30 Ascending (*Ascendente*)

Nothing ascends naturally unless of its nature it is light or connected to something light. But the soul of its spiritual nature is light. Therefore, it can sometimes take with it the body, but now through sin the soul has been made heavier than the body, because the body by its heaviness does not descend unless only as far as the earth. In truth the sinful soul goes down as far as hell.

Therefore, Christ put down sin, assumed our nature, and made it to ascend with him. Wherefore, Mich. 2[:13]: “He shall go up that shall open the way before them.” Because of this he descended so that he may prepare human nature to tend toward heaven, where there was, as if, a certain emptiness through the ruin of the angels, which ought to be filled through human nature. Wherefore, Eph. 4[:10]: “He that descended is the same also that ascended, that he might fill all things.” The eagle[[1]](#endnote-1) by instinct, as much as possible, lifted from the deep, sensing the need of her chicks, ascends. Christ does that for his chicks greatly troubled. Wherefore also it seems to serve the custom of the stork[[2]](#endnote-2) which, when her chicks fly away, descends and with earth refills her nest, lest it remain empty. Thus Christ, after the angels flew away from the heavenly nest, descended to the earth which he assumed in unity of person, and again ascended into heaven with the terrestrial nature and began to fill the angelic ruin.

¶ We have the figure of this ascension in Gen. 13[:1], where it is read that “Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had.” Abraham the patriarch is Christ, who ascended into the Egypt of this world, which is full of the darkness of sins, because Egypt is interpreted as darkness. He ascended with his wife, that is, with human nature coupled to him in unity of person with whom they ascend, all that they had, because after him all the faithful could ascend, who have it only from him through grace.

¶ Again, Joseph, who was raised up from a prison to the realm of Egypt, ascended over the chariot of the king, Gen. 41[:43]. In which it is figured that Christ was raised from the prison of this world, ascended over the second chariot, that is, over the congregation of men and angels. Concerning which chariot it is said in Ps. [67:18-19]: “The chariot of God is attended by ten thousand; thousands of them that rejoice: The Lord is among them in Sinai, in the holy place,” and it follows, “You have ascended on high.” This chariot is figured in the fiery chariot in which Elias ascended to paradise, 4 Kings 2[:11]. For these cherubim were in custody of the way to paradise over which Christ himself crossed, Psal. [17:11]: “And he ascended upon the cherubim, and he flew.” When birds fly, it is a sign of serenity and tranquility.

¶ Again, when the sun ascends in its sphere the summer approaches, thus for the ascension of Christ the pleasantness of grace approaches for us.

¶ Again note that water proceeding from a fountain’s origin never ascends by its own motion beyond that origin; and therefore, no fountain’s origin was in heaven unless Christ himself. Therefore, “no man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven,” John 3[:13]. According to our soul, the origin of our fountain is from heaven.

Therefore, now with the ascension of Christ afar off, with an impediment, a bird can ascend if it has feathers and opens the cross in the spreading of wings. Thus, if the soul has the grace of the crucifix, it can ascend. The pilgrims carry with them signs from whence they come, thus through a sign that the soul carries with it, it is recognized. Whence it comes from heaven or from earth, virtues are celestial signs, vices terrestrial, Apoc. 21[:2]: “I saw the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” in order that man may have a way of ascending into heaven, Christ made himself the way to the high place; the ascending cannot happen unless the way touches the high place to which it is raised, and it begins from the place by which it is descended. Such a one was Christ alone who “standing on the earth reached even to heaven,” Wis. 18[:16]: “reaching from end to end mightily,” [Wis. 8:1]. Therefore, he himself said, John 14[:6]: “No man comes to the Father, but by me.”

