

## St Gregory the Theologian

### Oration 14: *On Love for the Poor*

My brothers and fellow paupers—for we are all poor and needy where divine grace is concerned, even though, measured by our paltry standards one man may seem to have more than another—give ear to my sermon on loving the poor. Do so not grudgingly but generously, that you may become rich in the kingdom, and join us in praying that this our gift to you shall be rich in turn as we nourish your souls with our words and break spiritual bread for the hungry, whether by causing food to rain down from heaven and providing the *bread of the angels*, as Moses did of old,<sup>3</sup> or by actually feeding thousands to the full with a few loaves in the desert, as Jesus later did, the true bread and source of the true life. It is not at all an easy task to discover the one virtue that surpasses all others and to give it the sceptre and palm, just as it is not easy in a meadow fragrant with many blossoms to find the most fragrant and beautiful. One after the other they all beckon our sight and smell and plead to be picked first. At any rate, to the best of my ability, I propose to examine these matters as follows.

2. *Faith, hope, love*, are a fine thing, *these three*; Abram bears witness to faith, because he was justified for his faith;<sup>6</sup> Enos, to hope, because he first *hoped to call upon* the name of the Lord, and also all just men who suffered because of their hope; the divine Apostle, to love, because he had the courage to call down a curse even upon himself for the sake of Israel;<sup>8</sup> and *God* himself, whose name is *love*. Hospitality is a fine thing; among the just, the witness is Lot the Sodomite, no sodomite in character;<sup>10</sup> among sinners, the harlot Rahab, no harlot by choice, who for her hospitality won praise and salvation. Brotherly love is a fine thing; the witness is Jesus, who willed not only to be called our brother but also to suffer on our behalf. Love of mankind is a fine thing; the witness is again Jesus, who not only created mankind *for good works*<sup>12</sup> and joined his image to clay in order to guide us to the blessings of heaven in all their beauty and help us attain them, but also became man for our sake. Long-suffering is a fine thing; once again the witness is Jesus, who not only forbore to summon the *legions of angels* against those who rose in rebellion against him and to rebuke Peter for raising his sword, but even restored the ear of the man who had been struck. Stephen, too, the disciple of Christ, later acted in the same way when he prayed for those who were stoning him.<sup>14</sup> Meekness is a fine thing, as Moses and David<sup>16</sup> attest—this is the quality that Scripture ascribes to them above all—and their teacher, who neither wrangles, nor cries aloud, nor lifts up his voice in the street, nor offers resistance to those who lead him off.

3. Zeal is a fine thing, as Phinehas attests, who by piercing the Midianite woman and the man of Israel with one blow that he might remove reproach from the people of Israel won a reputation for resolute action; and after him those who say, *I have been very jealous for the Lord*, and, *For I feel a divine jealousy for you*<sup>20</sup> and, *Zeal for thy house has consumed me*; and not only say these words, but also feel them. Mortification of the body is a fine thing; accept the evidence of Paul who continually disciplines himself and through Israel puts fear into those who in self-conceit indulge their bodies;<sup>22</sup> and of Jesus himself who fasted and was tempted and prevailed over the Tempter. Prayer vigils are a fine thing; accept the evidence of God, who stayed sleepless praying before the Passion.<sup>24</sup> Purity and virginity are a fine thing; accept the evidence of Paul who prescribes rules for these matters and makes just provision for marriage and celibacy; and of Jesus himself, who was born of a virgin in order to honour both birth-giving and especially virginity at the same time. Self-restraint is a fine thing; accept the evidence of David, who showed restraint in not drinking of the water from the well in Bethlehem but poured a libation instead, refusing to quench his own thirst with the blood of others.<sup>26</sup>

4. Solitude and quiet are a fine thing; this is the lesson I draw from Elijah's Carmel, and John's wilderness,<sup>28</sup> and Jesus' mountain, to which he often retreated, as we know, and communed quietly with himself. Simplicity is a fine thing; this is the lesson I draw from Elijah, who visits at the widow's house;<sup>30</sup> from John, who put on a garment of *camel's* hair; from Peter, who fed on lupines bought for a farthing.<sup>32</sup> Humility is a fine thing; the examples are many and varied, but chief among them is the Saviour and Lord of all who not only humbled himself to the point of taking the form of *a servant* and submitted *his face* to the shame of *spitting* and was numbered with the transgressors,<sup>35</sup> he who purges the world from sin, but who also put on servant garb and washed his *disciples' feet*. Poverty and contempt for worldly goods are a fine thing, as Zacchaeus attests and Christ himself, the one by offering almost everything he owned when Christ visited him,<sup>38</sup> Christ by defining a rich man's perfection as dependent on this very act. And, to speak still more pointedly on these matters, contemplation is a fine thing, as is action: the one because it rises above this world and advances towards the Holy of Holies and conducts our mind upward to what is akin to it, the other because it welcomes Christ and serves him and confirms the power of love through good works.

