21 Water (*Aqua*)

Water designates grace without which nothing can grow. Wherefore, according to the Philosopher, 7, *De animalibus*, chapter 5,[[1]](#endnote-1) sheep by drinking water grow very fat. Thus, the sheep of Christ advance by drawing up grace. Otherwise that is verified in Psal. [142:6]: “My soul is as earth without water unto you.” The figure for this is as if Gen. 30[:39], the sheep of Jacob by looking upon the branch in the water conceived a varied original. Thus, the soul produces a variety of virtues, “You shall draw waters with joy out of the savior's fountains,” Isai. 12[:3], that is, from the wounds of Christ crucified. Wherefore, Chrysostom, homily 3, *Super Mattheum, in Opere imperfectum,[[2]](#endnote-2)* the nature of the viper is that when it has bitten a man, it immediately runs to water, which if it does not find it, it dies immediately. So, it is for any evil doer running to the water of grace.

¶ The figure for this, in Luke 22[:10-12], Christ commanded the disciples that where they would see a man carrying a jar of water, there they should prepare a meal, the meal for themselves. Thus, in this manner Christ freely enters where there is the water of devotion and grace. For the blessings of Christ as they commonly took place in water and with the nature of water he never cursed. Just as the lands, thence it is that “In the beginning the spirit of God moved over the waters,” [Gen. 1:1-2]. In the sign of which, Christ ate fish from the water and not the flesh of the land. A fish near death comes back to life in the water near where it was born, or in a similar water, Isaiah 50[:2]: “Fishes shall rot for want of water.” In this way it is that we are born in the water of baptism and if we die through sin, it is necessary to run back to the silent water, that is, to the grace of penitence.

Again, note that a fish nourished in the sea does not run to sweet water, unless the sweet water runs to it. Thus, the soul existing in sin does not run to grace unless first grace runs to it. Wherefore Ezechiel the prophet c. 47[:2-8], saw the waters issuing from “the right side of the temple which go down to the plains of the desert, shall go into the sea.”

¶ Again, water which flows from on high can ascend, but that which does not, cannot ascend, so devotion descending from God can ascend, but that which comes from the world quickly vanishes, John 4[:13-14]: “He that shall drink of the water that I will give him … shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.” Therefore, it is not without mystery among all the elements only the waters are above the heavens. Wherefore, in Psal. [148: 4-5], it is said, “The waters that are above the heavens praise the name of the Lord.”

¶ Again, of the waters which flow from the inside, as the waters of tears, and these designate teaching; some are from the bottom, as the fountains and these designate temporal fortunes. Concerning the first it is said in Ezech. 36[:25]: “I will pour upon you clean water.” Those having tears are in contrition for their sins also for lost grace, because if man weeps for a lost limb or for a temporal connection, so much more ought he to weep for his lost soul and glory. “My eyes have sent forth springs of water, because they have not kept your law,” [Ps. 118:136]. When a branch is cut, being full of water it is a sign of life, thus when the penitent weeps, Psal. [103:10]: “You send forth springs in the vales; between the midst of the hills the waters shall pass.”

¶ These having tears in prayer and compassion for the misfortunes of others, Lam. 3[:48]: “My eye has run down with streams of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people.”

¶ Concerning the second waters, it is said in Eccli. 15[:3]: “Give him the water of wholesome wisdom to drink.” These waters are pouring forth and dividing. Just as the moon receives the light from the sun and causes it to flow back to earth, thus the water is first in the fountain, afterwards in the river, Prov. 5[:15]: “Drink water out of your own cistern,” that is, wisdom derived from the scriptures. Your fountains are outside for shaping others. But, alas, because our superiors are like the clouds of the dog-days, having the appearance of rain, but not the reality, the canonical epistle of Jude [1:12]: “Clouds without water, trees of the autumn, unfruitful.”

¶ Concerning the third waters, which designate temporal fortune.

