96 Desert (*Desertum*)

The home of the flesh and the world is the desert, as far as God, and thus it is “(In a desert) land, and where there is no way, and no water,” [Psal. 62:3]. “No way,” certainly because there is no justice there. “No water” because there is no water of grace there. However, the desert is a spiritual home as far as the devil. Wherefore it is said to Pharaoh, Exod. [7:16]: “Let my people go to sacrifice to me in the desert.” In such a desert God wants all his people to serve there through this desert in many places is the necessary status of penance. Wherefore also the ancient fathers penetrated the desert for doing penance. In the example of John the Baptist, *Thou, in Thy Childhood, to the Desert Caverns*, etc.[[1]](#endnote-1) Christ also,[[2]](#endnote-2) Matt. 4[:1], after he was baptized, he went into the desert so that he may be tempted. Moses fleeing Pharaoh continued into the desert and there saw God whom he did not merit to see in Egypt, Exod. 3[:6].

¶ Again, the people fleeing from Egypt fed on manna in the desert for forty years, Exod. 16[:15], which food lacking to them, how quickly they came to delightful places.

¶ Again, David in each of his pursuits sought the desert as is evident, 1 Kings 23[:14] and 26[:2]. But when he was confirmed as king he went into Jerusalem, 2 Kings 15[:8]. Thus, they who now live in a state of penance, sometimes will reign peacefully in Jerusalem.

¶ Again, note, Luke 3[:2], “The word of the Lord was made unto John, the son of Zachary, in the desert.”

¶ The cause of this Augustine assigns in his *Sermo penitencie Dominice in quadragesimo.[[3]](#endnote-3)* Adam expelled from paradise sustained himself in cultivating the desert of the world.[[4]](#endnote-4) But in the desert salvation is first returned to man, where there are no banquets and delights, where there is no woman, the tinder of all evils. Therefore, the desert is convenient to salvation where there was no Eve who may persuade or where there is no woman who may flatter. See the marvelous thing. In paradise the devil battled with Adam, in the desert he abandoned Christ, everywhere the devil lies in wait for man. But where he finds a woman he conquers, where there is no woman he is conquered. God gives us a map in this fact, so just as those inhabiting the desert we may abstain from delight of banquets, lest Eve the woman trip us up in chastity. Then Christ inhabited the desert of our breast when he found that of hunger squalid, of thirst arid, but just as David says in the Psal. [62:3]: “In a desert land, and where there is no way, and no water: so, in the sanctuary have I come before you.” Otherwise we cannot appear in the sanctuary, unless the land of our body was a “desert” to the worldly delights, “no way” to concupiscence, “no water” to the libidinous. And just as “in a desert land” things are found more precious, so the virtues are found more in those who seem sterile, as the desert in Isai. [5:6] is said, “I will make it desolate,” as if delights in solitude than a garden of the Lord.

Wherefore, Jerome, *Epistle* 34,[[5]](#endnote-5) O desert, greening with flowers of Christ, in which those stones flourish about which in the Apocalypse [21:18] the city of the great king is constructed closer to God. Again, this world is compared to the desert, because just as in the desert the thorns sprout forth (*pululant*), the enemies walk about (*ambulant*), and the wolves howl (*ululant*). Thus, in the world the envious flourish unseemly, the insidious meanly, and the mad voraciously.

Concerning the first, Isai. 5[:6]: “I will make your vineyard desolate,” and it follows, “thorns shall come up.”

¶ Concerning the second, Isai. 1[:7]: “Your land is desolate; your cities are burnt with fire.”

Concerning the third, Seneca, [*Epistle*] 26,[[6]](#endnote-6) if you want me to hear you, let your life become as a desert.

¶ Again, the desert is rough and intolerable and in this it designates penance to which Jesus was led, Mark 1[:9]: “In those days, Jesus came” into the desert preaching the baptism of penance. Again, it is solitary and uninhabitable and in this it designates the perfidious Jew, Matt. 23[:38]: “Behold, your house shall be left to you, desolate.” And Zach. 7[:14]: “They changed the delightful land into a wilderness.” And Lev. 26[:31]: “I will make your sanctuaries desolate.”

¶ Again, the third, the desert is unfruitful and sterile, and in this it designates the gentile idolatry, Isai. 40[:3]: “The voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord.” And Isai. 43[:19]: “I will make a way in the wilderness.”

¶ Again, the desert is a place of terror on account of vastness, a place of fear on account of hostility, a place of mourning on account of punishment. Concerning the first, Deut. 32[:10]: “He found him in a desert land, in a place of horror.” Concerning the second, Psal. [62:3]: “In a desert land, and where there is no way.” Concerning the third, Matt. [14:15]: “Send away the multitudes, that going into the towns.”

