43. **Charlemagne.** From what you say, it seems to me that a theory of discussion, and exercises in voice and diction, should be pursued with great care from the very early years of their lives by all those who are to be judged worthy of participating in civil and secular affairs. A confident voice, a fluent speech, and a body trained to respond properly would by such exercises become the habitual traits of the very young; and later they would not dread to do in public what they had done as a matter of routine in private.

**Alcuin.** You correctly understand and admirably extend my meaning. Just as the soldier is trained at the military camps, so the speaker is trained at home, that he may not fear to do among many what he has practiced by himself.

**Charlemagne.** I also see how necessary it is that training at home should begin to anticipate what public life will later require. Indeed, he who wishes to speak with credit among strangers should not use discreditable speech in his own family. Necessary in every activity of life, integrity is of the greatest importance in discourse, because a man's speech completely reveals his character—unless it seems otherwise to you, O Master.

**Alcuin.** No other view of the subject seems possible to me. In a man's ordinary speech the words should be well-chosen, reputable, clear, and simple; and should be pronounced with undistorted mouth, a tranquil expression, a calm face, and without unseemly jeers or undue loudness of tone. The right method is to speak as we walk—to move calmly, without haste and without delay—until the time when every trait reflects the temperance of moderate control. Temperance, indeed, is one of the four virtues, from which as from roots grow various other virtues, among them being elevation of mind, propriety of life, integrity of character, and superiority of training.

**Charlemagne.** I perceive that the philosophical axiom should be applied not only to our general conduct but also to our speech.
ALCUIN. What axiom, pray?

CHARLEMAGNE. 'Nothing to excess.'

ALCUIN. It does apply to our speech and to the whole range of our behavior, for any act is imperfect which does not conform to the mean. Hence the virtues are placed between the extremes. At your respected command I should have been able to make various observations upon the subject of the virtues, if our dialogue were not in its last stages, and if the discussion of this subject appeared to have any bearing for you, who are distinguished at one and the same time by your knowledge and your practice of the principles of good conduct.

44. CHARLEMAGNE. Nevertheless, O Master, before I can permit you to throw down your pen, you should explain to me the names and purposes of those four virtues which you have called the roots of other virtues. A while ago we agreed that it is necessary for a speaker to have regular practice in discourse. Now if we ought to have practice of this kind, what subject is better than that of the superiority of the virtues, each one of which has the power to confer the greatest possible benefit upon our writing and reading?

ALCUIN. As you say, it is of great benefit, my Lord King, but I am caught in a dilemma. Brevity demands a few short remarks, words cause weariness, and too many, ignorance.

ALCUIN. It must first be observed that certain things are so illustrious and noble that they should be sought and loved and followed, not because of some advantage which accrues as a result, but rather because of the inherent excellence of the things themselves.

ALCUIN. I should like above all else to know what these things are.

ALCUIN. They are virtue, knowledge, truth, love of good.

ALCUIN. Does not the Christian religion chiefly celebrate these things?

ALCUIN. It celebrates and respects them.

ALCUIN. What attitude did the philosophers have towards these things?

ALCUIN. They perceived these things in human nature, and cultivated them with the greatest devotion.
rhettoric of Alcuin

Moderation is the capacity created by a love of goodness to protect the due limits of our entire mode of life, and to preserve a just measure in all the movements of our soul and body.

47. Charlemagne. The protecting and fostering of this love of goodness is a distinguished honor in the eyes of men, and a noble deed in the eyes of God. If those philosophers cultivated the virtues merely because such an activity lent great prestige and honor to their lives, then I am astonished that we Christians should turn away from the virtuous life and fall into many grievous errors when we are promised by Jesus Christ who is Truth itself that our faithful and loving devotion to good conduct will bring a reward of eternal glory.

Alcuin. We ought to feel pity rather than astonishment that so very many of us cannot be made to acknowledge the inherent worth of a virtuous life, either by the fear of punishment or the hope of reward.

Charlemagne. That I admit, and I acknowledge in all sorrow that there are many such men. I entreat you, however, to explain, as briefly as may be, how these excellent virtues should be understood and regarded in our Christian religion.

Alcuin. Does it not seem to you that he has Prudence who comes to know God, so far as the limitations of the human mind permit; and who comes to fear Him and to believe in His future judgment?

Charlemagne. I understand you, and I grant that nothing is more lofty than this kind of Prudence. As I recall, it is written in the Book of Job, 'Behold, the prudence of man is devotion.' And what is devotion, if not the worship of God, which in Greek is called 'theta theia'?

Alcuin. Your discernment is altogether excellent. Now, what in your opinion do we mean by the word 'Justice,' if we do not mean a man who loves God and keeps His commandments?

Charlemagne. I see at once that no other meaning more properly belongs to the word—indeed, it means nothing else but that.

Alcuin. Do you not see as well that the word 'Courage' describes the man who conquers his 'ancient enemy' and bears the trials of this world?

Charlemagne. I see it indeed, and esteem nothing more praiseworthy than victory in such a cause.
ALCUIN. And is not 'Temperance' the distinctive trait of him who governs his lust and controls his greed and calms and moderates all the passions of his soul?

CHARLEMAGNE. Yes, it is, and to do these things is essential for all men. But what object, may I now ask, is to be gained by adhering to these virtues?

ALCUIN. The object is to love God and our neighbor. Or do you think otherwise?

CHARLEMAGNE. Indeed, no; but how brief to hear, yet how difficult and lofty to do!

ALCUIN. What is easier than to love forms beauteous to the sight, tastes agreeable to the palate, sounds melodious to the ear, odors fragrant to the nostrils, objects pleasant to the touch, and all the honors and amenities of a lifetime? But it is easy for our soul to cherish these things, which disappear like unsubstantial shadows, and not love God, who is eternal beauty and enduring sweetness and unending pleasure and unceasing joy and permanent honor and unfailing happiness—particularly since the Sacred Scriptures require only that we love God and our Lord with our whole heart and our whole soul and our whole mind, and that we love our neighbor as ourself? Indeed, we have His promise who knows not how to deceive. 'For my yoke,' He says, 'is easy, and my burden is light.' To love the things of this world is more difficult than to love Christ; for what the soul longs for in this world is happiness and permanence, and these it does not find, because every good thing here below recedes and disappears, and forsakes him who loves it, or is forsaken by him who loves it. And then only may the soul re-establish its own due order.

CHARLEMAGNE. What is the due order of the soul?

ALCUIN. That it love what is higher, that is, God; that it rule what is lower, that is, the body; and that by its love it nourish and assist its fellow creatures. For the soul, cleansed and exonerated by these devotions, will fly back from this troubled and wretched life to eternal peace, and will enter into the joy of the Lord.

CHARLEMAGNE. You are now speaking in praise of some truly great and blessed man, O Master.

ALCUIN. May God make you great and truly blessed, my Lord King, and may He grant that this evil generation mount to the summit of the heavenly kingdom, propelled by the twin wings of