

HUGH  
*of*  
SAINT-  
VICTOR



**SELECTED SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**  
*of the revered 12th Century mystic,  
newly edited and translated—with  
an Introduction by Aelred Squire.*

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everything, you have nothing more to look for, and your heart is at rest.

### CHAPTER 7

*That Noah's ark is the figure of a spiritual building, that corresponds to Christ's whole Person. From the words of Isaiah the prophet*

Now the figure of this spiritual building which I am going to present to you is Noah's ark. This your eye shall see outwardly, so that your soul may be fashioned to its likeness inwardly. You will see there certain colours, shapes, and figures which will be pleasant to behold. But you must understand that these are put there, that from them you may learn wisdom, instruction, and virtue, to adorn your soul. And because this ark denotes the Church, and the Church is the body of Christ, to make the illustration clearer for you I have depicted Christ's whole Person, the Head with the members, in a form that you can see;<sup>1</sup> so that, when you have seen the whole, you will be able the more easily to understand what will be said hereafter with reference to the parts. And I want to represent this Person to you in such wise as Isaiah testifies that he beheld Him. So I shall quote Isaiah's words to you, and from them take the thing I want to show you; so that what the literal sense says, the prophecy may confirm.

Now what he says is this: 'I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.'<sup>2</sup> It is high, because it is located in the height. It is lifted up, because from the depths it has been translated to the heights.

### CHAPTER 8

*What is denoted by the throne high and lifted up, and what the temple is, that is filled*

Angelic spirits are, therefore, the 'high' throne, and the souls of the saints, who from this world's abyss have been translated

<sup>1</sup> If Hugh drew this picture, it has unfortunately not survived.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. vi, 1.

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to the joys of peace on high, are the throne 'lifted up'. God is represented as 'sitting on a throne high and lifted up', because He rules over both.

That which is said a little further on, however, 'the whole earth is full of His glory', means that every corporeal creature on earth is full of the glory of God. For as the divine essence by means of knowledge guides a spiritual creature, so does it fill that which is corporeal by ordering and ruling it. So, as it is said elsewhere, 'I fill heaven and earth',<sup>1</sup> and again, 'the heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool',<sup>2</sup> so in this place we have first, 'I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up', and then 'the whole earth is full of His glory', and 'the things that were beneath it filled the temple'.<sup>3</sup> 'The temple' is the power of understanding, whether of angels or of men, which temple is filled by the things that are beneath it. For the works of God so far transcend assessment that no creature has the power to understand them perfectly. The contemplation of them fills our heart, but our heart cannot compass their immensity. How, then, shall we comprehend the Maker of the works, when we cannot fully take in the works of the Maker?

We may say also that this throne high and lifted up, whereon God sits, is the eternity of the Godhead; for it is said of Him alone that He 'inhabiteth eternity',<sup>4</sup> not because God is one thing and His eternity another, but because a throne implies a ruler. He therefore is rightly represented as sitting upon the throne of eternity since, as there is neither beginning nor end to His being, so is there none either to His omnipotence. He always was, He always was omnipotent. Full ever in Himself and of Himself, He was at once perfect, and yet never overflowed. Well then may the prophet say, 'I saw the Lord sitting

<sup>1</sup> See Jer. xxiii, 24.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. lxvi, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. vi, 3 and 1. The Hebrew text of v. 1 says that 'His train filled the temple', 'train' meaning 'skirts'. The LXX reads, 'the temple was filled with His glory'. The Vulgate, which Hugh here quotes, has *ea quae sub ipso erant implebant templum*, the antecedent of *ipso* being *thronum*.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. lvii, 15.

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upon a throne, high and lifted up', for the might of the Godhead at once precedes all creatures in eternity, surpasses them in excellence, and orders them by power.

