Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

115 Wood (*Lignum*)

Wood. When something can happen through potency and through justice, it is more pleasing that it happens through justice. Just as it is evident in these who are enriched, of whom some are enriched through plunder, some through hard and just labors. For some, according to Augustine,[[1]](#endnote-1) God can lead back by only his power, humankind which by fraudulence the enemy lead astray. But that he might do it more appropriately, he chose the path of justice, so also that he who conquered by the tree, by the tree might also be conquered. Therefore, on account of this fitting justice, it was said to him that of Jer. 31[:23]: “The Lord bless you, the beauty of justice.”

¶ Because something exceeds singularly in some quality or condition it is accustomed to be named from that both in the abstract, as well as in the concrete. Just so a great falseness should be called from the falsity.

¶ And by the opposite Christ is called by the truth itself, so the cross of Christ is called beautiful, and meaningfully because when the beautiful tree was deceiving, according to that of Gen. 3[:6]: “Fair to the eyes,” it was very fitting that the tree upon which is all beauty be according to that of Ezech. 31[:8]: “No tree in paradise was like to its beauty.” Isidore says, *Etymologiae,* 17,[[2]](#endnote-2) if a living creature is tied to the fig tree however fierce it becomes tame, so the Lord under the law was fierce, but when he was tied to the tree, he became tame. Wherefore some history[[3]](#endnote-3) (yet apocryphal) says whichever tree of which Adam tasted the apple it was a fig and for some glory upon it they made for themselves breeches from the leaves of the figs, so it says. Thus, from which he sinned from that they covered themselves. Again, the previously mentioned history says that from that tree a shoot was planted, which grown into a tree, afterwards was cut down and was carried off for building the temple of Solomon. Seeing which the queen of Sheba, that is, Ethiopia,

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of which the whole is called Sheba. She foretold to Solomon that on that wood somewhere one would be suspended through whom the people of the Jews would be destroyed.[[4]](#endnote-4) Wherefore he buried the same in the earth in the deepest way. Which however afterwards in the time of the Lord’s passion it escaped into a fishpond according to the Master in his *Historia* 3 Kings.[[5]](#endnote-5) And again upon the Gospel.[[6]](#endnote-6)

¶ Upon the wood a burden was carried, a fire was started from the wood, wood alters the liquor, wood saves the sailors.

¶ Concerning the first, [1] Pet. [2:24]: “His own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree.” Sins, that is, the penalty for sins. There is the figure by metonymy as when the cause is put for the effect. Of which matter the figure preceded in Isaac [Gen. 22:2-13] for whom the ram was sacrificed, but he himself escaped, but Christ according to the flesh suffered.

¶ Concerning the second, from the wood of the cross we must ignite the love of the Divine in us. The figure for this, [3] Kings 17[:12]: “Behold I am gathering two sticks.” Concerning this fire, Lev. 6[:12]: “The fire on my altar shall always burn.”

Concerning the third, Eccli. 38[:5]: “Was not bitter water made sweet with wood?” Note there in the *Historia*, Exodus,[[7]](#endnote-7) because through the memory of the cross the tribulations of the world were sweetened.

¶ Concerning the fourth, Wisdom 14[:5]: ““Men trust their lives even to a little wood and passing over the sea by ship are saved.” Just so it is evident in the thief crucified with Christ how quickly he went to paradise. Therefore, it can be said that of Wis. 14[:7]: “Blessed is the wood, by which justice comes.” For wood is of life for these who seize it. Just like salvation is for the fugitive to seize the corner of the altar as is evident concerning Joab, [3 Kings 2:28].

¶ Again, the cross is called the wood of life and by reason of the fruit because from the fruit the tree takes its name. Formerly the cross was accustomed to carry corrupt fruit, Deut. 21[:23]: “He is accursed of God that hangs on a tree.” But now it carries the fruit of life. Therefore, by reason of effect because it confers life to those not having it, Prov. 11[:30]: “The fruit of the just man is the tree of life.”

¶ Again the cross of Christ rendered more copiously than the tree of which Adam received, and more copiously was it in emending that fault. And so, man justly recouped through the cross the life which he had lost, 1 Pet. [2:24]: “Who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree.”

¶ Third, by the wood of the cross life was conserved to these who have life. On whose wood a bird flying birdlime and snare flies high from the earth by spreading its wings in the shape of the cross. So, the cross saves man clinging to it from the birdlime

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of carnality and the snare of cupidity. And it is said with merit that the tree of life, which God put in the middle of paradise, that is, of the Church militant so anyone could tie himself to it.

