THE VIRTUES
OF A RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR
(DE SEX ALIS SERAPHIM)

Instructions by the Seraphic Doctor,
ST. BONAVENTURE

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN BY
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THE VIRTUES OF A RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR

PROLOGUE

"Give an occasion to a wise man, and wisdom shall be added to him."¹

As an intelligent man, who frequently becomes wiser through the folly of others, finds even in trifling occurrences matter for increasing his store of knowledge, so newly appointed superiors, who may not be fully prepared for distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong in the discharge of their duties, may find inducements in this treatise to give the matter more earnest reflection and seek from the study of the imperfections here described to acquire a better knowledge of the higher and more useful things as well as of many others

¹Prov. 9, 9.
2 *Virtues of a Religious Superior*

necessary to a religious superior in the government of inferiors. For we read that scientists have been led to deduce certain practical principles from the careful study of the habits of certain animals.²

CHAPTER I

THE SELECTION OF SUPERIORS

1. "These things I write to thee, . . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." ¹ The Apostle wrote two Epistles to his disciple Timothy, whom he had assigned as Bishop to the Church at Ephesus, teaching him how he ought to conduct himself in the office committed to his care, in order that, having learned from him how to lead a holy life, he might also learn through him how to govern others in a useful and meritorious manner. For there is a vast difference between knowing how to be submissive and humble, how to live in peace with others, and how to rule others in a useful manner. "You may notice," says St. Bernard, "many living peacefully under a director, but if you

¹ ¹ Tim. 3, 14 sq.
free them from the yoke, you shall see them unable to be peaceful and helpless against evil. Again you may find some who, as far as they are concerned, live in peace with all and really need no master, yet are by no means fit to direct others. For they are content with a certain good mediocrity, as God has divided the measure of grace to them. They know how to live sociably and peacefully among brethren, but when placed over them as superiors, they are not only useless, but imprudent and detrimental. There are others who know how to be superiors.” Hence Moses was instructed not to appoint anyone to govern the people, but “to provide out of all the people” experienced and “able men” to “judge the people at all times.” For one who is entrusted with an office, in order to be of benefit to others, must first learn the discipline of goodness by studiously exercising it himself and by frequent practice to form the

3 Rom. 12, 3.
8 Serm. in Cant., XXIII, n. 8.
4 Ex. 18, 21 sq.
habit of it. Hence we read that Our Lord first practised what He later taught by word. "Jesus began to do and to teach."  

2. Those who enter upon the duties of a superior need an instructor, in order that they may learn the things of which they are ignorant, namely, what is necessary and useful for their own salvation and spiritual advancement. In other words, what they ought to avoid and what they ought to know, to do, to hope, to fear, and to realise as the greater or less good or evil. "You have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the words of God."  

They should also be trained in the practise of virtue, because it is not sufficient to know what is good, but the good must be actually practised, even as one who has finished a course in medicine, later on applies his science practically. For practice gives to the mind greater skill than mere knowledge of principles. And as those that are still deficient are usually slow in exercising themselves

\(^5\) Acts 1, 1. \(^6\) Heb. 5, 12.
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in virtue, it is necessary that they be urged to it occasionally by others. Masters, therefore, are wont to exercise the disciples whom they desire to advance in perfection in diverse virtues,—now in humility, now in fraternal charity, now in self-control, now in devotion, now in patience, chastity, silence, obedience, etc., so that, practiced in this way, these virtues become habits, and the vices opposed to them are eradicated. For the more a virtue increases, the more the vice opposed to it decreases. "Bring them up," says St. Paul, "in the discipline and correction of the Lord." 