Next come the words, 'and the things that were beneath it filled the temple'. The temple may here be understood as meaning the cycle of the ages and revolutions of the centuries. For as the ages in their course return upon themselves,<sup>1</sup> they seem by their cycles to mark out as it were the enclosure of a temple, 'the things that were beneath it filled the temple', is to be taken, therefore, as meaning that all the periods of time are full of the works of God, and that every generation tells of His wonderful acts. Or else it may be taken thus: 'the things that were beneath it filled the temple'—that is, the things that filled the temple were beneath it, because whatever belongs to time is found below eternity. For the vastness of eternity includes below itself the narrow paths of time, in that it is both before time, since it has no beginning, and after time, in that it knows no end. It is above time too, for it admits no change.

## CHAPTER 9

*The meaning of the two seraphim, and why God is said to sit,  
and they to stand*

'Above it stood the seraphim.'<sup>2</sup> The two seraphim are the two covenants. And 'seraphim', which means 'burning', beautifully signifies Holy Scripture, which causes those whom it has first enlightened by knowledge afterwards to burn mightily with love. For when it shows our heart what it should desire, it first enlightens it, and then makes it burn. It burns, therefore, because it causes burning, as it is said elsewhere to shine because it enlightens. For of this Peter the apostle says, 'We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until

<sup>1</sup> For this conception in general, cf. M. Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, Paris, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. vi, 2.

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the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts'.<sup>1</sup> And perhaps it is in pursuance of this allegorical sense, whereby the effect it produces in the hearts of its hearers is wont to be attributed to the Scripture itself, that it is said: 'Above it *stood* the seraphim.' For it rises when it rouses us up, it walks when it makes us progress, and it stands when it confirms us in our good resolve.

We must inquire, however, why God is said to sit upon the throne, while the seraphim are represented not as sitting on, but as standing above it. And because in what has gone before we have given two interpretations of this throne, we must make this explanation fit them both. If, then, we take the throne of God as meaning spiritual creatures, God is rightly described as sitting upon it; for, that it may be above all things, the excellency of the Godhead neither advances in virtue nor grows in wisdom, since Fullness cannot be increased, nor can Eternity be changed. But whenever the human mind, enlightened by the knowledge of Holy Scripture, is raised to the contemplation of heavenly things, it does indeed mount the throne, if it also climbs above the choirs of angels and attains to the presence of its Creator. Once there, however, it does not sit, it stands. For it has come by toil to a point at which it has no natural power to stay. Thus standing is the posture of one who works, sitting of Him who rests. And so we stand on the throne and God sits on it, for we are by grace beginning to be where He is by nature.

In the same way, if we take the throne as meaning God's eternity, we understand ourselves as standing on it, because we can attain His immortality only by passing through the toil of death; it is by adoption that we, who are by nature subject to this latter end, are made heirs of eternity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i, 19.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Rom. viii, 15-17; Gal. iv, 3-7; Eph. i, 3-14.

## CHAPTER 10

*The meaning of the seraphim's two pairs of wings, and of the fact that the Lord's head and feet are covered, not His body*

'The one had six wings, and the other had six wings.'<sup>1</sup> That is to say, each seraph had six wings, joined two and two to make three pairs. Each covers his own body, not the Lord's, with two wings; that is the first pair. Each spreads out two, the one to cover not his own head, but the Lord's, the other to cover not his own feet, but the Lord's; that makes the second pair. Each flies with two, the one beating against the other; that makes the third pair.

If, then, the seraphim denote Holy Scripture, the three pairs of wings are the three senses of this selfsame Scripture, history, allegory, and tropology,<sup>2</sup> each of which is therefore twofold, since it enkindles the souls of those who read with the love of God and of their neighbour. The two wings which cover the body of the seraph are the historical sense, which covers mystical meanings beneath the veil of the letter. The two wings which are extended to cover the head and the feet of the Lord are the allegorical sense. For when we learn the mysteries of Holy Scripture, we come by the illumination of our minds to the knowledge of His Godhead who is before all things and after all things.

