
With All Your Mind

by Rev. Federico Suarez

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In St. Matthew's gospel (22:34-37) we read: "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

It is easy to notice here, as on other occasions, that the man who asked the question was insincere. He wasn't looking for knowledge: he wanted to test Jesus, to put him in a compromising situation. But the answer he got was absolutely sincere. It was given clearly and directly, ignoring the hidden intention of the questioner. This answer is well known; it contains a phrase which I think has special relevance to Catholics today, and particularly to students, to people who work with their minds.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." With all your mind. What does it mean to love God with your mind?

Let's begin by asking ourselves: Can you love what you don't know? The philosophers reply: No, you can only want something if you know it in some way or other. Knowing and wanting, having and loving, are so linked together that the act of the will—wanting—is somehow dependent on your mind. Or, in other words, the attitude of your will toward anything depends on the knowledge you have of that thing.

The mind, then, is a kind of governor in man's makeup. A person's conduct, the attitudes he adopts toward God, the world, and other people, depends to a great extent on the ideas he has. And he usually learns, rather than invents, these ideas—particularly his ideas about revelation, and God's message of salvation. You will, I am sure, have noticed that God did not reveal himself to everybody all in one flash. Being God, how could he? When the chosen people left Egypt they were little more than a horde—not even a people—incapable of understanding the most elementary and simple truths about the supernatural world. To give them then the fullness of revelation would have meant burdening them with something they could not carry. With infinite patience and over hundreds of years, first through Moses and then through other prophets he raised up, God set about preparing their minds. In this way, in the fullness of time, the people he had chosen would be capable of recognizing his envoy and grasping the message of redemption. In fact it is even possible, in Jesus' own words in the gospel, to distinguish the gradual unfolding of God's teaching. When he begins to preach, our Lord refers to the old law ("You have heard it said...") and he recalls the precept: "You will love your friend and hate your enemy"; now, centuries later, the chosen people were ready to take a step forward, and Jesus,

who had come to fulfill and complete the law ("...but I say to you") opens up new horizons and perfects the law: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who abuse you..."

We are made in such a way that we have to come to the truth in a gradual way, step by step. This holds good for man in himself and for the subject matter of his knowledge.

Studying God

Let's now look at the first question. What should we understand by "You will love God with all your mind"? What is the gospel saying? Only the Church can explain the exact meaning of Jesus' words without risk of error. Yet, it is true that these words contain a teaching meant for all of us, a teaching which is not just confined to the intellectual sphere but which affects our life. So reflection on these words, or on any other parts of the gospel, is a normal way of going deeper into the message of salvation.

But this deepening or, if you will, this knowledge has to suit each person's intellectual development. You cannot give an eleven-year-old the same geometry textbook as is used by a third or fourth year math student in college. Clearly intelligence undergoes a considerable development between the years of eleven and twenty, and a university text seems as big to a child as the school text is small to a university student.

Very well then: when a child goes to make his First Holy Communion, he has learned the catechism but not the small print. He has a knowledge of God and of the supernatural world which is suited to his mental development. He knows as much as he can know at that age about the basic truths. And, what is more, this knowledge is on a par with his secular knowledge. There is no disproportion between what he knows about God, men, and things—nor any difference in the way he knows all these. I would say that the child loves God "with all his mind," because his knowledge of God is as complete as it can be: it reaches the limit of his intellectual ability at that stage in his development.

As a person's intelligence develops he grows in knowledge of the world and of life. A suitable program of studies keeps opening up his intellectual horizons; normal biological and psychological growth, social relationships, and even things that happen to him all play a part in shaping his mind through the ideas he acquires in books, movies, television, conversations, and experience.

Generally speaking, a university student (at least in the country I live in) tends to think, especially if he has been to a Catholic school, that he "knows it all" as far as the faith is concerned. He thinks that because he has learned the articles of faith in a particularly well-defined way there is nothing more to it. And in a way he is right, for there are few dogmas and you can't find more over the horizon. Revelation was closed with the death of the last apostle. He makes his mistake in confusing the number of truths of faith which he holds and the way in which he as a particular individual holds them. And he is also missing out on the connection between these truths and his real life: for revelation is no mere speculative system. It is an expression of realities which affect the core of each man's personality, the world which surrounds him and in which he lives, and his ultimate and definitive destiny.