5. Each of these forms a single road to salvation, which has as its certain destination one of the blessed and everlasting abodes; for just as there is a wide variety of goals in life so in God's house also there are *many rooms*, assigned and distributed on the basis of individual merit. One man may excel in one particular virtue, a second in another, a third in several, a fourth in all, if he can. Let him but attempt the journey and press

forward, following in the steps of the one who with good guidance and direction leads us through *the narrow way* and *gate* toward the wide spaces of heavenly bliss. Now if, following Paul and Christ himself, we must regard charity as the first and greatest of the commandments since it is the very sum of the Law and the Prophets, its most vital part I find is the love of the poor along with compassion and sympathy for our fellow man. Of all things, nothing so serves God as mercy because no other thing is more proper to God, whose *mercy and truth* go before, and to whom we must demonstrate our capacity for mercy rather than condemnation;<sup>44</sup> and by nothing else more than by showing compassion to our fellow man do we receive compassionate treatment in turn at the hands of him who weighs mercy in his scale and balance and gives just recompense.

6. We must, then, open our hearts to all the poor and to all those who are victims of disasters from whatever cause, for the commandment enjoins us to *rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep*. Kindness is the gift we must, as human beings, proffer our fellow humans whatever the cause of their plight: widowhood, orphanhood, exile from homeland, savagery of tyrants, callousness of magistrates, ruthlessness of tax-collectors, brutality of bandits, rapacity of thieves, confiscation or shipwreck. All alike deserve our pity and look to our hands just as we look to the hands of God whenever we are in need of something. And of these very victims those whose plight stands in contrast to their former state arouse greater sympathy than do those whose misfortune is chronic. I am referring particularly to those wasted with the sacred disease that devours their flesh and bones and marrow clear through—the visitation that Scripture threatens against certain individuals<sup>47</sup>—and betrayed by this wretched, vile, and faithless body. How I came to be joined to it, I do not know; nor how I am the image of God and concocted of clay at the same time, this body that both wars against me when it is healthy and when warred against, brings me pain, that I both cherish as my fellow-servant and evade as my enemy; that I both try to escape as my chain and respect as my fellow heir. If I struggle to suppress it, I lose the helper I need to achieve my noble aims, knowing as I do why I was created and that it is through my actions that I am to ascend to God.

7. I show it consideration as a co-worker but I do not know how to suppress its insurgency nor how I can help falling away from God when the weight of its shackles drags me down and keeps me pinioned to the ground. It is an affable enemy and a scheming friend. What an incompatible alliance! I take good care of the object of my fear and feel dread before the object of my love. Before making war, I come to terms with it; before making peace, I am at odds with it. What is this wisdom that I embody? What is this great mystery? Or, is it his will that we, who are a portion of God and have our source

in heaven above, should always look to him as we wrestle and fight against the flesh and that the weakness to which we are harnessed should serve to impress upon us our true worth, lest we disdain our Creator out of pride and an inflated sense of our own importance? that we may know that we are at once most exalted and most humble, earthly and celestial, ephemeral and immortal, heirs of light and fire—or of darkness—depending on which way we turn? Such is our hybrid nature which, in my view at least, takes this form so that whenever we feel exalted because of our likeness to God's image, we may be brought down because of our clay. Let who will ruminate on these matters; we shall join him ourselves at a more appropriate time.

8. But now, though confronted with the suffering of others, I have been dwelling on the infirmity of my own flesh. We must, my brothers, as I started to say, look after it as being our kinsman and fellow-servant. For, even if I have denounced it as my enemy for the distress it causes, still, I also embrace it as a friend because of him who joined us together. And we must look after the physical needs of our neighbours, both the healthy and those consumed by the same ailment, no less than we do our individual persons. For we are all one in the Lord, rich or poor, slave or free, healthy or sick in body; and there is one head of all, Christ, who is the source of all things; and the same relationship that exists between the members of the body exists between ourselves, both as individuals and collectively. This is why we must not overlook or neglect those who have fallen victim to our common infirmity before us; nor should our contentment, because we enjoy physical well-being, exceed our distress that our brethren fare ill. It is incumbent upon us to believe that the welfare of our own bodies and souls lies in this one thing, loving regard for our fellow man. Let us consider the matter as follows.

9. The pitiful plight of other people is due to one thing alone, a lack of material resources, a condition that might perhaps be corrected by time, or hard work, or a friend, or a relative, or a change in circumstances. But for these people, what is no less pitiful, indeed, even more so, is that, in addition, they are deprived of the opportunity to work and help themselves acquire the necessaries of life; and the fear of their illness ever outweighs any hope in their minds for well-being. As a result, hope, the only antidote for victims of misfortune, can be of little help to them. Besides poverty, they are afflicted with a second evil, disease, indeed, the most abhorrent and oppressive evil of all and the one that the majority of people are especially ready to label a curse. And third, there is the fact that most people cannot stand to be near them, or even look at them, but avoid them, are nauseated by them, and regard them as abominations, so to speak. It is this that preys on them even more than their ailment: they sense that they are actually hated for their misfortune. I cannot bear to think of their suffering without weeping; I am

overcome by the mention of it; and I hope that you will feel as I do, and, through tears, dry their tears. Everyone present who loves Christ as well as the poor and who has a capacity for pity, which both defines God and derives from him, I am sure feels the same. But you have witnessed their distress even yourselves.