Those who enter upon the duties of a superior must furthermore be watched, lest they fall into sin or practice virtue with little discretion. For souls that are inexperienced, and not entirely free from inclination to sin, are more frequently restrained from sin through the fear of men than through the fear of God. Hence it is expedient for them to be subject to the direction of superiors, by whom they are withdrawn from danger, as little children 

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7 Eph. 6, 4.
in danger of falling into the water, or threatened by wolves, are safeguarded by their mothers. "Counsel shall keep thee and prudence shall preserve thee, that thou mayest be delivered from the evil way and from the man that speaketh perverse things."^8

They finally need a director to correct them, because evil ways always lead to something worse, just as a fever often is the cause of a more serious ailment, and a wound often produces an ulcer, unless the doctor's care prevents it. Thus also a person that commits a fault is not easily corrected unless he is sustained by the help of one who is stronger than himself. On this account God desires older persons to be superiors of the young, in order that if these fall into sin, or become negligent and imprudent, they may be corrected by admonition, correction, and punishment. For if they were left to themselves, they would either fail to realise their fault or wallow in the mire and sink deeper into it. Of such St. Jude says: "And some indeed reprove, being judged."^9

^8Prov. 2, 11 sq.  ^9Jude 22.
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Therefore it is necessary for them to be humbly subject to a master, because a patient cannot be cured of an ailment unless he obeys the directions of his physician. Evil passions are ailments in man. "He gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases." 10

3. Those, however, who need no master for themselves, ought to be so enlightened in knowledge that they cannot err in those matters which they need to know, and cannot be deceived by men, nor by the evil spirit, nor by their own reason under the appearance of good, but are endowed with the gift of the discernment of spirits. Of them must be true what St. Paul says: "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed." 11

They must also be filled with the fervor of devotion, so as to know, without the urging of another, how to apply themselves faithfully to the exercise of every virtue in the best manner possible. They should also be able to say: "Forgetting the things that are behind and

10 Luke 9, 1. 11 Phil. 4, 12.
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stretching forth myself to those that are before." 18

They should, besides, be so filled with the love of goodness that they naturally detest every evil, as it were, diligently avoid scandal, and live peacefully and without offence to anyone, as the Apostle says: "Be without offence to the Jews and to the Gentiles." 18

They should therefore be so humble in all things that they are neither elated over any good thing that they may possess, nor presume to be entirely free from evil, but accurately discern in themselves all disorders of thought, word, and omission, and correct them by strict self-discipline.

In all these things they are to be so firmly grounded that neither levity, nor distraction, nor difficulty, nor fear shall be able to change their attitude. "Who shall separate us from the charity of Christ." 14

But as it is difficult to find such persons, few are fit to live without the yoke of obedience,

12 Phil. 3, 13. 14 Rom. 8, 35.
18 1 Cor. 10, 32.
and those who are placed as superiors over others, to act better and more intelligently, must in turn necessarily be subject to others, up to the Supreme Pontiff, who in turn rules the entire Church Militant as Vicar of Christ.

4. Therefore, those who are obliged to govern others must be endowed with various virtues. Some of these, which involve an irreproachable life, refer to themselves; others, to their superiors, by means of which they humbly obey those whom they are obliged to obey; others, to subjects, by means of which they govern them meritoriously and advance them in virtue. But though he who has the duty of teaching every virtue by authority of his office, ought to possess all virtues in an eminent degree, still, as six is the first perfect numeral of its kind consisting of several parts, a good director of souls, especially a religious, must be distinguished among the rest by special virtues, as Isaias says: "The Seraphim [who are the most eminent choir of heavenly spirits] had

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six wings.” ¹⁶ It was probably for this reason that the Lord appeared to our holy Father, St. Francis, under the likeness of a Seraph, when He marked him with the stigmata of His Passion, to show that those who would be superiors in his Order must be endowed with spiritual wings. So also, according to St. John in the Apocalypse, “the four living creatures had each of them six wings.” ¹⁷

¹⁶ Is. 6, 2. ¹⁷ Apoc. 4, 8.
CHAPTER II

ZEAL FOR JUSTICE

1. The first wing of a director of souls is zeal for justice, by which he cannot bear to see any injustice done to himself or to others without interior protest. Every man is to be considered good in so far as he hates evil. The more a thing is cherished, the more is its destruction regretted. Hence it is to be observed that there are four kinds of persons who are commonly called good in a religious order and in the Church.

2. The first are those who, while they do no wrong, do not diligently exercise themselves in good works, e.g., those who live in peace and tranquillity with others, giving neither offence nor scandal by bad deeds. Of such it is said: "These men were very good to us, and gave us no trouble." ¹ We are accustomed to call

¹ 1 Kings 25, 15.
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those good who are gentle in their ways and live sociably with all, even though they appear somewhat sluggish in the practice of virtue. Baptised children are considered good in the same sense.