One must understand, however, that though the extended wings reach to the head and feet, they cover while they touch. For whenever we are caught up into ecstasy of soul to ponder His eternity, we find in Him no beginning and no end. For we reach to His head, when we reflect that He was before all things; yet with this same wing we veil His head, since we cannot understand how it is that in Him there is neither beginning nor end. We reach out to His feet, when we consider that, not in time but in eternity, He is after all things; yet we

<sup>1</sup> Vulg. Isa. vi, 2; cf. A.V. loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 23 ff; and for a discussion of Hugh's use of the senses of Scripture, see B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., pp. 88 ff.

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cover His feet when we find in Him no end. So by touching His head we touch His feet also; for the more the human spirit strives to search out His eternity, the more does it marvel at His surpassing of all understanding.

That which is written in Isaiah, however, is not 'they covered His head', but 'they covered His face'.<sup>1</sup> And this must be understood in the same sense as that which was said to Moses: 'Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live.'<sup>2</sup> The full knowledge of the Godhead, which is promised to the saints in the life everlasting, and of which the apostle says, we shall see Him 'face to face', and again, 'Then shall I know, even as also I am known',<sup>3</sup> is veiled and hidden from those still living in this mortal state. But in that everlasting life it is not veiled, but unveiled and made clear, as the Lord bears witness with reference to the angels in the gospel, saying, 'Their angels do always behold the face of the Father'.<sup>4</sup>

Since therefore for our present purposes it is more suitable that the face should remain exposed, in order that the truth may be verified that we cannot understand any beginning in God, we pass over rather than change the words of the prophet, and veil the head from above. And in order that those other words may stand, 'their angels do always behold the face of the Father in heaven', we leave the face uncovered. Other things also, which are here said otherwise, must be taken in conjunction not with the prophecy but with the picture.

'With twain they did fly.'<sup>5</sup> Those two wings with which the seraphim flew denote the tropological sense. For when through reading Holy Scripture we are prepared for doing good works, we are lifted up to higher things, as it were on wings. We fly with them, moreover, one against another, when we encourage each other by the pursuit of well-doing. And we cry 'Holy, Holy, Holy'<sup>6</sup> as we fly, if through our good works we seek not our own greater glory, but that of our Father who is in heaven. For what does crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy' mean, if not proclaiming the glory of our Maker which we have known within?

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxxiii, 20.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Cor. xiii, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xviii, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. vi, 2.

<sup>6</sup> See Isa. vi, 3.

Having thus briefly explained these matters, let us now begin to treat of those that follow. For now that we have shown the meaning of that which we read, to the effect that the Lord's head and feet are hidden from us, it remains to show what should be thought concerning the remainder of His body.

If then we have taught you that the head of God is that which was before the foundation of the world, and His feet that which is to be after the consummation of the age, we must take the intervening portion of His body to be the period of time between beginning and end. The head and the feet are covered, therefore, because we cannot discover either the first things or the last. The body is visible, because we see the intermediate things that happen in the present age. This body is the Church, which began when the world began, and will last till the end of the age.<sup>1</sup> This is the ark, of which we have set out to speak; and it reaches from the head to the feet, because through successive generations Holy Church reaches from the beginning to the end.

You must however understand that, just as a human person is subject to bodily conditions, which are not part of his body nor directly related to it, so is it with Christ's body, the Church. She dwells in the midst of a perverted race; and when she is attacked by unbelievers, the ark is buffeted as it were by stormy waves. When however she suffers tribulation from false brethren, the body is racked inwardly, as by noxious humours. Whatever, therefore, is contrary to the well-being of the body, whether from within or from without, is not of the body. But the fact that the arms of the Lord embrace all things on every side means that all things are under His control, and that no man can escape either the reward of His right hand or the punishment of His left.