Stopped along the way

As far as the first point is concerned, that is, the way in which he has a hold on the truths of the faith, we should remember what we have already noted: only when his knowledge of God and of revelation is on the same level as his mental development and grasp of human knowledge is he fulfilling the commandment (if it can be called that) of loving God with all his mind. But in the case of the average college student this is definitely not the case, for his religious knowledge tends to stop when he is thirteen or fourteen. After that age he rarely continues to read books which are attuned to his development. He doesn't work at religious knowledge after that age. The result is obvious: when he is twenty or twenty-five (and older) he is still discussing subjects connected with the faith using concepts which suit a twelve-year-old. He has learned nothing since that age. In fact he has forgotten part of what he knew. And so it happens (even more so in these times of crisis) that when he tries to solve some problem of faith with his childish knowledge, he finds the argument, the apologia, ridiculous (for it is childish) and the problem logical (for it is the result of a much more developed outlook and general education).

In fact it is my view that a very high proportion of the crises of faith which you meet among college students (I refer to the honest crises, not the other kind) are rooted in the solid, increasing ignorance of the faith which has accompanied their growth in other areas of knowledge and experience. These crises are the result of underdeveloped religious knowledge.

I think you cannot argue that lectures on religion and theology in colleges are an adequate counterweight. Quite apart from their effectiveness (if they have any) it is not the classes themselves that need attention (in some universities, at least, they have changed a great deal in format and content) but the attitude of the people who attend them. Revelation is not a philosophy. It is not something which should be learned like just another subject. Either you try to live it or you simply fail to understand it. In other words you cannot get a mature understanding of the gospel unless you are prepared to practice it in your own personal life. When there is no active practice of the gospel (and there very commonly is none), then religion—your relationship with God born from faith in revelation—is completely separated from life. Then religion just has no influence on life. Perhaps certain practices remain, but these eventually become empty of meaning and even lose their basis. Piety then is purely external and gives way to hypocrisy. And since the student finds hypocrisy repulsive, and his knowledge of the faith is superficial and inadequate, he decides to "be genuine" and give up the practice of his faith. He even stops thinking about such things. The enthusiasm with which a person like this adopts humanitarian ideals, taking up the fight against poverty, injustice, hunger, or war in a kind of philanthropic and altruistic crusade is partly (at least in many cases) a kind of substitute for the faith he has given up, if not lost. The situation gets worse when somebody feels he is now freed from his bonds and devotes himself to living according to the flesh, smothering the spirit. And it is very hard to find any cure when you set up your own intelligence in the center of things and make your own ideas the criteria of truth. In your blindness you are capable of even putting the blame on God rather than admitting your own mistakes, your obvious limitations, and your evident carelessness.

What color is your mind?

Maybe I'm not expressing myself well. What I mean is this: we are on the receiving end of a continuous barrage of ideas which reach us through television, newspapers, radio, magazine articles, films, theater, books, social behavior, and the environment we live in, just like a skin-diver who feels the pressure of the water on all sides. All right: generally all these ideas which reach us, or at least the great majority of them, not only do not lead us to God (unless by way of exception and through pure reaction) but rather tend to keep us from him. Faced with this barrage, what defense does the faith normally have? A mind which is constantly being fed with ideas, concepts, and criteria which have no reference to the gospel or go against it: what chance does it have of remaining loyal to the faith of Christ, if it starts out with almost no knowledge of that faith?

In fact, I think that it would not be difficult to find, in Catholics, non-Catholic minds: that is, Catholics whose thinking on many subjects is either not in agreement with or directly contrary to the faith which they claim to hold or at least have never explicitly denied. I think Msgr. Ronald Knox was getting at this when he said that a nonintellectual conversion often meant an unconverted mind. But, in this case, what hope is there for the world if those who should save it have, through their ignorance of saving doctrine, made themselves incompetent to save it, since they themselves have not yet saved their own minds?

