87 To Increase (*Crescere*)

According to the commandment of the Lord, Gen. 1[:22], man ought to increase and multiply, “Increase,” he said, “And multiply.” Because it is not said to all generally, as far as the production of children, because if it were, Christ fulfilled this according to this understanding, which he did not do, and yet, “he grew, and waxed strong … advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men,” Luke 2[:40]. And concerning John the Baptist it is read, Luke 1[:80], that “he grew, and was strengthened in spirit,” who, however, was a virgin. Therefore, by imitating Christ we increase, both as far as ourselves, and as far as our neighbors, and as far as God. For this is to grow just as we see trees grow in depth through the root, in width, through their branches, in height through their trunk. On account of this triple way of growing, God is read to have said three times to man: “Increase and multiply,” first in Gen. 1[:22], second in Gen. 8[:17], third in Gen. 9[:1]. And in Mark 8{24], it is said, “I see men as it were trees.” Therefore, man grows in himself, first by sending a deep root of humility. For it is that a building never grows very secure, unless its foundation extends down deeply.

¶ But because Christ teaches us deep humility, Matt. 11[:29]: “Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble,” etc. Therefore, the Apostle said, Eph. 2[:20-21]: “Christ … in whom all the building, being framed together, grows up,” etc.

¶ The figure for this is had in [1] Mach. 9[:66], concerning Jonathan who is interpreted as the dove, because he began “to increase in forces.” Thus, whoever is in himself a dove through true humility grows in virtues through perfect sanctity. For Gregory says[[1]](#endnote-1) whoever gathers virtues without humility, is like one who carries dust in a wind. Juda is that one, Esth. [11:10]: “A little fountain grew into a very great river and abounded into many waters.” Literally, a small fertile fountain poured fourth water, which was great, just as a humble and small person in his reputation grows to greater perfection of virtues than one great proud person, to whom that which he has is not sufficient to him, just as the water of a lake is hardly sufficient to one where a small fountain overflows copiously. This is evident in Saul, 1 Kings 15[:17], to whom it was said, “When you were a little one in your own eyes, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel?” And from the custodian of the asses he grew into the custodian of men because he was humble. When, in truth, he grew proud and did not obey God he was cast out of the reign. Wherefore, Augustine, *Super Catholicam Ioannis*, the third homily,[[2]](#endnote-2) no one grows according to the flesh, just as no one is born when he wants. However, where there is necessity in the will, there is an increase in the will, but no one out of water in the spirit is born unless willing. Therefore, if one wants, he grows; who does not want to grow, decreases. What is it to grow unless to make progress, what is it to decrease unless to diminish? Therefore, eagerly one latches on to his mother’s breasts and quickly grows.

¶ For our mother is the Church, her two breasts are the two testaments to the letter whoever nurses at the more abundant nipple grows better. Or the nipple of our mother the Church is the New Testament which teaches humility and virtues. Therefore, nursing from that breast, they grow better. This Peter intimated when he said, 1 Pet. 2[:2]: “As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile,” namely, the teachings of Christ, “that thereby you may grow unto salvation.” John the Baptist seeing the humility of Christ, said, John 3[:30]: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” In the sign of which thing Christ was born when the days began to increase and the earth began to grow green in birth, so that man may grow through himself and in him through true humility. John at that time was born when the days began to decrease, because he who in his reputation was the least merited more to be called by Christ [Luke 7:28]: “Amongst those that are born of women.” But it is [said] of many just as of the moon. For it, as far as the eyes of men, seems to grow, which however in itself never grows, so such ones who are hypocrites who do not care for the depth of virtue, but how they seem to the reputations of men. Thus, the rose bush grows and produces flowers, after the fall of which nothing remains except the thorn. Thus, the elderberry grows in fragrant flowers but after the fall of the flower nothing remains except the ill smelling tree without fruit. Thus, it is with the hypocrite flowering in exteriors, but when the flowers fail, he remains a miserable trunk. Wherefore Job 8[:11-13]: “Can the rush be green without moisture? or a sedge-bush grow without water? When it is yet in flower, and is not plucked up with the hand, it withers before all herbs. Even so are the ways of all that forget God, and the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.” About which Gregory, book 8, *Moralia*,[[3]](#endnote-3) so that by the name of a rush or a flag, he denotes the life of the hypocrite, which has an appearance of greenness, but has no fruit of usefulness for the services of man, which continuing dry in barrenness of practice, is green with only the color of sanctity alone. Wherefore, Num. 6[:5]: “He shall be holy,” that is, he will appear holy, “and shall let the hair of his head grow,” by which deficiency he will be unclean.

¶ The figure for this is concerning Sampson, Judges 16[:4-21], whose hairs when they grew, he was strong. After they had been cut and lacking his strength receded and he was captured. Second, we grow as far as our neighbors and this through the works of piety. Wherefore, Job 31[:18] said, “From my infancy mercy grew up with me. Therefore, although he had lost all his belongings, after that period he received them back doubled, namely, opinion in the present and glory in the future.