<sup>1</sup> Compare with this: *Tempus autem longitudinis eius est ab initio mundi usque ad finem, quia sancta ecclesia in fidelibus suis ab initio coepit, et usque ad finem durabit* (*De Arca Noe Mystica*, MPL, clxxvi, col. 685B), a notion which returns to a patristic tradition older than that of Augustine, as for instance, Origen, *In Canticum Cantorum*, Bk. II, *Non enim tu mihi ex adventu salvatoris in carne sponsam dici, aut ecclesiam putes, sed ab initio humani generis et ab ipsa constitutione mundi, imo, ut Paulo duce altius mysterii huius originem repetam, ante etiam constitutionem mundi*, MPG, xiii, col. 134.



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Why then should the members of the body worry any more about the well-being of the body, once they know the Head to have such power? He, who in His compassion is aware of the danger and by His power provides the remedy against it, knows what is best for His body. He it is who makes a track across the sea; for, guiding His body the Church through the storms of this life, as it were the ark in the flood, He brings her at last to the haven of eternal rest.

### CHAPTER I I

*A brief description of the four arks,  
whereof two are visible and two invisible*

If, then, we want to be saved, it behoves us to enter this ark. And, as I said before, we must build it within ourselves, so that we can live in it within ourselves. For it is not enough for us to be in it externally, if we have not also learnt how we should live in it within ourselves. In regard to this matter, there are three things that call chiefly for consideration. First, how we must build it in ourselves. Second, how we must enter it within ourselves. Third, how we must live in it within ourselves.

But look what has happened. We set out to talk about one ark, and one thing has so led to another that it seems now we have to speak not of one only, but of four. Of these, the two that are visible were built visibly and outwardly, but the two that are invisible come into being inwardly and invisibly, by an unseen process of construction. The first is that which Noah made, with hatchets and axes, using wood and pitch as his materials.<sup>1</sup> The second is that which Christ made through His preachers, by gathering the nations into a single confession of faith. The third is that which wisdom builds daily in our hearts through continual meditation on the law of God. The fourth is that which mother grace effects in us by joining together many virtues in a single charity.

The first is realized in visible reality, the second in faith, the

<sup>1</sup> See Gen. vi, 14.

third in knowledge, and the fourth in power. Let us call the first Noah's ark, the second the ark of the Church, the third the ark of wisdom, and the fourth the ark of mother grace. Nevertheless there is in a certain sense only one ark everywhere, for there is one only common ground of likeness everywhere, and that which is not different in nature ought not to be different in name. The form is one, though the matter is different, for that which is actualized in the wood is actualized also in the people, and that which is found in the heart is the same as that which is found in charity.

The special subject we have undertaken to discuss, however, is the ark of wisdom. So we shall run briefly through the explanation of the other three, so as to be free thereafter to explain this at greater length.

CHAPTER 12<sup>1</sup>

*The visible shape of the ark according to the letter,  
and certain views respecting its five storeys*

Those who want to make a closer study of the truth of what is told us about Noah's ark according to the letter have to search out two things in particular—namely, its shape and its size. Now Origen with reference to the shape says: 'I think myself that, from what is said about it, the ark must have rested on a quadrangular base, of which the corners, as they went up, were drawn together gradually, so that it narrowed at the top to the space of a single cubit.'<sup>2</sup> Many things seem to refute this view; for one thing, this shape does not appear such as would keep afloat. For it is indisputable that so massive a structure, laden with so many and such large animals, and also with provisions, could not possibly keep afloat when the waters came, unless the greater portion of its bulk were at the bottom; this fact we can put to the proof today with ships that carry heavy loads. If, then, as is stated, the ark began to narrow from

<sup>1</sup> Chapters 12 and 13 = MPL, clxxvi, cols. 626-9 (Bk. I, ch. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *In Genesim Homilia II* (MPG, xii, col. 162).

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the bottom upwards, so that the sides sloping towards each other took the swelling billows and did not throw them back, and it was thus not so much the waters that carried the ark as the ark the waters, how was it that the whole thing did not forthwith sink to the bottom?