Except through a special grace from God it is not possible to love him with your mind if you don't take steps to develop your mind in matters connected with revealed truth. And you will not get a developed grasp of revealed truth unless you learn it, unless you work at it. It is not something you can make up by yourself, no matter how intelligent, intuitive, and sensitive you are. Therefore the development of your mind in order to get an adequate knowledge of the faith (adequate to your intellectual development and on a par with your secular knowledge) should be sought through reading.

Finding good guides

It might be helpful, illustrative, at this point to recall that St. Teresa noticed she had a strong and almost instinctive tendency not to read religious books unless they were "really approved." To our modern minds this rings of censorship, limitation of freedom, and narrow-mindedness. I think St. Teresa was not that kind of person; she simply did not want to be fooled. I quote her here because I have the impression that college students are more inclined to read something that is easy and not too deep than a book which contains sound doctrine but which is not entertaining. And I suggest that possibly some young college people only read books which are topical and fashionable, not caring whether their content is true or their arguments well founded. And I think that some read only books which back up their own opinions.

You cannot love what you do not know. Can you know Jesus without knowing the gospel? How many times has the average college man or woman—you can average them from the oldest professor to the freshman—read the four gospels? How many of them have read them in their entirety even once? This ignorance of essential matters may be the reason why there are intellectuals whose idea of Christ, the

gospel, and the Church is so ignorant and deformed that when the time comes that they decide they need a spiritual element in their lives, they get carried away by any ideology or religious leader that comes along, rather than dedicate themselves to the faith they were baptized in.

If you were to ask my advice this is what I would say: every day spend some time reading a book which acts as nourishment for the mind. Not just any book but suitable books, books which meet at least these two requirements: sound doctrine (this is the same as saying that it is in keeping with the teaching of the Church) and intelligibility (it is suited to the intelligence and training of the reader). If a person wants to learn physics he does not go to Jules Verne or some modern science-fiction writer; he looks for books written by physicists, preferably by physicists of good standing. That's just common sense. Well then, if someone wants to get a deeper understanding of his faith or simply a better knowledge of the gospel and he takes up articles about theology-fiction or religious sociology, he is being very stupid. Not only will he not increase his knowledge, but he is liable to mess up the little knowledge he had when he started. As regards the second requirement, you need only remember what we were saying about the geometry textbook for the twelve-year-old and the fourth-year math student.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind." An adequate knowledge of the faith which is at least on a par with your secular knowledge is not a luxury.

You are free, and you can read or not read. But don't forget that, because you are free, you have to answer for what you do... and what you fail to do. The use of freedom, which has been given you so that you can love, involves supreme responsibility before God. The judgment of God, the particular judgment, is no theory; it is not something we can choose or reject. It is an event which we all have to confront as soon as death comes.

It's Easy Not to Believe

by Michael Adams

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Christianity is not an ideology (a system of ideas, like Marxism or existentialism) which would claim to provide a key or the key to allowing mankind or individuals to get the most out of life. Neither is it a natural religion, a more or less clumsy attempt to use more than the mind to reach more than the world. The religion of the Catholic Church into which you were baptized is on its own admission a "supernatural religion," the outcome of God's personal intervention in human history. The Church professes to have a hold on mysteries or truths taught by God and communicated to us by appointed messengers—especially by one messenger, Jesus Christ, who is the metaphysical Son of God. The Church says that he lived, worked, died and rose from the dead, and that he reconciled mankind (who had been estranged) to God. The Church tells each generation these truths (which do not change) and offers to believers the means of "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14). Through these means,

mainly preaching and the sacraments, a man, despite his defects, can become like God. Christianity is an intrusion by God into men's affairs, and an intrusion by men into God's, by way of response.

This relationship is the proper subject of catechism classes and sermons. If a Catholic priest or teacher talks about other things, get him back on the track. Ask him what the Church teaches; ask him to explain it as well as he can. Tell him you have very little time left. He will be happy to listen to you. Maybe in recent years he has been fumbling, afraid that the religion he learned would be a "hard saying" (Jn 6:60) to you. And so each year he's given you less religion, less natural religion, less philosophy.

