15 Altar (*Altare*)

An altar is fourfold and each of them is double.[[1]](#endnote-1) For there are the upper, lower, interior, and exterior altars.

The upper altar is that of the trinity, about which Exod. 20[:26]: “You shall not go up by steps unto my altar.” Or it is said to be the church triumphant, Psal. [51:21]: “Then shall they lay calves upon your altar.”

Again, the lower altar can be said to be the church militant, about which Exod. 20[:4]: “You shall not make” for yourself an altar of cut stones. Or it may be said to be the table of the temple, Psal. [117:27]: “Appoint a solemn day, with shady boughs, even to the horn of the altar.”

Again, the interior altar is the clean heart, Lev. [6:12]: “The fire on the altar shall always burn.” Or it may be said to faith in the flesh, about which Exod. 30[:1]: “You shall make an altar of earth unto me.”

Again, the exterior altar is the altar of the cross. This is the altar of the holocaust upon which the sacrifice is burnt at eventide; or it may be said to be the ecclesiastical sacrifice, Psal. [83:4]: “Your altars, O Lord of hosts.”

Therefore, the gridiron upon the altar or upon the small altar is penitence upon the cleanness of the heart.

1. Innocent III, *De sacro altaris mysterio* 5.5 (PL 217:891-892): Multiplex autem altare legitur in Scripturis, superius et inferius, interius et exterius. Quodlibet autem est duplex. Nam altare superius est Dei Trinitas, de quo legitur: Non ascendas ad altare meum per gradus **(Exod. XX)**. Est et altare superius triumphans Ecclesia, de qua dicitur: **[Col.0891D]** Tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos **(Psal. L)**. Altare inferius est Ecclesia militans, de quo dicitur: Si altare lapideum feceris mihi, non aedificabis illud de sectis lapidibus **(Exod. XX)**. Est et altare inferius mensa templi, de qua dicitur: Constituite diem solemnem in condensis, usque ad cornu altaris **(Psal. CXVII)**. Altare interius est cor mundum, de quo praecipitur: Ignis in altari meo semper ardebit **(Levit. VI)**. Est et altare interius fides incarnationis, de qua jubetur: Altare de terra facietis mihi **(Exod. XX)**. Altare exterius, ara crucis, hoc est altare holocausti, super quod cremabatur sacrificium vespertinum. Est et altare exterius ecclesiastica **[Col.0892A]** sacramenta, de quibus scriptum est: Altaria tua, Domine virtutum **(Psal. LXXXIII)**. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)