10. There lies before our eyes a dreadful and pathetic sight, one that no one would believe who has not seen it: human beings alive yet dead, disfigured in almost every part of their bodies, barely recognisable for who they once were or where they came from; or rather, the pitiful wreckage of what had once been human beings. By way of identification they keep calling out the names of their mothers and fathers, brothers, and places of origin: "I am the son of so-and-so. So-and-so is my mother. This is my name. You used to be a close friend of mine." And this they do because they cannot be identified from the way they used to look: mutilated, stripped of their possessions, their families, their friends, their very bodies; the only people in the world who hate and feel pity for themselves at the same time; who know not whether they should grieve more for the limbs they have lost or for those they have left; for those that disease has already eaten away or those it has not touched. The first have been eaten away in misery, the rest in greater misery preserved; the first have perished before burial, the others can rely on no one who will commit them to the grave, since even the most kind and considerate person shows no feeling at all for them. And on this account alone we have lost sight of the fact that we are flesh and compassed in a lowly body, and we are so derelict in our obligation to look after our fellow man that we actually believe that avoiding these people assures the well-being of our own persons. There are those, of course, who handle ripe and, it may be, fetid corpses and haul the stinking carcasses of dumb animals and have no objections to being covered with muck. These unfortunates, on the other hand, we avoid at all costs—the inhumanity of it!—hardly abiding the thought that in fact we breathe the same air as they.

11. What could be more loyal than a father? What more devoted than a mother? Yet even their natural instincts have been denied to them. A father spontaneously grieves over his own son, the one he fathered and brought up, whom he regarded as the only light of his life, the object of so many fervent prayers to God; yet he drives him away in spite of himself. His mother relives the pain of giving birth and her heart is wrenched; and with piteous cries she keeps calling out his name and lays him out and makes lament over him living as though he were dead. "Hapless child of a heart-broken mother!" she sobs. "The disease has taken its bitter toll of us both. My poor child! My child that I do not recognise! My child that I raised in crags and *mountains and deserts*, with wild beasts you will dwell and a rock will be your shelter and none but the most pious of men will look

upon you.” And then she cries out those piteous words of Job, *Why* were you formed in your mother’s *belly* and *not* come forth *from the womb* and expire *immediately* so that your birth and death might be simultaneous? *Why* did you not die untimely, before tasting the sorrows of life? *Why* did *your knees* receive you? *Why* did you suck *the breasts* when you were doomed to a life of misery, a life worse than death? As she says these words she unleashes a flood of tears; the poor woman wants to embrace her child’s flesh but shrinks from it in hostile fear. Outcries and persecutions become their public lot, directed not against criminals but hapless victims. A man thinks nothing of taking up residence with a murderer and invites an adulterer to share not only his home but his board as well and chooses a temple-robber as his boon companion and becomes friends with those who have mistreated him. Yet from the suffering of one who has done him no wrong he turns away as though it were a crime. And so malice wins out over disease and we embrace viciousness as the mark of the gentleman and reject sympathy as degradation.

12. They are driven away from cities, they are driven away from homes, from the market-place, from public gatherings, from the streets, from festivities, from drinking parties, even—how they suffer!—from water itself. They neither share the flowing springs with everyone else nor are they permitted the use of rivers to rinse away their contamination; and the strangest thing of all is that we drive them away from our midst as pariahs on one hand, and on the other bring them back to us claiming that they are really harmless, but all the while denying them shelter and failing to provide them with basic sustenance, treatment for their wounds, and dressing for their sores as best as we can. And so they wander about night and day, helpless, naked, homeless, exposing their sores for all to see, dwelling on their former state, invoking the Creator, leaning on each other’s limbs in place of those they have lost, devising songs that tug at the heartstrings, begging for a crust of bread or a bit of food or some tattered rag to hide their shame or provide relief for their wounds. To them a kind benefactor is not someone who has supplied their need but anyone who has not cruelly sent them away. With most of them not even discomfiture is a deterrent from attending celebrations; quite the contrary, their destitution compels their attendance. I am referring, of course, to those religious festivals that we have organised for the public as a way of ministering to souls, when we meet either for some sacramental occasion or to celebrate the martyrs of truth with the aim of both honouring their trials and emulating their piety. Still, being human, they are both ashamed in the presence of their fellows on account of their misfortune, and they would rather be hidden in the mountains or crags or forests or, as a last resort, in the darkness of the night. Yet they throw themselves in our midst, miserable chattels, enough to make one weep (in fact there is perhaps a reason for this: they can serve as

reminders to us of our own weakness and dissuade us from attaching ourselves to any single circumstance in our present visible world as though it were permanent); yes, throw themselves, some from a desire to hear a human voice, others to look upon a human face, others to collect scraps of food from the well-to-do, but all to enjoy a measure of relief by baring their private woes.

13. Who is not overcome as their plaintive cries rise in a symphony of lament? What ear can bear the sound? What eye take in the sight? They lie beside one another, a wretched union born of disease, each contributing his own misfortune to the common fund of misery, thus heightening each other's distress; pitiful in their affliction, more so in the sharing of it. Some bystanders gather round them like spectators at a drama, deeply affected, but only for a moment. In the hot sun and the dust they writhe at men's feet; and sometimes, too, they are tormented by biting cold and rain and blasts of wind and narrowly escape being trampled on only because we find it repugnant to come into contact with them. Their mournful pleas stand in jarring contrast to the sacred chanting within and their piteous lament forms a counterpoint to the mystic voices. Why lay out the full measure of their tragedy to those in the midst of celebration? Perhaps I might raise a dirge even among yourselves, if I were to evoke in tragic detail all their sorrows; then their suffering will overwhelm your festal spirit. I speak this way because I am not yet able to persuade you that sometimes anguish is of more value than pleasure, sadness than celebration, meritorious tears than unseemly laughter.