Therefore, Christ is figured through “a ladder,” Gen. 28[:12-13], “standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven, the angels ascending and descending by it; and the Lord leaning upon the ladder.” The sides of this ladder are the two natures in Christ, or innocence and penitence, which two are figured through those two who were taken up in figure to paradise, Enoch and Elias. The steps affixed to these sides of the ladder, just as the articles of faith concerning the incarnation, passion, descent into hell, the resurrection, the ascension, the return for judgment, which “were eight steps to go up to” the temple, Ezech. 40[:31]. The Lord prepares, he was leaning upon this ladder, [Gen. 28:13], because he himself never abandoned his son. John 10[:38]: “The Father is in me, and I in the Father.” The angels in truth ascend through the contemplation of divinity and descend through the contemplation of humanity.

Augustine, *De verbis Domini*, sermon 7,[[3]](#endnote-3) treats that man will not see Christ unless he ascends, as the very small Zacchaeus ascending the sycamore tree, [Luke 19:2-4], namely, the tree of the cross which is a scandal to the Jews. In this foolish fig tree Christ can be seen, not pressing himself into the crowd in the wood of this tree. Christ with his disciples alone ascended into the mountain. Nor under the fig tree did Nathaniel see him when, however, he was seen there by Christ himself, John 1[:48]. Because the proud man cannot see God, and, however, by God himself [is seen]. Under such a fig tree were our first parents when they sinned, Gen. 3[:7]. The experimenters[[4]](#endnote-4) say that the shell of an egg, covered with dew, and well supported, placed next to a lance in the heat of the sun, quickly ascends unless a cloud intervenes. Thus, the soul positioned next to the tree of the cross, filled with grace, without the cloud of sin, ascends into heaven. The bridegroom marveling at the ascent of this kind asks the cause or who is this one who ascends “leaning upon her beloved,” [Can. 8:5].

¶ For the soul, as much as it is filled, unless it leans upon God, does not ascend. Rather if it leans more upon the ladder than upon God it will ascend. The reason of this is because the water of a fountain cannot ascend above the origin of the fountain. Thus the rich, whose origin is the world, do not ascend above the world, but concerning Christ it is otherwise, as it was said above. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, book 12,[[5]](#endnote-5) says that the heron (*ardea*), as if lofty (*ardua*), as it is said of cattle, knowing beforehand the coming of a storm, the heron ascends over the place of the clouds, and there it is at peace in the meanwhile. Thus, the soul afflicted by the tempests ought to abstain from temptation.

¶ Again, the wild ass [Jer. 2:24], which is also an ass of the forest, to seek out his companion ascends the mountain, and finds him through the odor which he bears there. Thus the soul ascending through devotion finds Christ. Moses in the desert ascended into the mountain and found God speaking to him from the bramble bush, Exod. 3[:5]. But one thing is to be noticed here that when Moses ascended, by command he removed the shoes from his feet. However, Abraham and Isaac ascended, nor then was it said to them that they should remove their shoes.

¶ To which the teachers[[6]](#endnote-6) say that Moses came out of Egypt and carried some fetters of mortality with him on his feet, but Abraham had nothing of the kind. Thus it is necessary that the soul which ought to ascend be thus burdened by earthly things. In a sign of which before Abraham ascended, it was said to him, “Go forth out of your country, and from your kindred,” etc. and if follows, “come into the land which I shall show you, [Gen. 12:1], which he also did. Jerome puts a similar reason in *Epistola,* 12,[[7]](#endnote-7) saying that “Moses was instructed by secular persons in secular disciplines, and with an Egyptian killed, his conscience was of some part unclean. Therefore it was said to him, “Take off your shoes,” etc. Therefore, Christ ascended first so that he might take weakened men to heaven. The one loved moves by the affection of the lover to the place where he is loved. Wherefore it is said proverbially,[[8]](#endnote-8) Where love is there is the eye, but the most loveable one is God, 2 Kings 1[:26]: “Amiable above the love of women.” But he also ascended into heaven, Eph. 4[:10]: “He that descended is the same also that ascended.” Therefore, also through the desire of the mind we must also ascend there, Deut. 17[:8]: “Arise, and go up to the place, which the Lord shall choose.”