3. The second kind are better. They do nothing wrong and frequently practise good works,—of self-denial, chastity, humility, charity, assiduous prayer, and similar things which they believe to be good. It is characteristic of this class of persons that, as they neglect naught of the things they understand and are able to do, they are content with whatever good they do, and are not incited to higher things or inspired with a more perfect desire for sanctity. They are satisfied with a certain amount of watching, praying, alms-giving, fasting and similar practices for God’s sake, but leave the higher things to others. To them is applicable what Ecclesiastes says: “I have found that nothing is better than for a man to rejoice in his work, and that this is his portion.”

2 Eccl. 3, 22.
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4. The third class is even better than the former two. They that belong to it detest and avoid sin, and studiously perform the good that they are able to do, and when they have done all that they can, they think that they have done very little in comparison with what they would have liked to do, knowing that, as the Apostle says, "bodily exercise is profitable to little." Consequently they aspire to virtues of the soul, sweetness of internal devotion, an intimate knowledge of God and the sensual perception of His Love, deeming themselves to be and to have nothing, nor receiving any consolation from temporal and spiritual things, as long as they are not enjoying, according to their wish and desire, the pleasure of devotion and that arising from the above-mentioned practice of virtues. They are, however, not kindled with fervent zeal against evil habits and against the danger of others falling into sin. They desire that all men should be good and happy, but when they find the contrary to be the case, they experience no pain but are

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81 Tim. 4, 8.
content with themselves and God. Such persons, if called to rule over others, are less fit for this purpose, because they give more consideration to their own comfort than to the care of their subjects, like the figtree in the parable, which said: "Can I leave my sweetness and my delicious fruits, and go to be promoted among the other trees?" 4

5. The fourth class are the best. They, like the former, are aflame with zeal for justice, innocence, and virtue, and the salvation of souls. They obtain no consolation from their own advancement unless they can draw others with them to God, after the example of our Lord, who, though He possessed in Himself the fulness of everlasting beatitude, was not content with having glory for Himself, but went out and, by assuming the form of a servant, drew many after Him by deed and word. The zeal of justice, like the "scarlet twice dyed," 5 glitters with the two-fold color of

4 Judges 9, 11.
charity, love of God and of neighbor. Love of God not only inspires a desire to enjoy His sweetness and cling to Him, but delights in doing His holy will, increasing His worship, and exalting His honor, for it desires to see Him acknowledged, loved, served, and glorified above all things by every one. Love of neighbor desires not only the corporal well-being and temporal prosperity of others, but far more their eternal salvation. Wherever, therefore, charity is more perfect, the desire to promote these things is more fervent, the endeavor more energetic, the joy purer, when it sees them accomplished. For charity "seeketh not her own," 6 but the things that are God's. In proportion to the ardor with which you love God, and the purity with which you desire the things that are God's, you grieve over the offences committed against Him, when you see that He is not acknowledged, but dishonored; when you see that He is not loved and obeyed, that His worship is subverted and His enemies are multiplied and rejoice. And

61 Cor. 13, 5.
according to the depth of your love for the salvation of your neighbor you will grieve over his ruin and the obstacles laid in his way toward heaven.

6. Though charity is required of all the friends of God, it is required above all of His representatives, who, according to His will, should be governed by love of justice and hatred of iniquity. "Thou hast loved justice," says the Psalmist, "and hated iniquity." By justice is here meant the observance of all those things that are necessary for the salvation or perfection of souls.

7. Some of these things have their foundation in the eternal law, such as the pure virtues: humility, chastity, charity, mercy, and the like, without which no one can be saved. To these the commandments of God in the old and in the new law are mainly directed. For, as our Lord says, upon the law of God and neighbor "dependeth the whole law and the prophets." Others are of human institution, prescribed by an authority that acts in the name of

7 Ps. 44, 8.  
8 Matth. 22, 40.
God. Such are the laws that have been laid down by the Church for the general welfare, the rites for the administration of the Sacraments, and other regulations of positive law. "The canons are to be observed by every one,"⁹ in such a manner that each one shall observe what pertains to his state and what is prescribed for all, laymen as well as clerics.

