p. 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Jas 4.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Luke 12.48. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Blum, pp. 11-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Rom 1.24. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rom 1.26-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Gen 19.9.-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Gen 19.18-19. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. John 10.9. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Gen 19.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Rm 1.28. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Job 5.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Ps 82.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Ps 11.9. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Rom 1.32. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Note: There is a distinction between spiritual and carnal generation. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Cf. Lev 14.1-32; Matt 8.4; Luke 5.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Matt 15.14; Luke 6.39. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Luke 6.41-42; cf. Matt 7.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Blum, P. 18 [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Cf. 1Pt 5.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. 1 Cor 1.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Cf. 1 Thess 2.19; 1 Cor 4.15. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Gal 4.19. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Many of the Church canons on acts of sexual deviancy including homosexuality as quoted by Peter Damian in this section of the *Book of Gomorrah* were taken from the *Decretum* assembled by Cardinal Burchard of Worms (950/965 – August 20, 1025). The twenty volume monumental work was completed no later than 1023, 26 years before the comploetion of the Peter Damian’s work. Both works were exceptional in terms of sexual explicitness found in medieval penitential handbooks used by priests for hearing confession. Cardinal Burchard was born into a wealthy and illustrious family in the northern German Hesse region of the Holy Roman Empire. His older brother Franco served as the bishop of the Imperial City of Worms from 998 to 999, and his sister, Mathilda, was the abbess of a monastery near Worms from 1010-1015. Burchard succeeded Franco as the Bishop of Worms in 1000 A.D. and used his vast fortune to build great monasteries and churches and to train a large army of Church canon lawyers and scribes. Beginning in 1012, with the active cooperation of Bishop Walter of Speyer and Benedictine chronicler, Albert of Metz, and three other prominent regional clerics, Burchard compiled his references and materials for his great work titled the *Decretorum Libri Viginti*, which became a very influential and popular source of canonical material for penitentials for centuries to come. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Burchard has three years. Others three to four years. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Blum notes that Damian shortens the penances from those prescribed by Burchard and other penitential authors. Burchard has seven years. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Burchard and others have one year of penance. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Blum, pp. 20-21. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Blum, p. 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Cf. Matt 7.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Blum, p. 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Luke 11.17-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Blum, p. 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., pp. 23-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., p. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., pp. 26-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., p. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., pp. 27-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Rom 9.22. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Matt 18.16; p 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. The source of this citation is Burchard, *Decretum* 17.35. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Blum, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. The source of this citation is Burchard, *Decretum* 17.35. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Blum, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. On the decretal of Pope Siricius (JK 255), see Fuhrmann. *Falschungen* 68, 262*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Blum, p. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid, p. 30-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid, p. 31-32. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Lam 1.10. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Cf. Lev 26.19. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Lam 1.20. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. A similar lament is found in Burchard, *Decretum* 19.44.991 1ff., following the *Ad Theodorum* lapsum of John Chrysostom (PG 47.227-308). Blum states that Damian’s borrowing is slight. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Jer 9.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Jer 14.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Lam 4.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Lam 4.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Blum, pp. 33-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Lam 2.1; 1.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Lam 2.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Rev 18.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Cf. Jer 2.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Rev 3.17., Blum, p.34. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Editor: Here we have the essence of the perversity of homosexual and lesbian desires and acts. St. Peter Damian was indeed ahead of his time. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Lam2.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Cf. Rom 2.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. 2 Sam 3.28-29. Cf Lev 22.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Cf. John 6.51;6.59. Blum, pp. 35-36. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Cf. Num 5.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. 2 Chr 26.20. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Blum, pp. 36-37. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid, p. 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Prov 15.