¶ Again, a magnet is placed over iron in order to attract it. The magnet is Christ, Ezech. 3[:9]: “I have made your face like an adamant and like flint.” This is iron on account of its hardness, Jer. 6[:28]: “All of these are iron,” so that therefore the heart of man carries iron to heaven, Amos 9[:7]: “Did not I bring up Israel, out of the land of Egypt?” That is, the elect from earthly desires, Jer. 31[:6]: “Arise, and let us go up to Sion to the Lord our God.”

Second, Christ ascended so that he may show men the right road to heaven. Before the ascension of Christ to heaven they were not thinking of anything but the world, Gen. 28[:17]: “This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven.”

¶ Third, he ascended so that he might move our case before the Father. This is according to a triple judgment, namely, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal. He had lost his celestial inheritance. As far as the first, the angels and our bodies were witnesses against the sin of man. Because on account of the sin of man they lost their part of nobility, that is, light. As far as the second judgment, all material, vegetable, and sensible things, which receive less from God than man. There was more grace to God than man, because man alone was contrary to him.

¶ As far as the third judgment, there is a triple cure. The demons are witnesses against men. Because these men sin just like demons by sinning in many kinds, and this through diverse organs of the senses, which the demons lack, who only are delinquent in the single sin. Wherefore there has not been one wise enough, who could respond for man, Job 9[:3]: “If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one for a thousand.” Therefore Christ “went up to Jerusalem,” as it is said, John 2[:13]. So that he might defend our case as the good counselor, saying, And if man is wanting, I however have made satisfaction. Behold Father, my side. Behold my wounds. I ask that you restore his inheritance to him, Exod. 32[:30]: “I will go up to the Lord,” but for announcing your wickedness.

¶ Christ ascended so that he might more quickly find the thing lost. If he were placed on high, it would be more quickly found. But Christ, who was lost by man through sin, ascended on high, so that if man wished to seek him through penitence, he may quickly find him, Baruch 3[:29]: “Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds,” that is, he has found divine clemency on earth. Therefore, we are busy to ascend after Christ to heaven, on the one hand on account of the security of the place, on the other hand on account of the nobility of the place.

¶ Concerning the first, birds in so far as they are higher, so also the more secure from capture. And in high castles there is greater security against enemies, thus he who wants to be more secure in mind ascends into heaven, into the mountain, Isaiah 2[:3]: “Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” Exod. 24[:12]: “Come up to me into the mount, and be there.”

¶ Concerning the second, note whoever is in a wearisome prison, willingly ascends to a beautiful dwelling. But we are here in the pit of sin, Jer. 48[:44]: “Fear, and the pit, and the snare come upon you,” who are an “inhabitant” of the earth, but the most noble place is heaven. Therefore we ought to strive toward there, Mich. 4[:2]: “Come, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob.” In the figure of which the children of Israel ascend from Egypt to the promised land and so forth. Each year they ascended to the temple in Jerusalem for adoring, Jer. 31[:6]: “Arise, and let us go up to Sion to the Lord our God.”

¶ From what has gone before, therefore, it is to be gathered that Christ ascended in three ways: strongly, openly, joyfully. Strongly like a lion, Jer. 4[:7]: “The lion is come up out of his den.” See in the chapter [197] Lion (*Leo*). Second, he ascended openly as the eagle, because Act. 1[:9]: “While they looked on, he was raised up.” Jer. 49[:22]: “Behold he shall come up as an eagle, and fly, and he shall spread his wings.” Third, he ascended joyfully as a king with a victory, Psal. [46:6]: “God is ascended with jubilee.” Therefore we must ascend after Christ from the pit of sin by repenting. In the example of David, 2 Kings 15[:30]: “David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered, and all the people went up.”