14. This is how they suffer, and in fact far more wretchedly than I have indicated, these, our brothers in God, whether you like it or not; whose share in nature is the same as ours; who are formed of the same clay from the time of our first creation, knit together *with bones and sinews* just as we are, clothed *with skin and flesh* like everyone else (the divine Job says as much when in the course of his suffering he comes to understand how insignificant is our outward appearance); or rather, more importantly, who have the same portion as the image of God just as we do and who keep it perhaps better, wasted though their bodies may be; whose inner nature has put on the same *Christ* and who have been entrusted with the same *guarantee of the Spirit*<sup>55</sup> as we; who have been given to share with us the same laws, prophecies, testaments, liturgies, sacraments, hopes; for whom Christ, *who takes away the sin of all the world* died just as he did for us; who are *fellow heirs*<sup>57</sup> of the life in heaven, even if they have met with so much misfortune here on earth; who are buried with Christ and raised with him, *provided they suffer with him in order that they may also be glorified with him*.

15. But what of ourselves? We have received as our inheritance the great and new designation derived from Christ's name, we, *the holy nation; the royal priesthood; the peculiar and chosen people; the one zealous for good and salutary deeds; the disciples of Christ, the gentle<sup>62</sup> and loving who has borne our infirmities, who humbled himself so as to assume the lump of which we consist,<sup>65</sup> who for our sakes became poor in this flesh and earthly tabernacle of ours, who experienced pain and was bruised for us that we might become rich in divinity? Yes, what of ourselves, who have been given so great a model of sympathy and compassion? What will our attitude towards these people be? What shall we do? Shall we neglect them? Walk on by? Dismiss them as corpses, execrable, the vilest of beasts and creatures that crawl? Most certainly not, my brothers! These actions become neither ourselves, the flock of Christ, the good shepherd<sup>67</sup> who brings back *the one that went astray* and seeks *the one which is lost* and strengthens the weak one; nor do they become our human nature, which, learning piety and kindness from our common weakness, has given compassion the force of law.*

16. Will they, then, continue to suffer in the open while we lounge within luxurious homes bedecked with stone of every description, resplendent with gold and silver and the inlay of delicate mosaic and varied fresco that charm and beguile the eyes? Some we shall occupy ourselves, others we shall build, but for whom? Possibly not even for our own heirs, but for strangers and others not our kinsmen, and of these not even for the ones who are fond of us, I imagine, but—worst of all—our bitterest and most resentful enemies. They, in the meantime, will be shivering in their worn and tattered rags, if, that is, they are fortunate to have even those, while we pamper our own selves with soft, flowing gowns and filmy garments of linen and silk, costumes that will detract from rather than enhance our appearance—for this is how I regard anything that exceeds the bounds of need or practicality—while others we shall store away in vain and futile provision to be consumed by moths and all-devouring time. They, on the other hand, will lack even food enough to live—shame on my self-indulgence! woe for their misfortune!—but, fainting and famished, will lie in front of our doorways, without even the bodily wherewithal to beg—no voice to cry out in pain, no hands to stretch forth in supplication, no feet to carry them to the prosperous, no breath to swell their lamentation, deeming the heaviest of their ills the easiest to bear in that they actually feel gratitude to their eyes alone that they are spared the sight of their own ravaging.

17. Such is their condition. As for us, we shall magnificently ensconce our magnificent selves on a high and lofty bed amid exquisite and delicate coverlets and be put out of temper if we so much as hear the sound of their begging. Our floors must be scented with flowers—oftentimes out of season at that—and our table drizzled with



perfumes—naturally the most fragrant and costly perfumes—that we may coddle ourselves all the more; and we must have slave boys to dance attendance on us, some lined up in order, their tresses loose and effeminate, their beards betraying too much care, their eyes made up to lascivious excess, others balancing wine cups on their finger tips with consummate at once poise and care and others artificially stirring the air over our heads with fans or generating a breeze with their palms to cool our mass of flesh; and beside this, a table lavish with meats that all the elements of nature, air, earth, water, contribute in profusion to our meal, and crammed with the creations of cooks and caterers, all engaged in a contest to see who will have the most success in pandering to our indecent and ungrateful belly, that oppressive burden and author of evils, that most insatiable and treacherous beast, doomed to elimination along with its eliminated food.<sup>71</sup> While *they* would be quite satisfied with plain water, *we* keep demanding bowls of wine until we are drunk—or I should say even more than drunk, at least the more excessive among us. One vintage we shall send back, another will receive our seal of approval for its fragrant bouquet, we shall wax eloquent about the virtues of a third and we shall feel cheated if some imported name brand is not included along with the domestic variety to dominate the occasion like some foreign potentate. We feel obliged either to be, or to have the reputation of being, extravagant voluptuaries, as if it were shameful not to be considered depraved, slaves to the belly and what is below it.