Another point. When it says, 'The door shalt thou set in the side below',<sup>1</sup> it seems to mean the side *wall*, as distinct from the surface that formed the roof above, in which perhaps the window was located. And again it says that Noah 'opened the roof of the ark';<sup>2</sup> this makes it clear enough that the ark had walls below, over which the roof was placed, immediately above the top storey where the humans dwelt. For these and other reasons it seems to us that this ark must have had walls erected on four sides, over which was set the roof, narrowed at its ridge to the measure of a single cubit. Authority does not tell us what was the height of the walls themselves, but we infer that the walls reached to the base of the fourth storey. For the learned tell us that the door of the ark was between the second storey and the third, in such wise that its threshold was close to the base of the third, but its entrance was cut out above, in the side of the same storey; so that there were two floors below the door and three above it.

And they say that one was appointed to receive the animals' dung, the second for their food supplies, while in the third were the wild animals, in the fourth the tame ones, and in the fifth, which was at the top, the humans and the birds. And it is very likely that, when the ark was afloat, the two lower storeys were pressed down under water; whereas the third, in which were animals that needed fresh air to breathe, was the first to rise above the waters. Thus, for people approaching the ark from the water outside, the door was almost on the water-level.

That perhaps is what is meant when it is said, 'The door shalt thou set in the side below'. Or 'below' may mean that, in whichever storey it was located, the door had to be placed

<sup>1</sup> Gen. vi, 16. The Vulgate punctuates this sentence, *ostium autem arcae pones ex latere; deorsum cenacula et tristega facies in ea*, but Hugh takes *deorsum* with *latere*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gen. viii, 6.

low down, so that the feet of those entering would be on the floor.

If, however, one asks whether or not the height of all the storeys was the same, we for our part cannot judge from authority what should be thought on this point. Nevertheless we ask to be allowed to put forward a suggestion which does not contradict it. For we divide things thus: we allow four cubits of height for the first storey, five for the second, six for the third, seven for the fourth, and eight for the fifth. Thus the height of the walls will be fifteen cubits, and the height of the roof also will be fifteen.

On the outer surface of the walls of this ark little nests or chambers were constructed, and these were fastened to the walls in such wise as to allow entrance to them from without, while on the inside the surface of the wall remained unbroken. And these nests are said to have been made for those animals that cannot live either always in the water or always in the dry, like the otter and the seal. So much for the shape of the ark.

## CHAPTER 13

*The size of this same ark reckoned according to geometry,  
together with certain views about three storeys*

Of the size of the ark we are told as follows: 'The length shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth fifty cubits, the height thirty cubits.'<sup>1</sup>

There are, however, some who say that these dimensions would not be sufficient to contain so many kinds of animals and foodstuffs to feed them for a whole year. The learned<sup>2</sup> answer these objections on these lines: they say that Moses, who as Scripture testifies concerning him was 'learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians',<sup>3</sup> put the number of cubits in this place ac-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. vi, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *In Genesim Homilia II* (MPG, xii, cols. 166-7), quoted with approval by St. Augustine both in *De Civitate Dei*, xv, 27 and in *Questiones in Heptateuchum*, Bk. I, ch. 4 (MPL, xxxiv, col. 549).

<sup>3</sup> Acts vii, 22.

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According to the laws of geometry, an art in which the Egyptians excel; and, according to that, one cubit is reckoned the equivalent of six. Certainly, if this method of reckoning be applied to the dimensions of the ark, it will afford length, breadth, and height fully sufficient to contain enough seed for the renewal of the entire world, and stock from which all living creatures could be bred anew.

It must be understood, moreover, that there was no need for the animals that are generated not by sexual union but from the moisture of the earth, or from dead bodies, or some other corrupting thing, or for those that are born of the union of two different kinds, such as the two sorts of mule,<sup>1</sup> to be included in the ark at all. From these considerations the conclusion emerges that it would not have been impossible for a place of such capacity to contain sufficient stock to renew all living things.<sup>2</sup>

There are some who say that there were only three storeys in the ark, and that of these one was a single chamber, the middle one was divided into two, and the topmost into three. And they say that Scripture calls these divisions in the storeys rooms, but the storeys themselves it calls floors. We have depicted this form in preference to the other, because we were unable to show the height of the walls in a flat drawing.<sup>3</sup> For in this plan the ascending beams are gradually brought together until they meet in the measure of a single cubit.