 ¶ This David is Christ, with the reason of dignity because he is the king, with the reason of interpretation because by his strong hand, Job 9[:4]: “Mighty in strength.” Here he ascended mount Calvary weeping, Heb. 5[:7]: “With a strong cry and tears,” the head uncovered, because with a crown of thorns, with bare feet, because he was affixed to the cross, and the people thus ascended. As if saying, whoever did not wish to follow Christ, as they ought to proceed through the way of penitence by sorrowing for sins, 1 Kings 14[:13]: “And Jonathan went up creeping on his hands and feet, and his armor bearer after him.” Jonathan is Christ, his armor bearer is anyone of the faithful. Wherefore just as boys willingly ascend trees on account of fruit, when Christ is the best fruit, Can. 2[:3]: “His fruit was sweet to my palate. Freely we ought to ascend the tree of penitence so that Christ might take hold of us, Can. 7[:8]: “I will go up into the palm tree, and will take hold of the fruit thereof.” But what is to be lamented, some ascend against God to the heights of pride. In the example of Lucifer, Isaiah 14[:14]: “I will ascend above the height of the clouds.” And with Simon Magus, about whom Apo. 13[:1]: “A beast coming up out of the sea,” of which both have fallen triply. Thus, they ascend proud of their ascending forever, but alas with Lucifer and Simon they descend. The example in the sea where the water ascends, but quickly it descends, similarly also those who have the nature of the sea, namely, the bitterness of sin, Psal. [106:26]: “They mount up to the heavens, and they go down to the depths.” Amos 8[:8]: “Rise up altogether as a river, and be cast out.” The reason is because if it is a heavy upward movement, not having, restraining, not retaining, it quickly descends, but the heavy upward movement is pride, which thus is said an upwards movement on account of the exaltation of the mind, but heavy on account of the weight of sin. But such a one has the necessity to descend, Job [20:6-7]: “If his pride mounts up even to heaven, and his head touch the clouds, in the end he shall be destroyed like a dunghill.”

¶ The example of smoke ascending and quickly vanishing, smoke from a furnace blearing the eyes is pride which ascends against God, Exod. 19[:18]: “The smoke arose from it as out of a furnace.” Therefore, it is said in Exod. 19[:12]: “Take heed you go not up into the mount.”

¶ Note here that in tournaments those who have weak horses quickly fall, but pride is a weak horse because they do not have one foot, Psal. [35:12]: “Let not the foot of pride come to me.”

¶ Secondly, some ascend against God to the chamber of avarice. The example of the rich who are damned, Amos 9[:5]: “It shall rise up as a river, and quickly shall run down as the river of Egypt. Some to the exultation of worldly pomp like the hypocrite, Job 20[:6]: “If his pride mounts up even to heaven,” etc.

Here, note that four things make to ascend: nature, violence, art, and agility. For fire ascends naturally, a stone violently, water artificially, a light man agilely. Thus, four things make to ascend spiritually.

The first is charity as if naturally, Can. 8[:5]: “Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights.” Therefore neither the desert of poverty nor the delights of virtues suffice to this ascent unless the buttress of love is present. Nor it is a marvel if charity makes something ascend, since it is thus the fire of nature, Luke 12[:49]: “I am come to cast fire on the earth,” that is, charity. If therefore motion follows the nature of the matter, and fire naturally ascends, therefore also charity, Judges 13[:20]: “When the flame went up towards heaven.”

¶ Since therefore it is the unitive virtue, just as fire and our friend, Christ, is the upward movement, living charity makes us to ascend to this, Luke 14[:10]: “Go up higher.” And Can. 3[:10]: “The going up of purple.” Salomon made an accord through the medium of charity.

Second, what makes one to ascend, as if violently, is penitence, 1 Kings 14[:13]: “Jonathan went up creeping on his hands and feet.” As one might expect, a great violence is accustomed to abandon a loved one cursed, 4 Kings 2[:1]: “Elias” ascended “into heaven by a whirlwind.” And just as roughness of the bark helps ascending into a tree, and smoothness hinders, thus as for ascending into heaven the roughness of penitence helps and delights hinder.