18. Why is this so, my friends and brothers? Why are we ourselves sick in our very souls, with a sickness far worse than any that affect the body? For it is clear to me that bodily sickness is involuntary, but the other the result of deliberate choice; that the one comes to an end with the present life, but the other accompanies us when we leave this world; that the one is the object of pity, the other of hatred, at least on the part of those with any intelligence. Why do we not lend nature a helping hand while we have the chance? Why do we creatures of flesh make no attempt to succour our poor fleshly existence? Why do we revel amid the misfortunes of our brothers? God preserve me either from being prosperous when these are in want, or healthy if I do not try to assuage their wounds; from having enough food and clothing and a comfortable home if I do not offer them bread and give them as much to wear as I can and open my home to them. No; either we must set everything aside unto Christ that we may become his true followers, taking up the cross, and, unencumbered by anything that would drag us down, buoyantly soar to the world on high and gain Christ at the cost of everything else, ennobled through our humility and through our poverty enriched; or we must share what we have with Christ so that owning possessions may somehow be sanctified in itself by our putting them to good use and sharing them with those who have none. But even if I should sow for myself alone, then let me sow—but let others eat as well. To

quote once again the words of Job, *Let thorns grow instead of wheat and foul weeds instead of barley*, and a searing wind steal upon me, and a whirlwind wipe out my efforts so that my hard work go for naught. And even if I should build barns and store up wealth upon wealth, may my *soul this night*<sup>73</sup> be required to justify the treasures I have wickedly hoarded.

19. Will we never learn restraint, however late? Will we not repudiate our want of feeling, not to say petty selfishness? Will we not take note of our human condition? Will we not dedicate our own resources to the misfortunes of others? Nothing in human life is naturally secure or smooth or self-sustaining or permanent. Our fortunes run in a cyclical pattern that brings changes one after another, frequently within the space of a single day and sometimes even an hour, and one may rather count on the shifting winds, or the wake of a sea-faring ship, or the illusory dreams of night with their brief respite, or the lines that children at play trace in the sand, than on human prosperity. The wise are those who because of their distrust of the present save for themselves the world to come and because of the uncertain and fickle nature of human success embrace the kindness that does not fail. Their aim is to gain in any case one at least of three things: never to become the victims of misfortune, since the Deity who elicits our compassion by his own kindness frequently honours the pious in kind here on earth; or to have a deep-seated confidence in God and believe that their misfortunes result not from sinfulness but somehow because of his plan; or, finally, to demand as their right from the prosperous the generosity that they showed to the needy when they enjoyed good fortune themselves.

20. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, says Scripture, nor *the rich man in his riches*, nor the *mighty man in his might*, even if they have reached the pinnacle, respectively, of wisdom or wealth or power; and, I shall add also the corollaries, nor the celebrity in his fame, nor the robust in his health, nor the handsome in his good looks, nor the young man in his youth; in short, let no one be puffed up in anything else that is valued here on earth, *but let him who glories glory in this alone*, in the *understanding* and seeking out of God, in sympathy for the afflicted, and in the laying by of something that will benefit him in the life to come. The other advantages are transitory and ephemeral and, like the pieces in a children's game, move this way and that and pass back and forth to different persons at different times, and nothing is so particularly one's own that it does not come to an end in time or change hands as a result of malice. These, on the other hand, are permanent and abiding; they never withdraw or fail or cheat the faithful of their hopes. But I think there is a further reason why no earthly good is trustworthy or durable for man (and, like everything else, the creative Word and the Wisdom that exceeds every

intelligence has well contrived this too, that we be pawns amid the objects of sight, which change and are changed now one way now another, are borne up and down and all around, and slip away before we can lay hold of them): that when we contemplate the changeableness and caprice of this world we may seek out the secure haven of the one to come. For what should we have done if our prosperity were permanent, given that now, though it is not, we are so firmly attached to it and held in such thrall by its deceptive pleasure that we cannot imagine anything better or higher than our present circumstances; and this despite the fact that we are taught and believe that we are created in the image of God which exists on high and draws us to itself?

21. *Who is wise, and will understand these things?* Who will leave behind what is fleeting? Who will throw in his lot with what abides? Who will think of the present as passing away? Who what is hoped for as here and now? Who will distinguish between appearance and reality, ignore the one and court the other? Who between fact and fiction? Who between the tabernacle below and the city above? Who between temporary and permanent home? Who darkness from light? Who between the slime of the abyss and holy ground? Who between flesh and spirit? Who between God and world-ruler? Who between the shadow of death and the life eternal? Who will barter the things of the present for the future? Who the wealth that slips away from the kind that is not lost? Who things visible for things unseen? Yes, blessed is the man who distinguishes between these things, dividing them in accordance with the separation of the Word that divides the better from the worse,<sup>78</sup> and purposes *in his heart to go up*, as the divine David says at one point, and, fleeing this *valley of weeping*, seeks with all his might *the things that are above*, and takes his place at Christ's side, crucified to the world along with Christ,<sup>81</sup> and together with Christ ascends, heir to the life that no longer fails or deceives, where there is found no more *a biting viper by the path*, watching against our *heel*, even as his own *head* is watched against. The same David, just like a herald most loud of voice booming an important public proclamation, calling the rest of us slow of heart and lovers of *lies*, rightly cries out to us not to cling so tightly to the visible world or to regard the sum of earthly happiness as nothing more than a full supply of food and drink, perishable things. And I expect the blessed Micah too has something like this in mind when he says, confronting those who make a show of virtue as they creep along the ground, *Draw ye near to the everlasting mountains. Arise; for this is not thy rest*. These are almost the very words that our Lord and Saviour uses to admonish us. What does he say? *Rise, let us go hence*. He is not merely conducting his disciples of the moment from that specific place, as one might think, but he is drawing all his disciples as well away for all time from the earth and the things of earth to the heavens and the blessings of heaven.