You can't be taught holiness—but you can be taught out of it. If you have not taken in true ideas, true beliefs, you stand no chance of turning them into true living. If you have good doctrinal training, then you have a chance of a good life.

Religion really is about life—not religion classes. In fact, to grasp religion adequately you have to put it into practice. If you don't, then it's very likely that you'll sooner or later regard the whole thing as hocus pocus. Apologetics, the rational "argumentation" of the faith, has its importance (much underestimated at present because people are more often than not trying to explain their own views, not the faith of the Church, and they have more limited intellectual capacity than the tradition of the Church). Apologetics can show that the faith is reasonable, or not unreasonable. But it has only a secondary importance. We profess in the Creed that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; the last Council taught that "this Church is ruled and governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him."¹ We study what the Church teaches, but this does not mean that any one of us can carry around in his intellect, neatly organized, an adequate rationale for the Faith. Anyone's intelligence is too limited for that. Some of us are especially dense, others somewhat less so: that is all. But this stupidity, happily, does not mean that we are less whole Christians by reason of our intellectual shortcomings or even memory defects. Do you think the early Christians entered into detailed arguments in their apostolate? St. Paul does say: "Be tactful with those who are not Christians and be sure that you make the best use of time with them. Talk to them agreeably and with a flavor of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one" (Col 4:5-6), but he boasts that "in my speeches and sermons, there was none of the arguments that belong to philosophy" (1 Cor 2:4). He even warns St. Timothy to have "nothing to do with pointless philosophical discussions" (2 Tim. 2:16). And St. Paul thanks "God who, wherever he goes, makes us, in Christ, partners of his triumph, and through us is spreading the knowledge of himself, like a sweet smell, everywhere" (2 Cor 2:14-15). "I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God made things grow" (1 Cor 3:6)—God does the spreading.

More belief; fewer answers

Do not misunderstand me. I don't recommend any anti-intellectual fundamentalism (a potential risk, at least, of that Pentecostalism that is found in parts of the Church at present, and a risk for those who are afraid of intellectual study of the faith). I simply remind you that being a good Catholic does not have much connection with having a neat, nicely argued answer to every question. Where we lack argument of course we should try to acquire it. But what is more important than argument is answer.

It is more important to believe in the Eucharist, to hold that it is the body and blood, soul and the divinity, of Christ, than to be able to explain how transubstantiation is metaphysically possible.

The early Christians did not run around with metaphysical arguments. They rather passed on the Good News that Christ has risen. They did not try to change the News to make it more palatable to pleasure-loving pagans; they lived, or tried to live, by the tradition they had received from the first disciples and which the apostles and priests monitored.

Since that time God has made no new revelation; though we may know better, through the development of doctrine, we do not know more than the early Christians. There is no new gnosis, no further secret knowledge to be found which will render this particular message obsolete. Discourage people from spending their lives, or part of them, in trying to change the Church; tell them the Church is there to help them change themselves.

"Many today would argue that they are entitled, on grounds of conscience and in some fundamental matter, to choose a viewpoint contrary to that taught by the Church. Perhaps; but what they are not entitled to do, after such a choice, is to insist on regarding their new position as a Catholic position. Such insistence is not to demand freedom; or if it is, it is to demand the freedom to empty terms and positions of any real meaning.

"To claim the right both to be called a Catholic and to be totally subjective about what being a Catholic means, is a particularly modern phenomenon—one that may not be due to insincerity, but that must be explained as a lack of thought, as a failure to understand that to be a Catholic means to belong—voluntarily—to a Body that, where fundamental principles are concerned, thinks and teaches with the mind of Christ."²

"There cannot be more than one Good News; it is merely that some troublemakers among you want to change the Good News of Christ" (Gal 1:7-8).