Others proceed from a vow, as the things which no one is compelled to do, but which a man of his own free will has promised and is obliged to keep as it were by divine command. Such are, for instance, the chastity and obedience of the religious state, the abdication of property in monasteries, and the special obligations imposed by the rule of each order upon its members. "When thou hast made a vow to the Lord, thy God, thou shalt not delay to pay it; because the Lord thy God will require it. And if thou delay, it shall be imputed to thee for a sin. If thou wilt not promise, thou shalt be without sin. But that

⁹X. de Const., l. 9, tit. 2: "Canonum statuta custodiantur ob omnibus."
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which is once gone out of thy lips, thou shalt observe and shalt do as thou hast promised to the Lord, thy God, and hast spoken with thy own will and thy own mouth.”

Still others proceed from certain practices of spiritual progress, which are not otherwise necessary for salvation, such as the discipline of the Divine Office, the individual duties in an order, the order of duties, the time of observing silence, the use of food and raiment, the order of time and work, vigils and other spiritual practices, which differ in the various religious orders according to what seems most expedient for each. Though in regard to these things there exists no such strict obligation as if salvation were impossible without them, yet disregard of them mars the beauty of religious life and usually prevents spiritual progress and the edification of others. For just as the love of justice zealously promotes those things in oneself and in others, so on the other hand it grieves and is consumed and incensed when they are disregarded. “Have I

20 Deut. 23, 21–23.
not," says the Psalmist, "hated them, O Lord, that hated Thee; and pined away because of Thy enemies." 11

8. A person imbued with zeal for justice has a certain innate delicacy of feeling, which teaches him to deplore grave transgressions more seriously than minor ones. A thoughtful person considers things as they are, either good or bad, but a fool either regards great things as trifles or trifles as great things, and takes the mote in his brother's eye for a beam, "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel." 12 "You tithe mint and rue and every herb and pass over judgment and the charity of God," says Christ. 13 Such persons are carried away by selfishness and are not guided by the Spirit of God, like unto those who punish a person more severely for a neglected inclination in choir than for repeated detractions of another religious, or grow more indignant over the neglect of a versicle or some minute prescription of the rubrics than

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over a serious quarrel accompanied by scandal.

9. First and above all, therefore, transgressions of the commandments of God must be prevented and deplored; then transgressions of the inviolable precepts of holy Church; after this the non-observance of those things to which a person has bound himself by a voluntary promise, as, for instance, the regular observance of a rule, especially that which is prescribed as a matter of precept; finally, all habits having a species of malice, namely, avarice, pride, envy, gluttony, anger, suspicious familiarity, disobedience, and similar vices, through which the reputation of religious, whereby the rest of the faithful ought to be edified and learn what to avoid and what to do, loses its sweet odor, so that the faithful are scandalised by their vices rather than refreshed by the example of their virtues. St. Paul had such in mind when he said: “The name of God is blasphemed through you among the Gentiles.” 14 A serious secret sin is more easily corrected than such an evil habit,

14 Rom. 2, 24.
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because the former can be cured by secret penance, whereas an evil habit is scarcely ever eradicated from the hearts of those whom it controls.

10. In the fifth place, the zealously practice of prayer must be encouraged. It enlivens the true religious spirit and incites to the practice of every virtue. A religious congregation that is not fed with this oil runs dry. The structure of good works is unstable if it is not sustained by frequent and devout prayer as a stone wall is sustained by cement. In every religious order in which the fervor of devotion has decreased, the structure of the other virtues begins to weaken and is in danger of ruin. "The lamps of the foolish went out." 15

11. Finally there is to be mentioned the neglect of external discipline, which has been established as an ornament of the religious life and an incentive to spiritual progress. To disregard it is a sign of carelessness and interior levity. Compliance with discipline is not prescribed in such a way that one is not

15 Matth. 25, 8.
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allowed to live differently, but for the reason that it is more conducive to conformity of virtue and uniformity of life, lest any one live and act as he likes and thus prove a cause of disturbance to others. In regard to such customs and practices, which are in themselves indifferent, but prescribed, as has been said, for other reasons, greater care should be given to their being well observed than to scrupulous anxiety lest by some slight indulgence they be neglected, unless, indeed, their habitual disregard would engender a bad habit and dissimulation nourish neglect; in which case, to prevent other evils, the zeal of discipline must not relent.