22. So let us now follow the Word; let us seek the repose on high; let us cast aside the opulence of this world; let us have recourse to only that portion of it that serves a good end; let us gain our lives by acts of charity; let us share what we have with the poor that we may be rich in the bounty of heaven. Give a portion of your soul too, not just your body; give a portion to God too, not just the world; take something from the belly, dedicate it to the Spirit; pluck something from the fire, place it far from the devouring flame below; rob from the tyrant, commit to the Lord. *Give a portion to seven*, that is, to this life, *and even to eight*, the life that will receive us after this one; give a little to him from whom you have so much; give even the whole to him who has bestowed all. You will never surpass God's generosity even if you hand over your entire substance and yourself in the bargain. Indeed, to receive in the truest sense is to give oneself to God. No matter how much you offer, what remains is always more; and you will be giving nothing that is your own because all things come from God. And just as a man cannot overtake his own shadow, which recedes with every forward step and always stays the same distance ahead; nor his bulk surmount the head that always lies above it, in the same way also we cannot outdo God in our gifts, for we do not give anything that is not his or that surpasses his own bounty.

23. Recognise the source of your existence, of your breath of life, your understanding, your knowledge of God (itself the greatest of all gifts), your hope of gaining the heavenly kingdom, equality of honour with the angels, the contemplation of glory that now appears in a mirror, dimly, but then will be more perfect and clear; recognise that you have become a son of God,<sup>90</sup> fellow heir with Christ, if I may be so bold, even very God. Where did you obtain all these things? From whom? Or, to speak of lesser matters, that is, the visible world around us, who gave you to see the beauty of heaven, the sun in its course, the orb of the moon, the countless stars and the harmony and order, just as in a lyre, that prevails among all these, the turning hours, the changing seasons, the cycle of years, the equal portioning of night and day, the burgeoning earth, the flowing air, the expanse of ocean at once fixed and free, the river depths, the streaming winds? Who gave you rain, husbandry, food, the arts, dwellings, laws, governments, a civilised mode of life, friendly converse with your fellow man? How is it that some animals have been domesticated and pull a plow while others supply you with meat? Who made you lord and king of everything on earth? Who, without listing them individually, endowed you with all the things that lift man above the rest of creation? Is it not he who now in return and exchange for all asks that you show kindness to your fellow man? Can we then not be ashamed if we, after all we have received from him and hope yet to receive, will not grant him even this one thing, kindness? He set us apart from the brute beasts and alone of the creatures on earth honoured us with reason. Shall we now brutalise our own selves?

Have we been so corrupted by our life of ease, or deranged, or I know not what, that along with the bran and barley cakes that we have procured for ourselves, possibly by foul means, we shall imagine that we are naturally superior to our fellows?<sup>92</sup> And just as there was once, at least so legend tells us, a race of giants set apart from the rest of mankind, shall we too tower over these people like supermen, like the famous Nimrod or the race of Anak that once oppressed Israel, or those who provoked the flood that swept the earth clean?<sup>95</sup> He who is God and Lord does not shrink from being called our Father; shall we for our part deny our own kinsmen?

24. In no way, my friends and brothers! Let us not become bad *stewards* of the gifts we have received lest we hear Peter say to us, Shame on you for clinging to what belongs to another; imitate God's equality, and no one will be poor.<sup>97</sup> Let us not struggle to amass and hoard fortunes while others struggle in poverty, lest from one direction the divine Amos reproach us with these harsh and ominous words, Come now, you who say, *When will the new moon be over*, that we may sell, *and the Sabbath*, that we may open our treasures? along with the words that follow, which hold the threat of God's wrath over the heads of those who possess a large and small weight; and the blessed Micah, from another, who, convinced that excess breeds a wanton contempt towards others, rails, it would seem, even against all extravagance itself, the living delicately on beds of ivory and pampering oneself with the sleekest of ointments and waxing fat on the flesh of tender calves *from the midst of the stall* and lambs *from the flock* and clapping to *the sound of the harp* and, still more, believing that any of these things is abiding and permanent (but it may be he regards these activities as less shocking when compared with the fact that in their revelry they were not grieved *over the ruin of Joseph*, for he adds this to his indictment of excess). May we avoid the same fate in our day; may we not be so addicted to luxury as actually to scorn the compassion of a God who condemns this behaviour, even though he does not turn his wrath upon sinners at the moment of their transgression or immediately after it.

25. Let us put into practice the supreme and first law of God, *who sends rain on the just and on the sinners* and makes his *sun rise* upon all alike. To all the earth's creatures he has spread out land in spacious expanse and springs and rivers and forests; to the winged species he has given air, and to the creatures of the deep, water, and the basic requisites for life to all without stint, subject to no power, restricted by no law, isolated by no boundaries. On the contrary, he has set out the same necessities amply for all to share yet, for all that, in no way in short supply, thus both bestowing honour by the impartiality of his gift upon the equality of honour within the natural world and displaying the abundance of his own goodness. Yet men squirrel away gold and silver

and quantities of soft and superfluous clothes and glittering jewels and similar items that bear the stamp of war and dissension and of the first act of rebellion, and then in their folly arch their brows and refuse to show compassion towards the unfortunate among their kinsmen. They are neither willing to help them with basic necessities out of their superfluity—what perversity! what stupidity!—nor do they reflect, if on nothing else, at least on the fact that poverty, wealth, what we call freedom, slavery, and such kinds of terms were introduced into human history at a later stage and stormed upon the scene like so many epidemics, as the companions of evil, whose brainchildren they in fact are. But, as Scripture says, *from the beginning it was not so*. He who created man from the beginning left him free and with free will, subject only to the law of his commandment and rich in the delights of Paradise. This was the gift he chose to bestow upon the subsequent generations of mankind also, through the one first seed. Freedom and wealth meant simply keeping the commandment; true poverty and slavery are its transgression.