Easy not to believe

You only have to look around you, and you will see how easy it is not to believe. If you want not to believe in the teaching of the Catholic Church, just try. It is certainly easy for non-Christians and even non-Catholic Christians not to believe; they are ill-disposed (even if it is not their fault). But it is easy for Catholics too. If you want not to believe, try to pick holes in anything or everything the Pope says (or your bishops, for that matter); a little effort and you will soon believe only those things which you like to believe, those things which you, with your particular psychology and background, comprehend readily. If you are an ordinary sort of person you will not take issue at first with the doctrine of the Trinity but rather with some aspect of the Church's moral teaching: depending on your inclinations or taste for exploration you will find it difficult to commit a mortal sin of (let us just take a more colorful area) sexuality. And since venial sins are only venial you will not give much importance to sexual experimentation, contraception, or abortion. And even if you do not choose to indulge in one or another

of these yourself, you will be easily convinced that everybody has an absolute right to indulge himself in such ways and will go out of your way to accommodate him. Criticize, read criticism, encourage criticism and—especially in today's environment—soon you will be able not to believe.

Whereas St. Paul says: "The gospel will save you only if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you—believing anything else will not lead to anything" (1 Cor 15:2). He says that the only chance you have of believing is (1) to want to believe and (2) to stick to the tradition.

If you choose not to believe, you are not really rejecting "mysteries." For even on the human level "what can be known about God is perfectly plain; ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity—although invisible—have been there for the mind to see in the things that he has made. By closing your eyes you make nonsense out of logic, and your mind is darkened. The more you call yourself a philosopher the stupider you become. God leaves you in your own irrational ideas and your monstrous behavior. And so you are saturated in all kinds of depravity, rottenness, greed, and malice and addicted to envy, murder, treachery, and spite. Libelers, slanderers, enemies of God, rude, arrogant, and boastful, enterprising in sin, rebellious to parents, without brains, honor, love, or pity. You know what God's verdict is: that those who behave in these ways deserve to die—and yet they do it; and what is worse, they encourage others to do the same" (Rom 1:19-32 passim).

What St. Paul is saying here is: if you close your eyes to the existence of a personal God and build up your own philosophy, seeking yourself and not truth, you will soon become a candidate for damnation. And then you will be classically ripe for receiving the exact kind of apostolate which the early Christians received.

Can the world be won?

Another way to lose your faith is by being demoralized, which is like being beaten before you start. You can be demoralized by your own sins and failings (whether you take them too seriously and too secretly in adolescence, or too frivolously as a "mature" adult) or by the sins and failings of others. Nowadays, when the "news" thrust at us from all sides tends to highlight violence and aberration we can easily feel like saying: "What's the use? Christianity is fighting a losing battle. It does not work."

That argument was spreading in the fifties when Catholics amounted to six hundred million and statistics of world population suggested we were at least maintaining our proportion. Nowadays with teeming birthrates in predominantly non-Catholic areas, and a tendency for Catholics to do "the right thing" for the world by espousing contraception; with such doctrinal subjectivism that it is difficult enough to know how many have a hold on the faith (hold it and try to live it); nowadays, surely, the argument for being demoralized must be obvious? Don't believe it. Without any arrogance or naiveté, the Christian who really tries is the taste-giving salt of the Earth, he is the yeast which raises all the dough. His good life, a supernatural life, repairs and makes up for the faults of the natural lives of countless other people.

Anyway, do not think too much about the world! The world—that is the great escape-route of our time, the way to shed personal responsibility. Think rather of your world, the only world you will ever be involved in; a world which is restricted—as far as your external activity is concerned—to a relatively few people whom you are in fairly close contact with. Only you can save that world. If you do not save it, it will be condemned.

But my conscience...

I'd prefer to be tortured than force your conscience, or play the bully. But I feel no freedom to say: Go ahead, push aside your religious background, taste every dish, and when you're jaded then (young or middle-aged or old) go looking for God; he will still be there, an eye out for the prodigal. You appeal to conscience, to protect yourself against the Church, the priests, your parents, even your friends; then to conscience you shall go.

Try this line of advice:

Cardinal Newman is frequently invoked today, and rightly so, as one of the main exponents of the “supremacy of conscience.” His Letter to the Duke of Norfolk (1874) contains the famous phrase, “If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please. Still, to conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.”