¶ Note that fortune is either prosperous or adverse. If prosperous to this extent it is designated through water. For prosperity as if water flows out and flows back and sometimes it is submerged. Just as the Egyptians in following the poor (Israelites), were drowned, just like lead in waters extremely so, [Exod. 14:28]. And these waters thus flow because if they are detained at that time, with the obstacle broken they flow out more forcefully. Thus, at the death of the avaricious rich, their temporal effects flow out to others, Ps. [104:41]: “He opened the rock,” and the rich, the grasping, and the hard, “and waters flowed.” As is evident in the grasping of the rich, Luke 12[:20]: “You fool, this night do they require your soul of you; and whose shall those things be which you have provided?”

In the second place, the adversities of the world are called water because they judge the truth for the wise, Prov. 27[:19]: “As the faces of them that look therein, shine in the water, so the hearts of men are laid open to the wise.” Thus a large, wide-mouthed, globular jar is struck so that it may be known if anything is inside. Therefore, he says well to the prudent, for the fools judge present misfortunes and penitential works would not be meritorious. Just as a stick, although it is straight, however in water it is judged to be twisted by the ignorant. Therefore such one freely follow prosperities, Osee 2[:5]: “I will go after my lovers,” namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil, who give me bread and water. If in truth however much more they are in these waters, the more they become soiled, just as bleeding thieves are not considering that it is necessary to enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations. For such ones the water of celestial wisdom would be necessary, concerning which Eccli. 24[:41]: “Like a brook out of a river of a mighty water.” Water straining at its channel cleans away filth, nourishes the earth, floats wooden things. Thus, wisdom purges from evils, nourishes by good things, floats in the heavens.

¶ Therefore this water is to be produced on account of two matters because it is easy to have, and beneficial to carry. Concerning the first, Apo. 21[:6]: “To him that thirsts, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely.” Eccli. 15[:17-18]: “He has set water and fire before you,” namely, the water of glory, the fire of hell, “stretch forth your hand to which you will. Before man is life and death.” But the Lord is sought for, Jer. 2[:13]: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have dug to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

¶ Concerning the second, that it was beneficial to carry because they make the command, John 4[:13]: “He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever.” For only God himself can fulfill the desire of man concerning these two at the same time, Isaiah 55[:1]: “All you that thirst, come to the waters.”

Again, water is said to be penitence or grace because of the cleaning of filth and for this reason of inheritance, Heb. 10[:22]: “Our bodies washed with clean water.” Thus penitence washed away the filth of sin, Ezech. 16[:9]: “And I washed you with water, and cleansed away your blood from you.” This was figured, Lev. 12 and 13, where the unclean according to the law had to be washed with water and thus cleaned in sign that penitence cleans, Ezech. 36[:25]: “And I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness.” It is seen in sign of this that Christ washed the feet of the disciples, as if saying, thus penitence washes the soul, Lev 9[:11]: The purified will be washed who enters into the fortification, that is, the church, so that he may be a member in it.

Second, water is said to be penitence or grace because of the receiving of the light and the presence of the representation. For water from every part on account of its deformity receives the light and represents the image of the object to the onlooker, thus in the penitent soul divine grace shines, through which the polluted image of the old man is represented to him so that he may be cleansed, Prov. 27[:19]: “The faces of them that look therein, shine in the water.”

¶ Third, water is said to be penitence because in the vegetative state of the animate, Job 8[:11]: “Can the rush be green without moisture or a sedge-bush grow without water?” As if saying, does not the soul thus grow dry without the humor of penitence, Luke 8[:6]: “It withered away, because it had no moisture.” Jude 1[:12]: “These are clouds without water, which are carried about by winds,” but to the contrary penitence becomes green again. The figure of this is made, it is in Ezech. 47[:2-8], where Ezechiel sees waters flowing from the house of the Lord and enter the sea. This is explained concerning the waters of penitence which make the wood, that is, to make man recover, Jer. 17[:8]: “He shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters,” etc.