12. A superior who is imbued with a true zeal for justice, therefore, will first of all take care not to do or teach anything wrong; secondly not to allow or permit himself to be moved by importunity or deception; thirdly, not to favor or prefer to see anything done without being asked, or in his absence; fourthly, never to dissemble or be silent, as if

10 Supra, n. 7.
he had no knowledge of things, whereas it is his duty to admonish and teach how bad certain things are, and to deter others from presuming to attempt them in future; fifthly, not to permit faults to go unpunished, because the punishment of a transgression always produces some good, namely, by deterring the one who is guilty from sinning again. "Sin no more," said Christ, "lest some worse thing happen to thee." 17 Furthermore, faults should not be permitted to go unpunished, in order that the erring brother may be cleansed from his sin and not be punished more severely by God later on, for, says Proverbs, "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell." 18 Also for the reason that by this means others may be taught to beware lest they fall into similar faults. "The wicked man being scourged, the fool shall be wiser," 19 that is to say, the weak and the beginner learn to be cautious. Finally, the Superior, who takes the place of the Supreme Judge, saves his own

17 John 5, 14.  
18 Prov. 23, 14.  
19 Prov. 19, 25.
soul from the sin of neglect by fulfilling his duty. Heli, the high priest, because he failed to do this, heard his own sentence of death and also that of his sons.\textsuperscript{20}

13. Dutiful religious differ from careless ones not in this that among the former none is found without sin, but that none is suffered to sin unpunished, and they are studiously protected from the danger of sinning, kept away from the incorrigible, and are cherished and loved, that they may persevere and advance continuously on the way to perfection. Since depravity was found among the choirs of the holy Angels before their confirmation in grace, and among the Apostles under the direction of Christ, what order of virtuous persons on earth may dare to claim for itself that there is no sin in its members? Though many are free from sin by the grace of God, yet not all. "You are clean, but not all." \textsuperscript{21}

14. It is well for the good, while they are still in a position to acquire supernatural merits, to have among them some wicked per-

\textsuperscript{20} 1 Kings 4, 11 sq. \textsuperscript{21} John 13, 10.
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sons who may be for them the occasion of greater merit. They may have compassion on them in their wickedness. Their zeal may be inflamed. They may exert themselves in correcting the erring. They may be filled with fear of becoming like them. The wicked may become a source of temptations to the good. The good may have to suffer persecution from the wicked. They may be confounded and humbled in considering the evil ways of the bad, because they are not like them, and prompted to render thanks to Him who has protected them from becoming like the wicked. If no opportunity were offered to the good to practice the above mentioned virtues, their merits would by that much be curtailed.

“What things a man shall sow,” says St. Paul, “these also shall he reap.”

15. Badly disposed religious, however, are to be neither cherished nor favored, but may be tolerated, especially those whose faults are secret and do not contaminate others, and for whom there is hope of amendment.

22 Gal. 6, 8.
Where these things are lacking, bad religious cannot be tolerated without serious detriment, and hence should be expelled, in order that their wickedness may not appear to be agreeable to those who are good. During the time that they are tolerated, they are to be punished with the rod of admonitions, corrections, humiliations, and penances; and soothed with the balm of exhortations, consolations, prayers, and promises, if they recover from their faults and become strong. The way of sin and temptation must be closed to them. This is also beneficial for good religious, lest the occasion of sin corrupt them.

If a superior, who takes the place of God, “whom his Lord setteth over his family,” and to whom for this reason subjects owe the same obedience as to the Lord Himself, fails to correct delinquents, permits the growth of bad habits and the introduction of evil practices, and allows those that have crept in to increase and spread; if he sees that the regular observances are neglected and transgres-

sions multiply, and yet neglects to stop the existing or impending evils to the best of his ability, he shall be responsible to God for three things.