26. But ever since, there have been jealousies and dissensions and the deceitful tyranny of the serpent, which constantly seduces us with lewd pleasures and incites the more audacious against the weaker; and our human family has been so fragmented that we are now alienated from one another with a variety of labels, and greed has hacked away at the nobility of our nature to the point of arrogating even the legal process, the right arm of the power of government. But as for you, I ask you to look to that original egalitarian status, not the latter-day discrimination; not the law of the tyrant, but that of the Creator. Help nature as much as you can; honour your ancient freedom; cultivate your self-worth; draw a veil over the ignominy of our race; treat sickness; alleviate need: the healthy man, the need of the sick; the rich man, the need of the poor; the man who has not stumbled, that of him who lies fallen and crushed; the man full of spirit, that of the one discouraged; the one who enjoys prosperity, that of him who toils in adversity. Offer a gift of thanks to God that you are among those who are able to benefit others instead of those who require assistance; that you do not look to others' hands for help, but they to yours. Grow rich not in property alone but also in piety; not in gold alone, but also in virtue, or rather in this alone. Come to be held in higher esteem than your neighbour by proving yourself more kind. Come to be a god to the unfortunate by imitating God's mercy.

27. In nothing does man's affinity with God lie so much as in his capacity to do good. Even though God performs good works in greater and we in lesser number, each, I think we may say, does so in accordance with his power. God created us; and, when he frees us, he gathers us to him again. Do not you, in turn, neglect the one who has fallen. God has

been merciful in the greatest ways, giving us in addition to everything else law and the prophets and, before these, the unwritten law of nature, the watchdog of our actions, by way of pricking our consciences and advising and directing us; ultimately surrendering himself to redeem the life of the world; blessing us with *apostles, evangelists, teachers, pastors*, healings, miracles, restoration to life, abolition of death, triumph over him who prevailed over us, covenants, one in figure, one in realisation, gifts of *the Holy Spirit*, the mystery of the new salvation. As for you, if you are in fact capable of even higher things, things that have a salutary effect on the soul—for here too God has made you rich, if you should so choose—do not withhold also these benefactions from the one in need; or rather, as your first and foremost concern, try to give to him who begs from you even before his petition,<sup>105</sup> being merciful and ever lending your words and solicitously seeking repayment of the loan with interest in the form of the spiritual increment of the one you have benefitted. In this way the beneficiary adds steadily to the deposit of your words and little by little makes grow in his own right the seeds of piety.<sup>107</sup> If you cannot, do at least the secondary, less important things and all that you can: extend a helping hand; offer food; give old clothes; provide medicine; bandage wounds; ask after them; counsel fortitude; offer encouragement; keep them company. You will not demean yourself in the process; you will not catch their malady even if the squeamish deceive themselves into believing such nonsense; or rather, this is how they justify their, call it over-cautious or sacrilegious, behaviour; in point of fact, they are taking refuge in cowardice as though it were a truly worthwhile and wise course of action. On this score accept the evidence of science as well as of the doctors and nurses who look after these people. Not one of them has ever yet endangered his health through contact with these patients. You, then, servant of Christ, who are devoted to God and your fellow man, granted we are dealing with a terrible affliction, one that should make us careful, do not give in to small-mindedness; draw strength from your faith; let compassion overcome your misgivings, the fear of God your fastidiousness; let piety come before considerations of the flesh; do not disregard, do not walk past your brother; do not turn away from him as though he were an abomination, a blight, or anything else that one should avoid and repudiate. He is part of you, even if he is bent down with misfortune. *The hapless commits himself to thee*, as to God, even if you arrogantly hurry past him (perhaps my choice of words will make you feel ashamed). The opportunity to show compassion lies open to you even if the Alien One alienates you from the satisfaction.

28. For everyone who puts out to sea shipwreck is an ever-present possibility, and all the more so the more intrepid the sailor. Likewise, bodily ills are ever-present to everyone invested with a body, and all the more so if he walks with his head held high and pays no heed to those lying at his feet. As long as you sail with the wind at your back,

give a hand to the castaway. As long as you are prosperous and whole, help the one in distress. Do not wait to learn first-hand what a terrible thing inhumanity is and what a blessing a heart open to those in need. Do not invite God to raise his hand against those too proud to take notice of the poor. Here is how you should respond to the misfortunes of others: give something to the needy even if it is a little; it is not to the one who is utterly destitute, nor to God either, if it is the best in your power. Offer your hearty goodwill in lieu of a large donation; if you own nothing, shed a tear; compassion that issues from the heart is a great balm for the afflicted, and sincere sympathy goes a long way in lightening the burden of misfortune. A human being, my good fellow, is not less important to you than a farm animal that has fallen into a ditch or wandered off and that the Law obligates you to extricate and return.<sup>110</sup> (Whatever other meaning, deeper and more hidden, the Law masks in the profundity it so often employs, this is not for me to know but the Spirit who searches and understands *everything*. My limited understanding of the passage, at any rate, is that it is exercising us in the kindness that applies to little matters and guiding us toward the greater and more perfect form of it.) If we are expected to show kindness even to brute beasts, how much do we owe our own kind, our equals in worth?

