Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

16 To Ascend (*Ascendere*)

Four things make an ascent: nature, violence, art, and agility. For fire ascends naturally, a stone violently, water artificially, a light man agilely. Thus, four things make us to ascend spiritually.

¶ The first is charity as if naturally, Can. the last chapter 8[:5]: “Who is this that comes 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 is it 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.” 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, on account of which it is called the bond of peace Colo. 3[:14]: “But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection,” etc. If therefore our highest friend is charity, living for him makes us ascend to himself, Luke 14[:10]: “Friend, go up higher.” 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.”

¶ It is a great violence to abandon one accustomed to love to be cursed, 4 Kings 2[:1]: “Elias ascended into heaven by a whirlwind.”

¶ However penitence makes one to ascend for a double reason. First because it makes one to rise above one fault just as a bucket helps [water] to ascend from the lowest well, Gen. 35[:1]: “Arise, and go up to Bethel” in the house of the Lord, “and dwell there.” And just as the bucket by itself can descend, but not ascend, so also it is with man, Psal. [83:6]: “Blessed is the man whose help is from you; in his heart he ascends.”

¶ Second, because it makes one to ascend on high just like a bird with its wing, Can. 7[:8]: “I will go up into the palm tree and will take hold of the fruit thereof.” And just as for ascending into a tree roughness of the bark helps and smoothness hinders, thus as for ascending into heaven the roughness of penitence helps, and delights hinder. Third what makes one ascend as if artificially is humility, 3 Reg. 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

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of the sea. It is rising high through pride, grey through envy, 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, and it is the gate of glory. It is necessary that the entrant purify himself, Prov. 21[:22]: “The wise man has 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.”

¶ Second, 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]; Prov. 25[:6]: “Appear not glorious before the king and stand not in the great place of great men.” The example of the wolf and the bucket.[[1]](#endnote-1) Wherefore it is treated also in Donatus, *De prepositione,[[2]](#endnote-2)* 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.” 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. Therefore, the earth is higher, the closer it is to heaven, 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. [17:11]: “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,” to the father of joyfulness. Psal. [46:6]: “God is ascended with jubilee.” Psal. [67:34]: “Who mounts above the heaven of heavens, to the east.” Mich. [2:13]: “He shall go up that shall open the way before them.” [Psal. 23:3]: “Who therefore shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place?

¶ Again the purity of cleanness makes one to ascend as for himself. For what is purer tends upwards just as

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is evident in the site of the elements that the more subtle is situated higher. And in plants the flower blossoms at the top and in the keg of fresh grape juice the more impure it is it tends to be lower.

¶ So it is spiritually, Psal. [23:3]: “Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?” Thus, the duty of mercy toward our neighbor. For the weight of the matter draws each to his due place, as the heavy down, the light upwards. Second is the humility of obedience as far as God, just as the wheel does not go up, etc., as above.

1. 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-1)
2. 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-2)