Of the vile matter from which man is made

"God made the planets and stars from fire, the breeze and winds from air, the fishes and birds from water; but He made men and beasts from earth. Thus a man, looking upon sea life, will find himself low; looking upon creatures of the air he will know he is lower; and looking upon the creatures of fire he will see he is lowest of all. Nor can he equal heavenly things, nor dare put himself above the earthly; for he finds himself on a level with the beasts and knows he is like them.

"Therefore the death of man and the beast is the same, and the condition of them both is equal, and man has nothing more than the beast. Of earth they were made, and into earth they return together."¹ These are not just the words of any man, but of wisest Solomon. What then is a man but slime and ashes? Man addresses God: "Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay, and thou wilt bring me into dust again."² And God addresses man: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."³ "I am compared to mud and am likened to embers and ashes."⁴ Now, mud is made of water and dirt, both remaining what they are; but ashes are made of fire and wood, both being consumed. In this a mystery is revealed, but it will be expounded elsewhere. Therefore, mud, why art thou proud? dust, what hast thou to boast about? ashes, why art thou so insolent?

But perhaps you will reply that although Adam himself was formed of the earth's slime you were conceived of human seed. On the contrary, Adam was formed of earth, but of virgin earth; you were made of seed, and that unclean. "For who can make clean what was conceived from unclean seed?"⁵ "What is man that he should be without spot, and he that is born of a woman that he should appear just?"⁶ "Behold, I was conceived in iniquities and in sins did my mother conceive me."⁷ Not in one sin alone, not in one

ON THE MISERY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

transgression alone, but in many sins and many transgressions: in her own sins and transgressions, and the sins and transgressions of others....

Of the misery of the good and the evil

It is not for the wicked to rejoice, says the Lord, "For by what things a man sins, by the same also he is tormented." For the worm of conscience never dies, and reason's light is never put out. "I have seen those who work iniquity and sow sorrows and reap them perishing by the blast of God and consumed by the spirit of His wrath." Pride inflates, envy gnaws, avarice goads, wrath inflames, gluttony chokes, lechery destroys, lying ensnares, murder defies. So, too, other vices have their portents, for the sinful delights which entice men are the very instruments of God's punishment. "The envious man loses weight when he sees someone else getting fat." But,

The tyrants of Sicily never discovered a worse form of torment than envy.

For vice corrupts nature as the Apostle witnesses: "Because they have become vain in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts have been darkened, therefore God gave them up to the desires of their hearts uncleanliness, to dishonor their own bodies, and as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient.""12

But even those "who will to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." The saints had the experience of mockery and stripes, yes, even of chains and prisons. They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword for the Lord. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, being in want, distressed, and afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts in mountains, and in dens and in caves of the earth. In peril from floods, in peril from robbers, in peril from the gentiles, in peril from the city, in peril from false brethren. In labor and hardship, in many watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, in many hardships.

For the just man "denies himself," crucifying his body on the cross of its own vices and concupisences, so that the world is crucified to him and he to the world. He does not have in this life a lasting city of this world, but seeks the future city of God. He endures the world as an exile, shut up in the body as in a prison. "I am a sojourner on the earth" and a pilgrim like all my fathers. Turn thy eyes from me, that I may recover, before I go and am no more."18 "Who is me that my sojourning is prolonged; I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar, my soul has long been a sojourner." "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?" For the sins of those about us are a torment to the righteous. And this teaching is the flowing water which Caleb gave for dowry to his daughter Axa.
POPE INNOCENT III

On the enemies of man

"The life of man on the earth is warfare."21 Is it not truly warfare when a manifold enemy—the devil and man, the world and the flesh—always and everywhere lie in wait to seize us, follow us about to slay us?—the world through the four elements, the flesh through the senses, man through the beasts, and the devil through vices. "For the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh."22 For "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of darkness."23 For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour."24 ...  

Of the guilty progress of the human condition

Men strive especially for three things: riches, pleasures, and honors. Riches lead to immorality, pleasures to shame, and honors to vanity. Hence the Apostle John says, "Do not love the world or the things that are in the world; because all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life." The concupiscence of the flesh pertains to pleasures, the concupiscence of the eyes to riches, and the pride of life to honors. Riches beget covetousness and avarice, pleasures give birth to gluttony and lechery, and honors nourish pride and boasting.

Of covetousness

"Nothing is more wicked than a covetous man and there is not a more wicked thing than to love money."25 That is the statement of the wise man, and the Apostle confirms it by saying, "They that will become rich fall into temptations and into the snare of the devil and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdiction. For the desire of money is the root of all evils."26 It causes sacrilege and theft, incites robbery and plunder, starts wars and prompts murders; it buys and sells in simony, seeks and takes without fairness, trades and lends without justice, presses with guile and threatens with fraud; it violates agreements and breaks oaths, corrupts witnesses, and perverts judges...  

On respect of persons

Woe to you who have been corrupted by pressure of bribery, influenced by love or hate to "call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness,"27 killing souls which do not die and giving life to souls which do not live. [Judges] pay no attention to the value of a case, but to the value of a person; not to laws but to bribes; not to justice but to money; not to reason's dictate but to your will's desire: not to the law's decree but to your mind's urging. You do not bend your mind to justice,
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but bend justice to your mind; not in order that you desire what is lawful but that it may be made lawful to do what you desire. For your eye is never so pure as to keep the brightness of the whole body: you add always some yeast that corrupts the whole...

