364 Earth (*Terra*)

Sometimes earth is said to be the Blessed Virgin, just as in Psal. [84:2]: “Lord, you have blessed your land.” And Eccli. 38[:4]: “The Highest hath created medicines out of the earth, and a wise man will not abhor them.” And this on account of his humility, because Prov. 25[:3] “The heaven above, and the earth lies beneath.”

Second, on account of its firmness because with chapels and other tottering things in faith at the time of suffering, the earth itself stands firm in the faith, Eccle. 1[:4]: “One generation passes away,” as the apostles, “and another generation comes,” as the thief on the cross, “but the earth stands forever,” that is, the Blessed Virgin.

Again, on account of fertility, Psal. [66:7]: “The earth has yielded her fruit.” And Isai. 45[:8]: “Let the earth be opened, and bud forth a savior.”

¶ Again, the earth is said to be the present Church because it is cold in the chastity of the virgins, low in the humility of the confessors, underfoot in the patience of the martyrs, the fruitfulness in the teaching of the apostles, the stability in the truth of the prophets, the sphere in the abundance of the patriarchs.

Again, it is said to be our flesh, Gen. 3[:19]: “Dust you are, and into dust you shall return.” Job 9[:24]: “The earth is given into the hand of the wicked.” When someone becomes a traitor to his lord his land is given into plunder, thus our flesh consented to the devil against Christ is exposed to miseries in which we ought to consider three things.

First, its villainy so that we may be humbled. For the earth is the dregs of all elements from which man was made, Eccle. [3:20]: “All things were made of earth.” Therefore Eccli. 10[:9]: “Why is earth and ashes proud?”

Second, its struggle so that we may care for it solicitously. For the devil says that of Job 1[:7]: “I have gone around about the earth and walked through it.” Therefore, according to that, 1 Pet. 5[:8]: “Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour,” etc. For when the earth is not protected from robbers it is laid waste, Eccle. 10[:16]: “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child.” A child does not care for justice.

¶ Third, its condition so that we cultivate it although it does not fructify. So, neither our flesh nor works of penitence have an effect, Prov. 28[:19]: “He that tills his ground, shall be filled with bread.” The flesh is like the evil justice who wants to do nothing good except to be beaten. And again, if it is attacked too much evil herbs come forth, Isai. 7[:24]: “Briars and thorns shall be in all the land.” Jos. 15[:19]: “You have given me a southern and dry land, give me also a land that is watered.” When in man there is earth, body, soul, and spirit, according to that of the Apostle to [1] Thess. 5:23]: “May the God of peace sanctify you in all things; that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless in the coming of our Lord.” They have a dry earth of which the body is desiccated from delight by abstinence, Gen. 1[:9]: “Let the waters be gathered together,” that is, the delights, “into one place,” that is, in marriage, “and let the dry land appear,” that is, continence in virgins and the chaste. They also have a watering further down, of which the soul under tribulation is in tears, John 16[:20]: “You shall lament and weep.” They however have a watering further up, of which the spirit for desire of the fatherland poured out tears, Psal. [41:4]: “My tears have been my bread.” Such earth being so dry and thus watered, it is apt for producing flowers. For in a body so mortified by abstinence there grows the son of chastity, which is precious for the fecundity of marriage, Isai. 56[:4-5]: “I will give to my eunuchs a name better than sons and daughters: an everlasting name.” And Wis. 4[:1]: “O how beautiful is the chaste generation.” In the soul also watered by bitterness grows the rose of patience. Wherefore Augustine,[[1]](#endnote-1) every evil person either lives to be corrected, or by that one the good person may be exercised. In the spirit also watering by devotion is born the violet of heavenly contemplation, Isai. 26[:9]: “My spirit within me in the morning early I will watch for you.”

Again, the earth is distinguished because a certain supreme one and paradise, and a certain underworld as hell, a certain middle as this world here. First earth is desirable on account of many things.

First, because it is wide and spacious. For it was given to the fathers it was not lessened, not as the present land. Rather there was joy, one living would be the joy of another, just as heat and splendor of a fire is not lessened by the application of combustibles, Exod. 3[:8]: “I will bring them out of the land of Egypt into a good and spacious land.”

Second, because to always be fertile and copious does not happen in a stable land, Deut. 8[:7]: “the Lord will bring you into a good land,” etc., up to “your bread.” Psal. [26:13]: “I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living.”

¶ Fourth, because there is a pleasing society, Isai. 65[:9]: “My elect shall inherit” the earth. Gen. 22[:3]: “Abraham rising,” that is, from the place to which you have inclined through love, etc.

Just as it is treated above in chapter [350] To Stand Up (*Surgere*).

This land is acquired by various ways. First, by legitimate purchase which happens by the bequeathing of alms, Prov. last chapter [31:16]: “She has considered a field and bought it.” Psal. [36:26]: “He shows mercy and lends all day long.”

Second, on account of voluntary exchange, by giving an escheat for eternity, Gen. 12[:1]: “Go forth out of your country, and from your kindred,” etc.

Third, by bellicose acquisition which happened by sustaining opposition on account of God, Psal. [36:11]: “The meek shall inherit the land.”

¶ Fourth, by hereditary succession which happens according to the model of Christ by living innocently, Matt. 5[:4]: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.”