Third, what makes one to ascend, as if artificially, is humility, 3 Kings 18[:44]: “Behold, a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man's foot,” that is, from the world which in the way of the sea is rising high through pride, bluish through cleanliness, troubled through wrath, dirty through sloth, fierce through avarice, fluid through lust, stinking through gluttony. However humility makes one rise by a double nature. First, by reason of its modification, for from it the way is narrow to heaven. It is necessary that the one inside purify himself, Prov. 21[:22]: “The wise man hath scaled the city of the strong,” that is, the humble man. Because “where humility is, there also is wisdom,” Prov. 11[:2]. For just as a wheel never ascends at the rear unless it descends at the front, so neither does man, John 3[:13]: Who is it who “has ascended, but he that descended.”

¶ Third, against the position of pride the humble man opposes himself to stand from another part, knowing that pride which is now on high descends and thus in the end humility ascends. For such a one now is standing up, so that when one part descends, the other part rises; the example of the rich man and Lazarus [Luke 16:19-20]; the example of the wolf and the bucket.[[9]](#endnote-9) Wherefore it is treated also in Donatus, *De prepositione,[[10]](#endnote-10)* How many inflections? One. Which? Case only.

¶ Fourth, that which makes one ascend as if through agility is poverty, 4 Kings 3[:8]: “Which way shall we go up? But he answered, By the desert of Edom,” which is interpreted earthly. However, poverty makes on ascend for a double reason: first because it puts down the weight of temporalities, Can. 3[:6]: “Who is she that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke,” which is thin.

¶ And note that in the desert is want, in the pillar is slenderness, in the smoke is lightness. The second reason is because he puts the whole earth beneath his feet, the reason is, however much higher the earth is, just so much closer to heaven it is, 4 Kings 2[:23]: “Go up, you bald head,” just as through the hair of temporal things, thus through baldness is designated poverty.

¶ Therefore also we ascend with Christ by these four ways, namely, into the height of charity, Psal. [17:9]: “He ascended upon the cherubim, and he flew.” On the cross of penalties, Gen. 49[:9]: “To the prey, my son, you have gone up.” In the boat of humility, Luke 8[:22]: “Jesus went into a little ship with his disciples.”

¶ Again, upon the light cloud of poverty, Isaiah 19[:1]: “Behold the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud,” namely, to the father of joyfulness. Psal. [46:6]: “God is ascended with jubilee.”

1. Guillaume le Clerc [13th century CE] (Bestiaire): The eagle has such keen vision, that if it is high up among the clouds, soaring through the air, it sees the fish swimming beneath it, in river or sea; then down it shoots upon the fish and seizes and drags it to the shore. Again, if unknown to the eagle its eggs should be changed and others put into its nest, when the young are grown, before they fly away, it carries them up into the air when the sun is shining its brightest. Those which can look at the rays of the sun, without blinking, it loves and holds dear; those which cannot stand to look at the light, it abandons, as base-born, nor troubles itself henceforth concerning them.