16. First of all he shall have to render an account to God for his negligence in omitting to do that to which his office obliged him. "Because being ministers of his kingdom, you have not judged rightly, nor kept the law of justice, nor walked according to the will of God. Horribly and speedily will he appear to you: for a most severe judgement shall be for them that bear rule." 24

Secondly, all the sins of his subjects, which he could and ought to have corrected, are imputed to him. "If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked man from his ways, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I shall require his blood at thy hand." 25

In the third place, he shall be responsible for the abuse of the dignity and power that was given to him, having turned it to his own honor and pleasure and not to the purpose for

24 Wis. 6, 5.  
25 Ezech. 33, 8.
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which it was conferred upon him. "Take ye away . . . the talent from him . . . and the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 26

17. A superior who is imbued with the right kind of zeal should show how much he loves God by promoting in himself and in others what pleases Him. He should not falter in his zeal through sloth, nor tire in his exertions, nor be deflected by counsels, nor fooled by cunning, nor carried away by friendship and flattery, nor terrified by threats, nor become discouraged on account of long standing abuses, but should fulfill his duty.

26 Matt. 25, 28, 30.
CHAPTER III

PITY

1. The second "wing" of the ecclesiastical superior is pity or fraternal compassion. As the love of God inflames him with zeal for justice, so fraternal love should imbue him with affection. For if the rod should be held over evil-doers, the staff is required for the support of the weak. "Thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me." ¹ St. Paul says: "Shall I come to you with a rod; or in charity, and in the spirit of meekness?" ² Thus also the Samaritan poured into the wounds of the half dead wanderer the wine of fervent zeal and the oil of compassion. ⁸

2. There are two kinds of infirmities that need to be treated with compassion,—the one corporal, the other spiritual. Corporal infirm-

¹ Ps. 22, 4. ² 1 Cor. 4, 31. ⁸ Luke 10, 33 sq.
Pity

ity is threefold. There are first the sick who are forced to remain in bed on account of an acute or serious disease. There are, secondly, those who, though confined to their cells, are able to be up and about now and then and sometimes even venture out, yet are subject to frequent and severe attacks of painful ailments, such as gallstones, ulcers, obesity, and the like. A third kind of sick are those that have no specific ailment, but are weak and exhausted, as, for instance, the aged and those who have been over-worked or are depressed by natural weakness and momentarily worn out by accidental languor.

These classes of patients must be severally treated in a threefold way, namely, with drugs, if it can be properly done, or relaxation of rigor in food, raiment, hours of sleep, etc., exemption from work in the shops, from services, from attending choir and the like, according as their needs may require. Each of these remedies is to be applied to the sick according to their condition, as indicated above, so that they may find relief.
3. Pity and compassion must be shown to the sick and ailing because they are afflicted by the Lord. If they are molested because of their condition their very misfortune will cry out to the Father of mercies against their tormentors. “They have persecuted him whom thou hast smitten; and they have added to the grief of my wounds.”⁴ For a sick man is harassed in his affliction a great deal more when those who are in duty bound to do so, fail to comfort him, to relieve him from work, to supply his wants, and have no pity for him. “In thy sight,” says the Psalmist, “are all they that afflict me; I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort me, and I found none. And they gave me gall [reproach] for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar [censure] to drink. Let their table become as a snare before them, and a recompense and a stumbling block.”⁵

4. A good superior realizes that he is the father and not the task-master of his brethren,

⁴ Ps. 68, 27. ⁵ Ps. 68, 21, 23.
and acts like a physician, not like a tyrant. He does not consider his subjects as beasts of burden or slaves, but as children, who are destined to partake of the eternal inheritance, and does unto them "as he would have it done unto himself," ⁶ if he were in a similar position. The strong and healthy do not suffer as a sick person does, and hence have no compassion with the sick. But they will know it later on when they themselves suffer affliction. They object that sick persons often imagine themselves to be weaker than they really are. Are all, then, to be considered hypocrites for this reason? Should they not on the contrary recall that the Lord was willing to spare many wicked men for the sake of a few who were just? ⁷

⁵ The sick stand in greater need of assistance and compassion than the hale and strong, for three reasons. First, on account of the necessity of sustaining life, which they cannot do for themselves. If the necessaries of life are not procured for them by others, they be-