But, in defending the supremacy of conscience, he is very explicit as to what sort of conscience can be regarded as supreme, and as to what must be our attitude toward its supremacy: conscience understood “not as a fancy or an opinion, but as a dutiful obedience to what claims to be a Divine voice speaking within us” (ibid.). Many of those who invoke Newman today on this matter of the rights of conscience, fail to echo his emphasis on the duties of conscience on the duties owed toward conscience. In his *Apologia* he writes, “I have always contended that obedience even to an erring conscience was the way to gain light” (ch. 4). No doubt he felt he was speaking from personal experience. And anyone familiar with his life knows how he suffered from his immensely sensitive obedience to his conscience, how he suffered as it brought him to the light.

Today, more than ever, it is necessary to say that the man who really listens to his conscience and is prepared to be faithful to it will often have the sense of obeying a voice that leads him in a direction a large part of him does not feel like following. We are of course speaking of the man who takes his conscience seriously, who looks up to it and respects it, and for this reason is prepared to acknowledge its supremacy and obey it.

Newman writes elsewhere that if we wish to find religious (or moral) truth, we must “interrogate our hearts, and (since it is a personal individual matter) interrogate our own hearts—interrogate our own consciences, interrogate, I will say, the God who dwells there,” and do so “with an earnest desire to know the truth and a sincere intention of following it” (cf. *Ward, Life, II, 330*).

Conscience is a precious but delicate guide. Its voice is easily distorted or obscured. To dictate to conscience is to silence and, eventually, to destroy it. Conscience must be listened to, and listened to sensitively. It needs to be interrogated, even to be cross-examined. And only those who habitually interrogate their conscience and are ready to pay heed even to its awkward answers, will not cheat their conscience or be cheated by it.³

It is easy to believe

It is easy to believe: if you want to believe, if you are well-disposed, if your attitude is an active one. If you want to believe, to follow through the baptism you have received, the formula is simple: (1) "Repent" (Mk 1:15); (2) seek to know what the Church, not some theologian or journalist (however competent) teaches; (3) build up your Christian life by prayer and the sacraments, getting to know Jesus Christ; (4) and then "offer your living bodies as a holy sacrifice ... let your behavior change, modeled by your new mind, not by the behavior of the world around you... Sincerely prefer good to evil ... Love each other as much as brothers should... Work for the Lord with untiring effort... Treat everyone with equal kindness... Resist evil and conquer it with good... Obey the civil authorities... Be brave and strong... We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it... Make a point of living quietly, minding your own business and earning your living" (Rom 12:1 ff; 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 2:10; 1 Thes 4:11). Hardly a limited panorama. The world is the oyster of this Christian, and it is easy to see how quickly its values would be turned upside down by more living based on these truths. The radicalism which thus effortlessly results from Christianity leaves human radical formulae sounding like a child's whine. To put it more accurately, it is easy to know how to go about believing. You have God's help: it deserves the response of your best effort. Even the pain (which must come one way or another) and the difficulty (which could take the form of doubt, at times) are swallowed up in the joy of serving God. But don't think of this business as a nice, cozy mystical relationship between yourself and a God "out there" or even an indwelling God.

Where's your example?

There is a tendency for people to think that the function of bishops, priests, and other officials is to preach; and that the function of lay people is (1) to be preached at and (2) to "behave." To put it another way, the Christian in the street is supposed to give good example (understood in an almost spectral sense). Forget it! You have a mouth, a tongue. Presence (in the French sense), coy, demure, edifying conduct is not enough (it is even humanly unbecoming). We must be confessors and professors of the faith, but in our own way. "On all Christians rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation," as the Second Vatican Council put it.⁴ You do it particularly through your friendships and your natural relationships—you don't have to set yourself up as a teacher of your peers. Look: even "children have an apostolate of their own. In their own way they are true living witnesses of Christ among their companions."⁵ But do not dare open your mouth if you are not trying to be a good Christian. And if you try to be a good Christian, do not dare not to open that mouth of yours.

¹ Lumen Gentium, 8.

² Cormac Burke, *Conscience and Authority*, CTS London.

³ Cormac Burke, *Conscience and Truth*, CTS London.

⁴ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 3.

⁵ *Idem*, 12.