http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast232.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 12.8 (1505 p. 229b): Sed in suo recessu contra hyemem terra replet nidum suum et cum luto virgulas nidi et spinas compaginat ne aliquis ventus impetuosus ipsum in hyeme deiiciat aut dissoluat. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *Sermo* 174.3.3 (PL 38. 941-942): Zacchaei factum allegorice. Sycomorus, crux Christi. Crux in fronte. Sed dicturus es: Si Zacchaeus fuero, prae turba non potero videre Jesum. Noli esse tristis, ascende lignum, ubi pro te pependit Jesus, et videbis Jesum. Et quale genus ligni ascendit Zacchaeus? Sycomorum. In regionibus nostris aut omnino nusquam, aut raro forte alicubi nascitur: in illis autem partibus multum est hujus generis ligni et pomi. Sycomora dicuntur poma quaedam ficis similia: sed tamen distant aliquid; quod possunt nosse qui viderunt vel gustaverunt. Quantum tamen indicant interpretatione nominis, sycomora Fici fatuae latine interpretantur. Jam vide Zacchaeum meum, vide illum, obsecro te, volentem in turba videre Jesum, et non valentem. Humilis enim erat, turba superba erat: et ipsa turba ad videndum bene Dominum, sicut solet turba, se ipsam impediebat: ascendit a turba, et vidit Jesum non impediente turba. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Anton E. Schönbach, “Miscellen aus Grazer Handschriften” in *Mittheilungen: Historischer Verein für Steirmark*, 48 Heft (Graz: Im Selbstverlage, 1900), 95-224, p. 179: 167 (Eierschale) B7c: Testa ovi, purgata humore proprio, et rore celi, repleta, obdurata aliquo, ne ros exeat, posita juxta hastam in fervore solis, ascendit per hastam. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.7.21 (PL 82.461): Ardea vocata, quasi ardua, id est, propter altos volatus. Lucanus: Quodque ausa volare Ardea. Formidat enim imbres, et super nubes evolat, ut procellas nubium sentire non possit; cum autem altius volaverit, significat tempestatem. Hanc multi tantalum nominant. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* 5.25 (PL 14:582): Hoc est visum magnum, sed si videre vis, solve calceamentum pedum tuorum, solve omne vinculum iniquitatis, solve cingula saeculi, relinque calceamentum quod terrenum est. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Jerome, *Epistola* 18.15 (PL 22.371-372): Moysen vero quia saecularibus eruditus fuerat disciplinis, et interfecto Aegyptio, conscientia ejus aliqua ex parte sorduerat (Exod. 2); unde et vox ad eum de rubo facta sit, dicens: Ne accesseris huc: solve calceamenta de pedibus tuis, locus enim in quo stas, terra sancta est: [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John of Salisbury, *Epistulae* 167 (PL 199.158): nam ubi amor, ibi oculus; *Episulae* 202 (PL 199.225); *Polycraticus* 3.12 (PL 199.501): Certe vetus proverbium est qui ubi amor, ibi oculus; cf. M. C. Suthpen, “A Further Collection of Latin Proverbs,” Amor # 6 in *American Journal of Philology* 22.1 (1901), 1-28, p. 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. *The history of Reynard the fox: William Caxton’s English translation of 1481* Chap. 33, ed. Henry Morley (London: George routledge and Sons, 1889), p. 82: Tho spake Ersewynde the Wolf’s wife, “Ach, fell Reynart, no man can keep himself from thee,—thou canst so well utter thy words and thy falseness and reason set forth. But it shall be [142] evil rewarded in the end. How broughtest thou me once into the well, where the two buckets hung by one cord running through one pulley, which went one up and another down, thou sattest in that one bucket beneath in the pit in great dread. I came thither and heard thee sigh and make sorrow, and asked thee how thou camest there. Thou saidst that thou hadst there so many good fishes eaten out of the water that thy belly would burst. I said, ‘Tell me how I shall come to thee.’ Then saidst thou, ‘Aunt, spring into that bucket that hangeth there, and ye shall come anon to me.’ I did so; and I went downward, and ye came upward. Tho was I all angry. Thou saidst, ‘Thus fareth the world, that one goeth up and another goeth down.’ Tho sprang ye forth and went your way, and I abode there alone, sitting an whole day sore and hungered and a cold; and thereto had I many a stroke ere I could get thence.” [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Donatus, cf. “Aelius Donatus Septem Sapientibus scholarum Angliae Publicarum, S.P.D.,” *Notes and Queries* 3rd S. XI, Jan. 5, 1867, p. 6: De praepositione: Praepositio quid est? Pars orationis quae praeposita aliis partibus orationis, significationem earum aut complet, aut mutat, aut minuit. Praepositioni quot accidunt? Unum. Quod? Casus tantum. Quot casus? Duo. Qui? Accusativus et ablativus. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)