28 Tree (*Arbor*)

Sometimes a tree[[1]](#endnote-1) is sterile and reviled, Matt. 21[:19], Jesus saw “a certain fig tree,” and reviled it. Sometimes a tree is partly sterile and partly fertile. And therefore, it is added as one might say, Matt. 3[:10]: “Now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.” This is to be understood concerning man, because Matt. 7[:19]: “Every tree that brings not forth good fruit, shall be cut down.” Where note the nobility of nature because a tree for the sterility of its fault, which does not bring forth fruit, for the severity of justice, because it shall be cut down, Luke 13[:7]: “Cut it down therefore, why cumbers it the ground?”

¶ Again, sometimes a tree is simply sterile, but blessed. This is said concerning the cross, Gen. 18[:3]: “Wash your feet, and rest under the tree,” etc. And Luke 19[:4], Zacchaeus “running before, he climbed up into a sycamore tree.” However, a man[[2]](#endnote-2) is compared to a tree, and because he has a mouth, as if a root, through which he takes his nourishment. According to Augustine,[[3]](#endnote-3) a man is said to be a tree upside down, for he has blood as if humor, a body as if a trunk, arms as if branches, a tongue as if a leaf, posture as if the outsides, operations as if the fruits. Mark 8[:24]: “I see men as it were trees, walking.” This tree if it does not bring forth fruit, it produces husks of carnal desires which are the food of pigs and the unclean, but if the branch of virtue of such a tree is grafted, it draws the tree to his mercy, and makes the tree to bear fruit to the joy of God and men, Luc. 15[:10]: “There shall be joy before the angels upon one sinner doing penance.”

¶ Wherefore, and here it is to be noted that of trees some bring forth fruit, some do not. But of the fruit bearing some bring forth evil, as the trees of Sodom. Some bring forth good fruit, but interrupted, because for some part of the year they are empty; others bring forth good fruit and continuously. Thus, also some men do nothing as the idle, Matt. 20[:6]: “Why stand you here all day idle?” Some bring forth fruit but evil, Matt. 7[:19]: “Every tree that brings not forth good fruit, shall be cut down.” Others bring forth fruit but interrupted as those falling into the same sin, “they believe for a while, and in time of temptation, they fall away,” Luke [8:13]. Other trees bring forth good fruit and continuously.

But, alas, because some “trees of the autumn, unfruitful, twice dead,” concerning which it is said in the canonical epistle of Jude [1:12]. Some trees are lofty in stature but without fruit in a pasture, about which Dan. 4[:7]: “I saw and behold a tree amid the earth, and the height thereof was exceeding great.” The lofty belittle God, but “amid the earth,” he who goes around about from every part of the earth, that is, the earthly, an affection “the height thereof was exceeding great,” because of pride, about which in Psal. [73:23]: “The pride of them ascends continually.” His height touches heaven, [Dan. 4:8]. As an appetite of honors because it is thus, a cleric wants to be a priest. If he is a priest, he wants to be a rector. If he is a rector, he wants to be a beneficiary. And thus, ascending to a bishopric, his sight is up to the ends of the earth. Because on all sides he has explorers who declare themselves as the gainful leaves, the most beautiful sheep, because he has ornate words and his fruit is too much, namely, of temporal things. Because spiritual fruit cannot be too much; for thus, “I saw in the vision of my head,” [Dan. 4:10]. He says this because of some who do not see with their own vision, but with a vision of their advisors. Certainly, it was shown when the vision which ought to be in the head is in the foot or in the hand. Such is the rich man, whose vision is in the hand, but see what Christ says, [Matt. 18:8]: “And if your hand, or your foot scandalize you, cast it from you,” etc. And again [Matt. 6:3]: “Let not your left hand know what your right hand does.” This is if one persuades rude things to be drunk or what are against God. Do not believe that he loves you who does not love God, or one is faithful to you who is unfaithful to God.

¶ The example of Constantine the great who warned that those who would be unfaithful to God he would find out by himself, concerning which see in the histories,[[4]](#endnote-4) so also you. And note here that he did not say, Let not the right hand know what the left hand does, etc., because the good advisor can well know what things concern you. But what follows in the aforesaid authority when such a one is in full prosperity God commanded to cut down the tree. Bernard, explaining that of Eccle. [11:3]:[[5]](#endnote-5) “If the tree falls to the south, or to the north, there shall it be.” Where, he said, God finds you, there he will judge you. Therefore let him see the tree where the decline happens before it falls. Because after it has fallen, it will not come back together so that it may rise again nor that it may turn itself green. If therefore you wish to know from what part of the tree would fall, look to the branches because where there is a greater part of branches there will be the decline.

¶ Our branches, are our desires, which extend to the south if they are spiritual; but to the north if they are carnal. This is Bernard. And certainly, when such a one is cut down, the wretched remain, who serve as soldiers under the others. Note therefore that just as for things commend the tree: the greenness of the leaves, the thickness of the branches, the beauty of the flowers, and the richness of the fruit, so three things commend man: the sanctity of life, the truth of teaching, and the brightness of the reputation.

1. Guillelmus Peraldus, *De eruditione principum* lib. 5 cap. 64: Non est virgo arbor sterilis et maledicta. <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/xre5.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Albert the Great, *Enarrationes In Evang. Lucae* 6:44 *Opera omnia* ed. Steph. Caes. Aug. Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicum Vives, 1894), (22:450b): Comparatur autem homo arbori. Quia graece etiam homo arbor circumversa vocatur. Anthropos enim componitur ab an, quod est circum: et tropos, quod est conversio. Anthropos autem homo vocatur sermone graeco: quia arbor habet raices inferius, nutrimentum sugentes ori similes: et hoc os habet homo superius unde sugit nutrimentum, et hoc habet solus. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, cf. Petrus de Roya Claravallis, *Sermo* 34 (PL 194.1801): Unde a physicis arbor eversa homo dicitur, qui quasi radicem caput habet sursum, et frondes, id est membra, ramosque, tanquam membrorum articulos deorsum mittit. Caput autem unum est, unde membrorum multiplicitas sentit, ac motum habet. Summi quoque verticis rotunditas una est, unde combinantur oculi, aures, nares, labia, mammae, brachia, latera, nates, coxae, genua, tibiae, pedes. Ubi autem terram tangit, id est pede ac manu, quinus efficitur, multiplex in imo, unus in summo: quinus terram versus, ubi terrenus; unus coelum versus, ubi coelestis. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10.8 trans. Roy J.Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), (2:282): But, for Constantine, God was Friend, Protector, and Guardian, who brough to light for him the plots devised in secret and darkness and reproved them. Of such power is the great wapon of godliness to ward off the attack of the enemy, and to strengthen the protection of its own safety. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bernard, *Sermo* 85 (PL 183.702): Exciditur autem arbor in morte: et quocunque ceciderit, ibi erit; quia ibi te judicabit Deus ubi invenerit. Ibi, inquam, erit immutabiliter et irretractabiliter. Videat quo casura sit antequam cadat; quia postquam ceciderit, non adjiciet ut resurgat, sed nec ut se vertat. Quo vero casura sit arbor, si scire volueris, ramos ejus attende. Unde major est copia ramorum et ponderosior, inde casuram ne dubites, si tamen fuerit tunc excisa. Rami nostri, desideria nostra sunt: quibus ad austrum extendimur, si spiritualia fuerint; si carnalia, ad aquilonem. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)