¶ The example of the grain sown in good ground, sometimes it returns grain a hundredfold. In growing the poor are the good earth because they are made fertile by divine grace and by the cultivation of God. Therefore, they who sow in them receive much fruit, 2 Cor. 9[:10]: “Multiply your seed and increase the growth of the fruits of your justice.” Wherefore, Augustine, *De verbis Domini*, on Luke, Homily 24,[[4]](#endnote-4) what you do now of good you will not see, because the farmer when he sows the cornfield does not see it, but believe the earth, and you do not believe God. Christ says, Matt. 13[:30]: “Suffer both to grow until the harvest,” namely, the tares with the wheat, “and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers,” etc., up to “into my barn.” Sometimes it happens that a good plant grows better among bad plants than by itself, because among others it is defended from the wind and from the storms, so it is concerning good men, as is evident in Exod. 1[:12], who however much more they were oppressed by the Egyptians, “the more they were multiplied, and increased,” in the sterile earth than in the fertile. So, in our emaciated flesh, which is the earth, the fruit of virtues grow better than in the heavier, Gen. 41[:52]: “God has made me to grow in the land of my poverty.”

¶ Third, man grows in height to God through works of charity, Eph. 4[:15]: “Doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him.” Whoever does the truth is well founded against the falsity of life.

¶ “Being rooted and founded in charity,” he said, “You may be able to comprehend, with all the saints,” etc., Eph. 3[:17-18]. The son cannot comprehend this that is elevated in the hand of his father except he grows well. However, he does not grow unless he has a good and healthy nature. Thus, we cannot apprehend beatitude, which is in the hand of God the Father, elevated from us unless we grow in charity. Therefore, it is said 2 Pet. 3[:18]: “Grow in grace.” Wherefore, Augustine, book 6, *De trinitate,* c. 12,[[5]](#endnote-5)bodies grow by their joining. But the spirit of a rational creature grows only by adhering to God. Where, the Philosopher in the fourth book of the *Physica* says[[6]](#endnote-6) that animate things grow and just as many drops leading the way dispose toward a cavity of a rock, but ultimately, they make it hollow. Thus, grow the souls through ultimate disposition in virtue of first things. For no one suddenly becomes the highest, but just as Gregory says, *Super Canticum* homily 3,[[7]](#endnote-7) through many good dispositions of grace one is rendered apt that he may grow as if in the end of those dispositions and become great. Thus, Isaac trembles, Gen. 26[:13]: “He went on prospering and increasing, till he became exceeding great.” Giants are said to grow greatly and to be made magicians. If in growing one touches heaven with a hand just as the poets treat of Atalanta, as Boethius witnesses, *De consolation*, who says[[8]](#endnote-8) that he supported heaven with his hand lest it fall. But charity does this which, according to Thomas, charity can grow into infinity because not only can it touch heaven, but also it can penetrate heaven itself.[[9]](#endnote-9) Wherefore, Chrysostom, Homilia 6, on *Matthaeum in imperfecta*,[[10]](#endnote-10) in the right time lilies grow, are formed, and are clothed in white, filled with fragrance, and because earth did not give to its root, nor the root to it, God increased the invisible operation. Thus, God makes man to grow invisibly. Through the mediating heat of the sun the plants grow, 1 Cor. 1[:6]: “I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase.” Eccli. 2[:3]: “Join yourself to God, and endure, that your life may be increased in the latter end.”

¶ However, he who thought himself consumed his life grows through death into a perfect life, just as a grain of corn falling into the earth grows to a better and to a greater.

¶ From the foregoing it is connected that man spiritually grows in the way of a natural bodily thing because in the depth as far as to himself just as pits and roots and this through contempt of the earths or through humility. For fourth, if the root goes down as deep as a tree, so much more it will be exalted upwards, [1] Mach. 9[:66], Jonathan “began to increase in forces.” Thus, the humble handmaiden grew into a queen, Esth. 2[:17]. Man grows in depth through purgation just as a plant purged of the thorns, rocks, and superfluous branches grows better. Judg. 13[:24]: “The child grew, and the Lord blessed him.”

Second, man grows in width as far as his neighbor. First through patience in adversities just as the good soldier hurrying to the thrust grows in glory, thus the children of Israel grew through oppression, Exod. 1[:7] and Gen. 41[:52]: “God hath made me to grow in the land of my poverty.”

Second, he grows in width through mercy, to the sick man, Job 31[:18]: “From my infancy mercy grew up with me.”

¶ Therefore, his possessions grew in the earth, Job 1[:10].

Third, he grew in width through teaching to the unknowing, thus Act. 6[:1]: “Increasing,” by the word of God the faithful grew in numbers.