¶ Again, the desert is a difficult place for being quiet on account of too much roughness, dread for lingering on account of the neighboring wild beasts, tedious for gazing upon on account of the anxiety of the solitude. Thus, this world is difficult for quiet, because it is set among the wicked. Therefore, finally also Job [5:7]: “Man is born to labor.” And Gen. 3[:19]: “In the sweat of your face shall you eat your bread.” As thus concerning the unquiet of the present, one longs for quiet. And second is the fear of lingering on account of the beasts, that is, the secular powers of whom their prey are the poor, just as in the desert the prey of the lion are the lesser beasts, Eccli. [13:24]: “The rich man abhors the poor.” Third is the tedium of looking for cursed is everyone who confides in man.

¶ Again, just as in the desert is a multitude of wild beasts, a paucity of things to eat, uncertainty of ways, so in this world there is an abundance of plundering, a lack of good exhortation, and material of deviation. For here the older ones are spoiled, the younger ones as far as the first are corrupted. Here customs as far as the second are evident; here errors as far as the third.

Concerning [98] Desperation (*Desperacio*), see below.

1. Paul the Deacon, *Carmina* 5 (PL 95:1597): Antra deserti teneris sub annis,

   Civium turmas fugiens, petisti,

   Ne levi saltem maculare vitam

   Famine posses.

   Cf. *Antra deserti, teneris sub annis; Thou, in Thy Childhood, to the Desert Caverns*. Hymn for Matins on 24 June, feast of Saint John the Baptist. It was written by Paul the Deacon (720-799). The English title given is from the translation by M. Blacker and G. Palmer. Cf. *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402* Part 3, ll. 549-552, ed. Bell. Millet, Early English Text Society O.S. 325 (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005) 1:61: Antra deserti teneris sub annis / Ciuium turmas fugiens petisti, / Ne leui saltem maculare uitam / Famine posses. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Bonaventure, *Diaetae salutis* 2.1 (8:264b): Unde post baptismum statim intravit desertum ut dicitur in Luca. Poenitentia etiam fuit prima doctrina quam Christus prædicavit ut habetur in Matthæo. Poenitens igitur si est bonus discipulus libenter intrat cum Christo poenitentiæ desertum contra simulatos pœnitentes qui ad modum usurarii volunt esse discipuli Christi. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *Sermo* 147.3 (PL 39:2032): Potuerat enim Adam inter illas paradisi delicias inconcussus stare, si Eva ibidem cum diabolicis insidiis non fuisset. Conveniens ergo est desertum saluti, ubi non est Eva quae persuadet, non est mulier quae blanditur. Videte rem miram: in paradiso cum Adam diabolus decertat, in deserto cum Christo diabolus dimicat; ubique insidiatur homini, ubique congreditur: sed ubi mulierem invenit, vincit; ubi mulierem non invenit, victus abscedit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Maximus of Tour, *Sermones de tempore* 19 (PL 57:571-572): In deserto itaque Salvator implet mandatum Dei, et sibi Adam salvaret errantem, ubi fuerat de possessione paradisi dejectus. Adam enim expulsus de paradiso inculti mundi deserta sustinuit. In deserto ergo primum homini salus refunditur, ubi non sunt epulae, ubi desunt deliciae, ubi (quod est **[Col.0572A]**omnium malorum causa) deest et mulier. Poterat enim Adam inter illas paradisi inconcussus stare delicias, si Eva ibidem cum diabolicis illecebris non fuisset. Conveniens ergo est desertum saluti, ubi non est Eva, quae persuadet, non est mulier quae blanditur. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Jerome, *Epistola* 14, *Ad Helidorum monacum* 10 (PL 22:353-54): O desertum, Christi floribus vernans! O solitudo, in qua illi nascuntur lapides, de quibus in Apocalypsi civitas magni regis extruitur (Apoc. 21. 18)! [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Seneca, *Epistle* 84.11 (LCL 76:282): Hanc si audire volueris, dicet tibi: relinque ista iamdudum, ad quae discurritur. Relinque divitias, aut periculum possidentium aut onus. Relinque corporis atque animi voluptates; molliunt et enervant. Relinque ambitum; tumida res est, vana, ventosa, nullum habet terminum, tam sollicita est, ne quem ante se videat, quam ne quem post se. Laborat invidia et quidem duplici; vides autem, quam miser sit, si is cui invidetur et invidet. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)