⁶ Tobias 4, 16. ⁷ Gen. 18, 23.
come enfeebled and cannot endure. "He that is cast off should not altogether perish." 8 Secondly, on account of the necessity of restoring health and strength, which they have lost by sickness. If even a strong and healthy person needs assistance in order to sustain his health, one who is sick and weak needs a two-fold relief in order not to lose the strength he still has, and to recover that which he has lost. For, says the Lord: "From him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away." 9 Thirdly, on account of the relief which consolation brings. For those who are much afflicted it is a solace to see others having compassion upon them and faithfully assisting them in the endeavor to recover their health. "Blessed be ye of the Lord, for you have pitied my case." 10

6. But, says some one, those for whom there is hope of recovery are indeed worthy of assistance, but it is a useless waste to assist those who are hopelessly ill. This would be correct

8 2 Kings 14, 14.  
10 1 Kings 23, 31.
if consideration were asked for the sick not for the sake of charity, but for reasons of worldly utility. But he who comes to the relief of an invalid for the sake of receiving a return for the favor, deprives himself of the merit of charity. The greater the misery, the brighter is mercy and the purer is charity. It is, therefore, well for a superior occasionally to suffer himself, so that he may learn to have compassion on his subjects. "We have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin."  

7. Spiritual infirmities are also threefold. The first class of sufferers comprises those who, because of lack of devotion or under the influence of temptations, are prone to commit faults and incur imperfections, are easily led astray by temptations, and apt to fall into sin. "There are many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep."  

In the second class are those who, though devout and well disposed, become discouraged

11 Heb. 4, 15.  
12 1 Cor. 11, 30.
by a slight correction or a severe reprimand, or fall a prey to a kind of diffidence akin to despair, or give way to great impatience and excitement, which causes them to grieve afterwards and sometimes to annoy others. Of such St. Paul says: "We that are stronger, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." ¹³

To the third class belong all imperfect religious, who waver in the pursuit of virtue, and, through the impulse of the passions, feel themselves intermittently, even though reluctantly, urged to turn to irritation, anger, sloth, lust, intemperance, and other carnal as well as spiritual vices. They may cry in the words of the Psalmist: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, for my bones are troubled." ¹⁴

8. The remedies to be applied to these infirmities are: to remove the occasion of the scandal and the opportunity of sinning, in order that they may not see or hear anything that would cause them to grow infirm, and hence they should not be permitted to roam

¹³ Rom. 15, 1. ¹⁴ Ps. 6, 3.
about outside the house. Dina was ravished when she left her house.\textsuperscript{15} Through frequent exhortations they should be strengthened in the practice of patience, and should be spared severe reproaches and other measures that would tend to excite them until they have recovered from their frailty. St. Paul says: “Fathers, provoke not your children to indignation, lest they be discouraged.”\textsuperscript{16} He who nags an excited person, so to speak, provokes a barking dog to bite him.—Their idiosyncracies and imperfections should be borne with equanimity. “All things cannot be in men.”\textsuperscript{17}

9. As doctors, in treating rude and inexperienced persons, are wont to disregard their ignorance, because they are simple, so virtuous persons kindly bear with the faults of others, knowing that all cannot be equally perfect, and hence do not impose upon those who are like tender children in Christ heavier burdens than they are able to carry, or expect of them

\textsuperscript{15} Gen. 34, 1, 2. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{17} Ecclesiast. 17, 29.
\textsuperscript{16} Col. 3, 21.
anything that exceeds their strength. In reference to this the words of Jacob are appropriate: "Thou knowest that I have with me tender children and sheep, and kine with young, which if I cause to be overdriven, in one day all the flock will die."\textsuperscript{18} In other words, he who drives those who are like children and have a certain measure of good will, resembling a fruit in the womb, as it were, in an effort to make them practice virtue above their strength, destroys in them what, with the help of grace, they have already acquired. "We became little ones," says St. Paul, "in the midst of you, as if a nurse should cherish her children."\textsuperscript{19} He means, I have humored you humbly and gently, out of consideration for your sensitiveness and inexperience. On the other hand, the Lord, through the Prophet Ezechiel, chides harsh and unfeeling shepherds: "The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, that which was broken you have not bound up, . . . neither have you sought that which was lost;

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} Gen. 33, 13. \textsuperscript{19} 1 Thess. 2, 7.}