On the despair of the damned

"They are laid in hell like sheep; death will feed on them." 28 This text is based upon the similarity of damned souls to beasts of burden, who do not tear up the grass by the roots but only chew the top, so that the grass grows again for pasture. Thus the wicked, as if eaten by death, spring to life again to die once more, and so are eternally dying.

The liver of Titius, unconsumed and ever growing,
Wastes not – whence it can be devoured many times. 29

Then death will never die, and those who are dead to life will live for death alone. They will seek death and never find it, having had life and lost it. Hear what John says in the Apocalypse: "In those days men will seek death and they will not find it, and they will desire to die and death will flee from them." 30 O death, how sweet you would be to these souls who when alive thought you so bitter; they will long for you and you alone – they who had despised you so in life.

Why the wicked will never be released from punishment

Therefore let no man flatter himself, saying "The Lord will not always be angry, nor will He threaten forever," 31 and "His mercy is over all His works." 32 For "when He was angry He did not forget to be merciful," 33 nor does He hate anything which He has made. They take up this erroneous argument because of what our Lord said through the prophet, "And they shall be gathered together as in the gathering of one bundle into the pit. And they shall be shut up there in prison, and after many days they shall be visited." 34 And therefore – so they argue – because man sinned in time, he will not be punished in eternity.

O vain hope, O false presumption! "He shall not believe, being vainly deceived by error, that he may be redeemed with any price," 35 "for there is no redemption in hell." 36 Therefore sinners shall be gathered in a pit and shut in a prison, which is Hell; and there they will be tortured without their bodies until Doomsday, and then after many days they shall be visited, that is, after they rise with their bodies on the last day; but they will be visited with vengeance, not salvation, for they will be punished still more grievously after the day of judgment. Thus it is said in another place, "I will visit their iniquities with a rod and their sins with stripes." 37

Therefore God will be angry with those who are saved only for a time, for "He scourges every son whom he receives." 38 From this it is understood that "He will not always be

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angry."\(^3^9\) But with the wicked He will be angry forever, for it is just and right that those who go astray in their portion of eternity shall have God's wrath throughout His eternity. For although the sinner in Hell has lost the opportunity of sinning, still he does not lose his will to sin. It is written: "The pride of those who hate thee ascends continually."\(^4^0\)

The wicked will not be humbled, having already despised of mercy. Malignant hate will grow in them, so much that they will wish God, through whom they know they exist so unhappily, could altogether cease to exist. They will curse the Almighty and blaspheme the Everlasting, complaining that He is evil who created them for punishment and never inclines to mercy. Hear what John says in the Apocalypse: "And great hail came down from heaven upon men, and men blasphemed God for the plague of the hail because it was exceeding great."\(^4^1\)

Therefore the will of the damned, although it lose the effect of its power, will always retain the love of evil; it will of itself be a punishment in hell, which had been a sin in the world, though perhaps even in hell it will still be a sin, but not worth punishment. Thus the sinner, having always had within himself the accusation of guilt, will always feel within himself the anguish of punishment: what he did not wipe away through penitence, God will not remit through indulgence. "There it pertains to the great justice of the judge that they never lack punishment in hell who never wished to lack sin in life. They would have certainly wished, if they could, to live forever so that they might sin forever."\(^4^2\) For they show that they want always to live in sin who never cease to sin while they are alive.

Notes

2 Job 10:9.
3 Gen. 3:19.
4 Job 30:19.
5 Job 14:4.
6 Job 15:14.
7 Ps. 50:7.
8 Wisd. 11:17.
9 Job 4:8–9.
10 Horace, Epistles I. ii. 56.
11 Ibid., 57–59.
12 Rom. 1:21, 24, 28.
13 II Tim. 3:12.
14 Heb. 11:36–38.
15 II Cor. 11:26–27.
17 Ps. 118:19.
18 Ps. 38:13–14.
19 Ps. 119:5.
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20 II Cor. 11:29.
21 Job 7:1.
22 Gal. 5:17.
23 Eph. 6:12.
24 1 Pet. 5:8.
25 Ecclus. 10:9, 10.
26 1 Tim. 6:9–10.
27 Isa. 5:20.
28 Ps. 48:15.
29 Ovid, Epistulae ex Ponto I. ii. 42.
30 Apoc. 9:6.
31 Ps. 102:9.
32 Ps. 144:9.
33 Cf. Ps. 76:10.
34 Isa. 24:22.
37 Ps. 88:33.
39 Ps. 102:9.
40 Ps. 73:23.
41 Apoc. 16:21.
42 St. Gregory, Dialogues IV. 44.

And right that throughout His suffering, still he ascends

malignant hate

And great know they Almighty and

And great plague of the

will always been a sin in

punishment.

will always through peni-

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might sin

cease to sin
THE MANY FACES OF EVIL
Historical perspectives

Edited by
Amélie Oksenberg Rorty