These things have been spoken about Noah's ark according to the letter.

<sup>1</sup> I.e. *muli*, offspring of ass and mare; and *burdones*, offspring of horse and she-ass.

<sup>2</sup> In this section a passage from MPL, clxxvi, cols. 628C-629D, *Si autem . . . declinamus*, has been omitted.

<sup>3</sup> This is a new drawing, not the one already mentioned on p. 52.

CHAPTER 14<sup>1</sup>

*Of the ark of the Church, and the meaning of its length and breadth and height. Of the three storeys, the cubit, and the hundred years that the ark took to build*

It remains for us to see what the ark of the Church may be. And, to put it more exactly, the Church is herself the ark, which her Noah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Helmsman and the Haven, is guiding through the tempests of this present life, and leading through Himself unto Himself.

The length of three hundred cubits denotes this present age, which extends over three periods—namely, the period of natural law, the period of the written law, and the period of grace through which holy Church is from the world's beginning to its end advancing from this present life towards the future glory. The fifty cubits' breadth denotes all believers everywhere, who are established under one Head, that is Christ. For fifty is seven times seven—that is, forty-nine, the number that means the total sum of all believers—*plus* one, which means Christ, who is the Head of His Church and the goal of our desires. That is why the ark is gathered to one cubit at the top.

The height of thirty cubits denotes the thirty volumes<sup>2</sup> of the Holy Writ—namely, the twenty-two of the Old Testament and the eight of the New, wherein is contained the sum of all the things that God has either done, or else is going to do, for His Church.

The three storeys signify the three ranks of believers that there are in the Church, whereof the first have commerce with the world, albeit lawfully, the second are fleeing from it and forgetting it, and the third already have forgotten it, and they are near to God.

The fact that the ark gets narrower towards the top and wider below means that in holy Church there are more people

<sup>1</sup> Chapters 14 to 18 = MPL, clxxvi, cols. 629–34 (Bk. I, ch. 4).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *De Sacramentis*, prologue, ch. 7 (MPL, CLXXVI, col. 186) where Hugh explains how he arrives at thirty as the number of books in the Bible.

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leading a carnal life than there are persons of a spiritual life, it being always the rule that the more perfect are proportionately few in number. The ark narrows to the measure of a single cubit at the top, because Christ the Head of His Church, who is the Saint of saints, is like to other men in all respects in nature, but in the uniqueness of His virtue He is above them all.

The hundred years that the ark took to build mean the same as a hundred cubits. For the hundred years signify the period of grace: since holy Church, which began with the beginning of the world, received redemption through the immolation of the spotless Lamb<sup>1</sup> in the period of grace. For the ark was fashioned when the Church's sacraments flowed forth in blood and water from the side of Christ, while He was hanging on the cross.<sup>2</sup> When the Lamb was sacrificed, then was the Lamb's Bride born. When Adam slept, then Eve received her form.<sup>3</sup> Our Bridegroom went up to His bridal bed, He slept the sleep of death, He showed forth what availed from the beginning, and did what was done from the beginning.<sup>4</sup> See whether Scripture does not mean to say this very thing, when it speaks of the making of this ark of the Church. What does it say? 'A Lamb', it says, 'slain from the foundation of the world.'<sup>5</sup> What does this mean? It was at the end of an age that the Son of God came in flesh, suffered Himself to be crucified for man's salvation, suffered Himself to be slain, suffered Himself to be offered up in sacrifice. The Lamb was slain, therefore, at the end of the world, and He was slain once. How then can it be right to say that He was slain from the beginning of the world? Could He be slain before He was incarnate? If there was nothing mortal about Him as yet, how then could He die? But if He was slain from the beginning, He was slain before He was incarnate. If He was slain from the beginning, He was slain not

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Pet. i, 19 and Heb. ix, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, Bk. XII, ch. 16. (MPL, xlii, col. 263.)