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Isa 1.10-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Blum, pp. 39-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Isa 1.15. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Ps 50.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. See Isidore, *Etym*. 9.6.4, “For male semen is spume of the blood….” [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Blum, p.40. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Rev 18.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Blum, pp. 40-41. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Could not be identified; see Ryan, *Sources* 31, no. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Cf. Rom 1.24. [Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, unto uncleanness, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves.] Blum, p. 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Deut 32.32. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Heb 10.31. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Zeph 1.18. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Isa 66.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Deut 32.41. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Deut 32.42. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. 2 Pet 2.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. 2 Pet 2.13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. 2.Pet 2.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Jude 6-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Blum, pp. 43-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Rev. 21.27. Blum p. 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Eph 5.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. John 11.25. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Ps 40.9. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Cf. Exod 23.5; see also Burchard, *Decretum* 19.46.994A. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Cf. Judg 16. Blum, p. 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Cf. Ezek 30.21. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Cf. 1 Kgs 16.32-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Cf 1 Kgs 21.13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. 1 Kgs 21.27. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. 1 Kgs 21.28-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Blum, p. 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Isa 56.4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. Isa 56-4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
126. Blum, pp. 47-48. [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
127. Ps 111.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
128. Rev 3.4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
129. Rev 14.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
130. Cf. Rev 14.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-130)
131. Blum, p. 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-131)
132. Cf. Matt 19.11. [↑](#endnote-ref-132)
133. 1 Thess 4.4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-133)
134. Jonah 2.4-5. Blum48-49. [↑](#endnote-ref-134)
135. Cf. Gen 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-135)
136. Cf. 1 Sam 2.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-136)
137. Ezek 3.18. [↑](#endnote-ref-137)
138. Jer 48.10. [↑](#endnote-ref-138)
139. Rev 1.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-139)
140. Acts 20.26-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-140)
141. Rev 22.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-141)
142. Blum, pp. 49-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-142)
143. For Blum’s references to St. Jerome’s fiery works ft. 129, p. 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-143)
144. See references to St. Jerome’s works against Arianism in ft. 130, p. 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-144)
145. See multiple references to St. Augustine’s works against the Manichaeans and Donatists at ft. 131, p. 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-145)
146. 1 John2.19. [↑](#endnote-ref-146)
147. Cf. 2 Kgs 17; Gen 19.24. [↑](#endnote-ref-147)
148. Blum, pp. 51-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-148)
149. Ezek 32.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-149)
150. Blum, p.52. [↑](#endnote-ref-150)
151. Ibid., pp. 52-53. [↑](#endnote-ref-151)
152. Ibid., p.53. [↑](#endnote-ref-152)
153. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-153)
154. Pope Saint Leo IX was elected to the Chair of Peter on the 12th of February 1049. His father was a first cousin of Conrad II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He was educated at Toul and consecrated a bishop at the age of 25. Like Peter Damian, he was steadfast in returning high moral standards to monasteries. He was appointed pope and ruler of the Papal States by Emperor Henry III, but did not take office until, at his own request, he was elected by the people and clergy of Rome at the age of 47. Significantly, his first public act as pope at the Easter synod of 1049 was to renew the vow of celibacy for all clergy down to subdeacon. It is not surprising, therefore, that Peter Damian found a welcome reception for his *Book of Gomorrah.* Note that in his letter to the holy monk, the pope refers to sodomy as the “execrable vice” meaning a detestable act. [↑](#endnote-ref-154)
155. The ruling provides that clerics who are not habituated solitary or group masturbators shall retain their clerical status after completing an assigned vigorous penance. This ruling is in keeping with Damian’s statement that those “who pollute themselves (solitary masturbation”) or “befoul one another by mutually handling their genitals,” (group masturbation) pp.6-7, deserve lesser penance than those who are habituated masturbators; those who “fornicate between the thighs,” or practice anal penetration (sodomy). For these, Leo IX decrees automatic removal from clerical office in keeping with Damian’s proposal. Note that the Vatican’s February 1961 decree “Careful Selection And Training Of Candidates For The States Of Perfection And Sacred Orders,” (S. C. Rel., 2 Feb., 1961) declares that habituated masturbators, homosexuals, and pederasts are prohibited from seeking entry into holy orders. [↑](#endnote-ref-155)
156. In the Middle Ages, anal intercourse was referred to as the “devil’s congress.” [↑](#endnote-ref-156)
157. Blum, p. 4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-157)
158. Blum, p. 5. Conclusion of Pope Saint Leo IX’s 1049 decree on the condemnation of sodomy and other homosexual acts. [↑](#endnote-ref-158)