Again, water is called penitence because of the cooling of ardor; just as in fire there are two elements: heat and dryness. Thus on the contrary in water there are two: coldness, which extinguishes the heat, and wetness, which extinguishes the dryness. Wherefore also, all things being equal, water extinguishes all fire, Luke 16[:24]: “Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water.” But when a man sins the infernal fire is kindled against him, Jer. 15[:14]: “A fire is kindled in my rage.” But penitence extinguishes it, Eccli. [3.33]: “Water quenches a flaming fire.” John 4[:13]: “He that shall drink of the water that I will give him,” just as it is deserved, that is, he shall not repent in eternity. But note here that fire, which is called inextinguishable water in Greek, thus the fire of lust can hardly be extinguished, Wis. 16[:7]: “In water, the fire had more force.”

Again, water is called penitence or grace because the settling and sustenance of the earth, the wise say that the earth would be reduced into dust, unless there would be water which goes through its courses of the earth and consolidates it. Therefore, Prov. 30[:16]: “The earth which is not satisfied with water,” thus without penitence the sinner does not halt. Psal. [142:6]: “My soul is as earth without water unto you.” Again, in Psal. [135:6]: “Who established the earth above the waters.”

¶ Again, water is called penitence because it is without bending to God, just as water tends to unity, thus penitence to those lower down, Psal. [103:10]: “You send forth springs in the vales: between the midst of the hills.”

¶ Again, because of the conversable quality, for deceptive water is convertible into sweet with the filtration of the earth. Just as is evident in fountains, however through the boiling down and attraction of the sun, as is evident concerning rain.

¶ Thus, penitence has been an aid to suffering because it is bitter without sweetness, because it could not reach the kingdom of the heavens, but it was filtered by Christ’s passion. This water through the strait channels of the body of Christ broke out through his hands, feet, and sides.

Again, it was attracted through the eyes when one has been furious, when he has wept through the heat of love decocted downwards it flowed through the face, as if rain. And thus converted into sweetness, and as if one might in a way drink of that. Wherefore one thirsts for, not hungers for, eternal penance. This was figured in Exod. 15[:25], where the wood having been cast into the bitter waters in Mara they became sweet, because your penitential sufferings are sweetened in a way through the passion of Christ on the wood, Eccli. 38[:5]: “Was not bitter water made sweet with wood?” Again, water is called penitence because of the publication of Scripture.

¶ For when we have sinned we have made a written compact with the devil, Job 13[:26]: “For you write bitter things against me.” And Isaiah 28[:15]: “We have entered into a league with death.” But if the water of penitence pours over it blots out what has been written, Isaiah 28[:17-18]: “Waters shall overflow its protection and shall be abolished.”

Again, because of renewal the old hind draws up the serpent through the nostrils, and then heated by the violence of the poison and made to thirst, she drinks a great deal of water for which “as the hart pants after the fountains of water,” [Ps. 41:2], and then throws off her old hair and is renewed. Thus, old water ascending descends in water and is renewed;[[3]](#endnote-3) equally with penitence, John 5[:7-9]: “When the water is troubled,” and whoever descended first “into the pond … the man was made whole.”

1. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 8.10,596a16-23 (Barnes, 1:932): Sheep are much improved in condition by drinking, and accordingly they give the flocks salt every five days in summer, to the extent of one medimnus to the hundred sheep, and this is found to render a flock healthier and fatter. In fact they mix salt with the greater part of their food; a large amount of salt is mixed into their bran (for the reason that they drink more when thirsty), and in autumn they get cucumbers with a sprinkling of salt on them; this admixture of salt in their food tends also to increase the quantity of milk in the ewes. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Pseudo-Chrysostum, *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* Homilia 3 ex cap. 3:8 (PG 56:651\*): Natura enim viperarum talis est, cum momorderit hominem, statim currit ad aquam; si autem aquam non invenerit, moritur.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* Matt. 3, Lectio 4, Chrysostomus Super Mattheum, trans. John Henry Parker and J. Rivington (London, 1842). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. *The Middle English* Physiologus, lines 188-209, edited by Hanneke Wirtjes, Early English Text Society 299 (Oxford: University Press, 1991), p. 9.

Cf. T. H. White, *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts* (NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954-1960), p. 37.

Cf. *The Bestiary*, If the stag is ill or old, it draws the snake out of hiding and swallows it. The stag then finds water and drinks large amounts of it to overcome the poison, and is renewed. <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast162.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)