<sup>3</sup> See Gen. ii, 21 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus*, cxx, par. 2. (MPL, xxxiv, cols. 1950-1.)

<sup>5</sup> Rev. xiii, 8.

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once but often, and indeed always. For that which was from the beginning always was, and that which is from the beginning always is.

But if perhaps you say that He was slain from the beginning—that is, for those who were from the beginning, for the redemption and salvation and reconciliation, namely, of those who were from the beginning, taking what is said about the beginning as referring not to the time of the slaying but to that of the salvation—we shall be doing nothing unbecoming if we say that He was slain both once and also from the beginning. For His death was of benefit before it happened; the promise came first, and afterwards the making manifest. So He was slain from the beginning of the world, because from the beginning of the world people existed for whose salvation He was slain at the end of an age.

Nevertheless when He put on beauty, that is to say, when He took flesh, unspotted, stainless, fair flesh from a virgin body, when He ‘girded Himself with strength’<sup>1</sup>—in other words, conquered the powers of the air by His victorious cross<sup>2</sup>—*then* was His seat prepared, *then* was the Church redeemed, *then* was the lost sheep brought back,<sup>3</sup> *then* was the way to heaven’s kingdom opened, that formerly was shut.

So now you see why the ark, though it was three hundred cubits long, took not three hundred but only one hundred years to build. It was because the Church, which was from the beginning, was redeemed at the end of an age.

But the fact that the length of the ark is six times its width and ten times its height provides us with an allegorical figure for the human body in which Christ appeared, for it is itself His body. For the length of a body from crown to heel is six times its width from one side to the other, and its height moreover is ten times its thickness through from back to front. So if you measure a recumbent man when he is lying down quite flat, his

<sup>1</sup> See Ps. xciii, 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Eph. ii, 2 and St. Athanasius, *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi*, iv, 25.

<sup>3</sup> See Luke xv, 4 ff. In the Fathers the lost sheep is frequently interpreted as mankind as a whole, the ninety and nine being the unfallen hosts of angels.



## NOAH'S ARK

length from head to foot is six times his width across from right to left or left to right, and ten times his thickness from the ground. Six is the number of times that fifty goes into three hundred, and there are six periods in the three ages of the world. Again, three hundred signifies faith in the Trinity, or—because of the letter Tau, of which the numerical value is 300, and which still retains the shape of the cross among the Syrians—it signifies the cross. Fifty denotes the remission of sins, thirty 'the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ'.<sup>1</sup>

### CHAPTER 15

*Of the five storeys of the ark according to the view of some;  
of the five states of the Church, and of the peak of the ark*

According to the view by which we divide the interior of the ark into five storeys, the ark is the Church, and the five storeys are the five states, three of this present life and two of that which is to come. The first is the state of those who are referred to as carnal, of whom the apostle says, 'I could not speak to you as unto spiritual persons, but as unto carnal, I have given you milk to drink, and not meat'.<sup>2</sup> The second is the state of those who are called sensual,<sup>3</sup> of whom again he says, 'The sensual man receiveth not the things of God'.<sup>4</sup> The third state is that of the spiritual, of whom again he says, 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man'.<sup>5</sup> The fourth state is that of souls who have laid off the body. The fifth state is that of those who rise in soul and body; this is the highest state, and bordering on the highest cubit.

The fact that the walls of the three lower storeys rise vertically one above the other and do not slope inwards towards the topmost cubit, means that, whatever progress we may make

<sup>1</sup> Vulg. Eph. iv, 13; cf. A.V. loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Cor. iii, 1 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Latin *animales*. 'Sensuous' is the Douai rendering. The A.V. and the R.V. have 'natural', Moffatt and the R.S.V. 'unspiritual'.

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Cor. ii, 14.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. v, 15.