¶ But note here that he who would be revivified by the cross is required that he accept the cross and stick to it. So, we see that a medicine however efficacious does not heal unless it cooperates with nature. So, neither does the cross for anyone’s affliction render life for the soul unless his will accepts it. The example of Antiochus, [2] Mach. 9[:5], who although he was shown to be hard, he was not saved. Therefore, unless man joins himself to the tree, he will not take of its fruit. Cant. 7[:8]: “I will go up into the palm tree and will take hold of the fruit thereof.” Therefore, good friend, ascend higher because in the upper part are the riper and sweeter fruits. So, in the taking up of the cross, the penances are the bitter fruits, but in the consummation are the sweet fruits. Note here that the rich of the world freely eat good fruits, but against their will they ascend the tree. But a cat loves fish, but it does not want to get its feet wet.

¶ Concerning the third, note that the blind man needs a guide whom he holds by the cloak or by a stick. But humanity was blinded and Christ as guide in the incarnation whom he needed that man hold to by the cloak of innocence which if he could not perhaps by the stick of penitence. Psal. [136:9]: “Blessed be he that shall take and dash your little ones against the rock.” Here it is to be noticed who ought to hold on. Let him stick to it by the feet of affection and the hands of operation, otherwise if he loosened his hand because of the itch of the delightful act he can easily fall.

¶ Therefore, the cross was shining from the virgin members, reddened from the drops of blood, illuminated by the title of the passion.

1. Augustine, [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 17.7.17 (PL 82:612): Tauros quoque ferocissimos ad fici arborem colligatos repente mansuescere dicunt.

Cf. Isidore, *The Etymologies* 17.7.17 (Barney p. 344a): They also say that very ferocious bulls, tethered to a fig tree, suddenly become tame. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Apocryphal history, [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Laurie Schneider, "The Iconography of Piero della Francesca's Frescoes Illustrating the Legend of the True Cross in the Church of San Francesco in Arezzo," Art Quarterly 32 (1969), 22-48. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Libri III Regum. 26 (PL 198:1370): Quae regina gratis suscipiens ad propria remeavit. Tradunt quidam eam rescripsisse Salomoni, quod praesentialiter ei dicere timuit, se vidisse scilicet quoddam lignum in domo Saltus, in quo suspendendus erat quidam, pro cujus morte regnum Judaeorum periret, et certis indiciis illud regi indicavit. Quod timens Salomon in profundissimis terrae visceribus occultavit illud. Pro cujus virtute aqua mota sanavit aegrotos, quod tamen in libris suis negant se habere Hebraei. Sed quomodo circa tempora Christi in probatica piscina superenataverit incertum est (Joan. V), et creditur fuisse hoc lignum crucis Dominicae. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica,* Evangelica 81 (PL 198:1579): Solet autem collecta aqua pisces non habens, piscina dici, quasi per contrarium. De hac motione, incertum est quando coeperit. Quod autem incertum esset, quando moveri debebat, inde perpenditur, quod languidi semper erant ibi, qui ad certam horam convenirent tantum si sciretur. Traditur a quibusdam quod regina Saba vidit in spiritu in domo saltus, quae Nethota dicebatur, lignum **[Col. 1579B]**Dominicae crucis, et nuntiavit Salomoni cum jam recessisset ab eo, quod in eo moreretur quidam, pro quo occiso perirent Judaei, et perderent locum et gentem (Joan. XI). Quod timens Salomon, defodit illud in terra, ubi post facta est piscina. Appropinquante autem tempore passionis Christi, superenatavit, quasi praenuntians Christum, et exinde coepit motio praedicta. Sed hoc non est authenticum.  [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Exodus 32 (PL 198:1159): Animaequior est enim, qui sitit, si non invenerit potum, quam si inventum gustare non possit. «Dominus autem ostendit lignum Moysi, quod cum misisset in aquas, dulcoratae sunt.» Forte lignum illud talis efficaciae erat, et forte miraculose factum est, ut in solitudine in qua non erat lignum, inveniretur lignum. Hebraeus dicit, quia illud lignum naturaliter amarissimum erat, et ut mirabiliter innotesceret vis divina, amarum additum amaro, dulcedinem operatum est. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)