Fourth he grows in width through the scent of tradition, Esth. 9[:4]: “The fame of his name increased.” Therefore, Peter says, 2 Pet. 3[:18]: “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord.”

¶ Third, man grows in length through the continuation of good desires and through the endurance of labors just as money grows through multiplication, Luke 13[:18-19]: “The kingdom of heaven is like … to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden, and it grew and became a great tree.”

Fourth, man grows in height toward the Lord, just as buildings and trees and this through eternal desires, just as a fire however much more it tends upward, so much the more it grows, Eph. 4[:15]: “Doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ.” [2] Pet. 3[:18]: “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our” God. Eccli. 2[:3]: “Join yourself to God, and endure, that your life may be increased in the latter end.” Again, three things are required for making an increase: the sun shining, rain or moisture bedewing, and the wind agitating. Thus, for the success of man are required grace enlightening, tears making fruitful, and temptation making firm. For the perfection of man consists in a triple increase, namely, of love, of working, and of knowing. For example, when the love of charity is more fervent, when the working of the good is more frequent, and when the knowledge of the faith is purer. Thus, the physician profits when he is more diligent in the cure, more trained in practice, and more prudent in theory.

1. Gregory, *Homilia in Evangelia* 7.4 (PL 76.1103): Qui enim sine humilitate virtutes congregat, in ventum pulverem portat. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos* tract. 3.1 (PL 35.1997-98): Ita nullus secundum carnem crescit quando vult; sicut nullus quando vult nascitur: ubi autem nativitas in voluntate est, et crementum in voluntate est. Nemo ex [Col.1998] aqua et Spiritu nascitur nisi volens. Ergo si vult, crescit: si vult, decrescit. Quid est crescere? Proficere. Quid est decrescere? Deficere. Quisquis novit natum se esse, audiat quia puer est et infans; avide inhiet uberibus matris, et cito crescit. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Gregory, *Moralia* 8.42.66 (PL 75.841): Scirpi ergo vel carecti nomine hypocritae vitam signat, quae speciem quidem viriditatis habet, sed ad humanos usus fructum utilitatis non habet; quae, sterilitate operis arida permanens, solo sanctitatis colore viridescit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Augustine, *Sermo* 102.4.5, De verbis Evangelii Lucae, 10:16 (PL 38.613): Quod facitis, quantum bonum sit nondum videtis: quia et rusticanus quando seminat, segetem non videt, sed terrae credit. Tu Deo quare non credis? [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.8 (PL 42.929): Corpora quippe adjunctione sua crescunt. Quamvis enim qui adhaeret uxori suae, unum corpus sit; majus tamen corpus fit, quam si solius viri esset, aut solius uxoris. In rebus autem spiritualibus, cum minor majori adhaerescit, sicut creatura Creatori, illa fit major quam erat, non ille. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Aristotle, *Physics* 8.3, 253b13-17 (Barnes 1:423): there cannot be a continuous process either of increase or of decrease: that which comes between the two has to be included. The theory resembles that about the stone being worn away by the drop of water or split by plants growing out of it: if so much has been extruded or removed by the drop, it does not follow that half the amount has previously been extruded or removed in half the time [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem* 2.3.3 (PL 76.959): Nemo enim repente fit summus, sed in bona conversatione a minimis quisque inchoat, ut ad magna perveniat. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* 3 pr. 12 (PL 63.780): Accepisti, inquit, in fabulis lacessenteis coelum Gigantes: sed illos quoque, uti condignum fuit, benigna fortitudo deposuit. 4 met. 7 (PL 63:827:

Poma cernenti rapuit draconi,

Aureo laevam gravior metallo:

Cerberum traxit triplici catena.

17. Poma cernenti rapuit draconi, etc.] Quartus Herculis labor. Hesperides filiae Hesperi, qui frater Atlantis fuit; videlicet Aegle, Arethusa, et Hesperethusa, ad Lixum Mauritaniae oppidum feruntur hortos incoluisse aureis arboribus pretiosos, et a vigili dracone custoditos. Sed draconem interfecit Hercules, fructusque ablatos ad vitricum Euristheum detulit. Ex illo Hesperidum horto Venus fertur accepisse mala aurea, quibus dispersis Hippomenes Atalantam cursu superavit. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* IIª-IIae q. 24 a. 7 s. c.: Sed contra est quod apostolus dicit, ad Philipp. III. Non quod iam acceperim, aut iam perfectus sim, sequor autem si quo modo comprehendam. Ubi dicit Glossa, nemo fidelium, etsi multum profecerit, dicat, sufficit mihi. Qui enim hoc dicit, exit de via ante finem. Ergo semper in via caritas potest magis ac magis augeri. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* Homilia16.28, ex capite 6:28. (PG 56.723): Considerate lilia agri, quomodo in tempore opportuno crescunt, tempore statuto formantur. In frondibus vestiuntur candore, implentur odoribus et quod terra radici non dederat, neque radix illi, invisibili operatione Deus largitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)