95 To Descend (*Descendere*)

According to Augustine,[[1]](#endnote-1) the Son of God descended into the heart of a virgin, just like a generous bird which seeks nothing except the hearts.[[2]](#endnote-2) This descent he wanted, who said, Isai. 64[:1]: “That you would rend the heavens and would come down.” But why because the Psal. [35:6] says, “Lord, your mercy is in heaven.” And if one would say your mercy also descends like water from the clouds, equally it does not profit unless it descends to the earth, so neither does the divine water of grace. Therefore, again Psal. [71:6] says, “He shall come down like rain upon the fleece.”

¶ Again, the eagle however high it flies it descends, however, on account of the needs of its chicks. Thus, the Son of God. Wherefore in figure it is read [4] Kings 4[:1-31], that when the son of the Shunamite woman did not arise at the staff of Eliseus sent in advance, Eliseus himself descended and raised the boy. Thus, also call for an awakening of the breast. In the type of which is that rule, John 4[:47]: “He prayed Jesus to come down and heal his son.” God himself first sent his son Moses with the staff of fear, that is, with the law but he did not raise the dead, “for the law brought nothing to perfection,” according to the Apostle, [Heb. 7:19]. Therefore, the Son of God descended in his own person, assuming human nature, and thus he fashioned himself to a boy “being made in the likeness of men,” Philip. 2[:7]. The bride congratulating him on his descent here says, Can. [6:1]: “My beloved is gone down into his garden.” This is figured in Jonas 3[:6], where the king descended from his throne clothed in sack cloth, sat in ashes, and thus was made whole in Nineveh, because the king of kings descended from his throne of heaven and was clothed in the sack cloth of our mortality. For Apo. 6[:12], it is said, “The sun became black as sackcloth of hair.” In this sack cloth is found in the desert the money of our redemption and the wheat of our restitution, Gen. 42[:2-37]. And he sat in the ashes of our humility. Wherefore Augustine says, in the *Sententiam Prosperi,[[3]](#endnote-3)* no one raises another to that in which he is, unless he descends a little to that in which the other is.

¶ The example if that which is in the lower part of the wheel[[4]](#endnote-4) does not ascend, neither that which is in the upper part of the world, which is as if one wheel and man is in the lowest part to this which man ascends to beatitude it was necessary for him to descend. Here also note that although the water of the sea makes the earth sterile upon which it runs on account of its bitterness, however, the clouds of the sea elevated and purified through the heat of the sun descending over the earth makes it fertile. Wherefore, as commonly the earth near the sea is fertile. Thus, the bitterness of the sin of our first parents ran over the whole earthly, humankind and made all sterile. But the clouds elevated by virtue of God and purified by the bitterness descending over the whole earth made it fertile, 3 Kings 18[:44]: “Behold, a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man’s foot,” and immediately it was followed by rain. Wherefore, in the Psal. [71:6]: “He shall come down like rain upon the fleece.” Wherefore also the Jews said, “Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him,” Matt. 27[:42]. But he would not because on account of this he descended from heaven so that he might die there, but he descended from the cross to hell, so thence he might pluck out his elect.

1. Augustine, *Confessiones* 2.3.7 (PL 32:678): Et cujus erant, nisi tua, verba illa per matrem meam, fidelem tuam, quae cantasti in aures meas? Nec inde quidquam descendit in cor, ut facerem illud. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 12 : Among all manner kinds of divers fowls, the eagle is the more liberal and free of heart. For the prey that she taketh, but it be for great hunger, she eateth not alone, but putteth it forth in common to fowls that follow her. But first she taketh her own portion and part. And therefore oft other fowls follow the eagle for hope and trust to have some part of her prey. But when the prey that is taken is not sufficient to herself, then as a king that taketh heed to a community, she taketh the bird that is next to her, and giveth it among the others, and serveth them therewith.

   <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast232.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *Epistola* 1.11.4 (PL 33:77): Nemo enim quemquam erigit ad id in quo ipse est, nisi aliquantum ad id, in quo est ille, descendat. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bonaventure, *Diaetae salutis* 5.8 (8:304a): Siquidem vita nostra tota est volubilis sicut rota quandoque enim hominem elevat honore quem paulo post humiliando occultat juxta illud Ascendunt usque ad coelos etc interdum e converso hominem humilitate deprimit quem postea ad honores attollit quia dicitur Suscitans a terra inopem et de stercore etc Quandoque hominem a læva mutat in dexteram scilicet ab adversis in prospera interdum a dexteris in lævam id est a prosperis in adversa juxta illud quod Abraham dixit ad Loth *Si ad sinistram ieris ego* [↑](#endnote-ref-4)