Again, the land is said to be ours by nature, Jer. 22[:29-30]: “O earth, earth, earth … Write.” Here earth is said three times, because weighty things are hoped for in the world, so obscured by our nature, certainly by the ignorance of the truth, Amos 8[:9]: “I will make the earth dark in the day of light.”

Again, defiled on account of the concupiscence of desire, Gen. 2[:7]: “God formed man of the slime of the earth.”

Again, weighty on account of the difficulty for the good, Eccle. 1[:4]: “The earth stands forever.”

¶ Again, the earth is small in quantity, Jer. 4[:23]: “I beheld the earth, and lo it was void, and nothing.”

Again, it is arid in quality, Gen. 1[:10]: “God called the dry land, Earth.” It is solid in firmness, Eccle. 1[:4]: “The earth stands forever.” Weak in dignity, Prov. 25[:3]: “The heaven above, and the earth beneath.”

In the first, it is designated as brief in present joy in respect to heaven, just as an eye existing in heaven sees nothing but only a point. So, the mind elevated through contemplation thinks of earthly things as small, Acts 9[:8]: “Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing.”

Second, that the earth is arid is understood the lack of courage of the timid, by which the evil are constrained lest they be moved to penitence, Matt. 24[:7] there will be on earth the pressure of the people by men drying up for fear.

Third, because the earth becomes solid by firmness is understood the hope of seeing God and the solidness of remaining with him.

Fourth, that it is low in dignity suggests moderate sorrow rising in us by reason of the another’s exaltation, Job 14[:19]: “The ground by little and little is washed away.”

¶ Again, note that some are under the earth as the damned, about whom Num. 16[:31-33]: “Immediately the earth broke asunder under their feet, and devoured them, and they went down alive into hell.” There are some on the earth as the avaricious who make their bed on the earth.

Third, they lie on the earth outside, children and the old, such is the habitation of the cursed, Apo. 3[:13]: “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth.” There are some upon the earth as holy men who are not under the earth with the damned, nor on the earth with the greedy, but above the earth with the elect, Col. 3[:1]: “If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above … not the things that are upon the earth.” For how much more one has that is earthly so much more is it bitter and tastes less. A ship that is near to land if it is agitated by the winds it is in greater peril than if it were far out on the sea. So, he who approaches the world too much is often endangered. Therefore, Christ said, Luke 5[:4]: “Launch out into the deep,” namely, the ship. The quail because they were lifted from the earth, that is, “two cubits high above the ground,” they were easily captured by the children of Israel in the desert, Num. 11[:31]. So, Ambrose, in his *Hexameron*,[[2]](#endnote-2) says that birds flying from the earth evade the snares and the nets, but not so those that fall upon the earth because there they are always in confusion, so those who rise above earthly things escape.

¶ The example in poetry, the strongest Hercules could not overcome Antaeus if he could touch the earth, because as a son of the earth he took in strength, just as Augustine touches upon, book 18, *De civitate*, c. 13,[[3]](#endnote-3) so they who fight with the flesh, if they permit it to stick too much to earthly matters it will be fortified against him. He wants not to elevate himself above the earth unless first he has made three jumps over the earth, namely childhood, youth, and old age. They wish to consume in vain the things of the world before they tend upward, but in the meantime, they are captured. Pliny the Younger[[4]](#endnote-4) writes that the heron flying to catch quail first flies to that one which flies closer to the earth. Thus, the devil attacks the earthly men.

Again, the Philosopher, book 8, *De animalibus* c. 4,[[5]](#endnote-5) says that hawks strike doves which are near the earth, so the devil attacks earthly men.

1. Augustine, *Enarratio in psalmos* 54.4 (PL 36:630): Omnis malus aut ideo vivit ut corrigatur, aut ideo vivit ut per illum bonus exerceatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.8.48 (PL 14:261): Damula retia aspectus vivacitate declinat: avis devitat laqueos, si ad superiora se conferat, et terrena supervolet. In superioribus enim nemo tendit retia, laqueum nullus abscondit. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.13 (PL 41:571): de Antaeo, quem necavit Hercules, quod filius Terrae fuerit, propter quod cadens in terram fortior soleret assurgere: et si qua forte alia praetermisi. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 10.33.65-66 (LCL 353:332-335): coturnices ante etiam semper adveniunt quam grues, parva avis et cum ad nos venit terrestris potius quam sublimis; … primam earum terrae adpropinquantem accipiter rapit; semper hinc remeantes comitatum sollicitant,

the quails always actually arrive before the cranes, though the quail is a small bird and when it has come to us remains on the ground more than it soars aloft; The first quail approaching land is seized by a hawk; from the place where this happens they always return and try to get an escort, [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.36 620a24-33 (Barnes 1:966): One hawk, they say, will strike and grab the pigeon as it rests on the ground, but never touch it while it is in flight; another hawk attacks the pigeon when it is perched upon a tree or any elevation, but never touches it when it is on the ground or on the wing; other hawks attack their prey only when it is on the wing. They say that pigeons can distinguish the various species: so that, when a hawk is an assailant, if it be one that attacks its prey when the prey is on the wing, the pigeon will sit still; if it be one that attacks sitting prey, the pigeon will rise up and fly away. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)