29. This, then, is what reason and the Law demand, as well as the most sensible among us, who agree that it is more honourable to be a benefactor than a beneficiary and that compassion should be more keenly cultivated than profit. What would you say of the sages in our midst? I am excluding the heathens: they dream up gods to cater to their baser instincts, particularly the Bringer of Gain, on whom they bestow highest honours. In fact—and this is worse—there are a number of tribes that practice even human sacrifice by way of honouring some of their deities. Barbarity for them is a form of piety. They derive great pleasure themselves from sacrifices of this sort, and, becoming in the process vicious priests and devotees of vicious rites, think that their gods share their sentiments. Yet there are certain people in our own midst—it is enough to make one weep—who, so far from commiserating with those in distress and helping them, actually subject them to cruel verbal and physical abuse. Mouthing vain and empty platitudes and truly speaking *from the earth*<sup>113</sup> and talking to the air instead of to discriminating ears familiar with God's precepts they even have the impudence to say, "Their affliction comes from God, as does our prosperity. Who am I to overturn God's ruling and appear more merciful than God? Let them struggle, let them suffer, let them be unfortunate; it is God's will." This, in truth, is the only time they display any love for God, that is, when they feel obliged to watch their pennies and bully the helpless. Their words make it quite plain that they do not believe that their good fortune comes from God. After all, who could entertain such notions regarding the needy if he were



convinced that it is God who gave him his possessions? For those who possess a gift from God and those who use their possessions in his service are by definition one and the same.

30. But whether their affliction actually comes from God will remain obscure so long as matter stays true to its nature, unsteady as in a stream. Who really knows whether one man is punished for his misdeeds while another is exalted for praiseworthy behavior, or whether the opposite holds true: one man is placed on a pedestal because of his wickedness while another is tested because of his goodness, the one raised higher that he may fall the harder, allowed to let his evil erupt like an abscess beforehand in order that his punishment may be all the more justified, the other persecuted for no discernible reason in order that any impurity he has, even if scant, may be smelted out, like gold refined in a furnace? For no one is completely free from corruption, certainly if born in nature, as we are told, even though he may appear worthy. I find a similar sense of mystery in Scripture although it would take long to enumerate all the expressions of the Spirit that lead me to this conclusion. Nay, *who* could measure the grains of sand of *the sea, and the drops of rain*, and the fathoms of the deep? *Who* could find out the depths of God's wisdom in all things whereby he has both created the universe and directs it in the way he himself both wishes and knows? It is enough, as the divine Apostle says, merely to express wonderment at the inscrutability and incomprehensibility of it and pass on. *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways!* and, *Who has known the mind of the Lord?* Job says, *Who has come to the limit of his wisdom? Who is wise and will understand these things*<sup>118</sup> and will not measure by a standard beyond his reach what is beyond measurement?

31. So let someone else flaunt a cavalier attitude toward these matters, or, rather, let no one do so. As for me, I am reluctant to attribute every instance of hardship here below to moral turpitude or the reprieve therefrom to piety. The fact is that, sometimes, for some utilitarian end, either evil is held at bay through the misfortune of malefactors or the cause of virtue advanced by the prosperity of the righteous; on the other hand, not always, of course, or fully, because this, I say, is the function only of the age to come, when one group will receive the rewards of their virtue and the other the wages of their sinfulness. The one will arise *to the resurrection of life* and the other *to the resurrection of judgment*, says Scripture, whereas the things of this earth are of a different kind and a different mode of existence: they tend all toward the other life where the very treatment that appears to us inequable possesses, we may be sure, a kind of equity in God's eyes, just as in the body beauty is to be found and appreciated in the interrelation between its prominences and its recesses, large and small, and, in a landscape, between its heights

and its valleys. The same holds true with a craftsman: material that is uneven and asymmetric at the start becomes an artistic whole if it is shaped with a particular composition in mind. When we see the creation in finished form, that is when we too realise and concede its beauty. So, unlike ourselves, neither does God lack artistry nor does he manage our affairs indiscriminately just because we are not privy to the reasons behind them.

32. If we may adopt an image to describe our condition, there is not much difference between ourselves and those who are seasick and dizzy. They think that everything is spinning round when it is they who are doing the spinning. The persons of whom we are speaking are in a similar predicament. They refuse to accept that God is wiser than they if some incident throws them off balance. They should direct their efforts to learning the reason in the hope that their labor will be rewarded with the truth; or they should have a serious discussion with those who are wiser in these matters than themselves and more spiritual (since this, too, is a special gift; knowledge is not a universal attainment); or they should pursue this knowledge through a purity of life and seek wisdom from the true Wisdom. Instead—what stupidity!—they take the easier way and condemn the universe as irrational when the irrationality arises from their own ignorance. And so they are wise in their stupidity, or rather, unwise and unknowing in a wisdom I can only describe as bizarre.<sup>121</sup> As a result, one school of thought has formulated the doctrine of fate and a mechanical universe, themselves truly mechanical and fortuitously contrived concepts; another postulates some kind of irrational and indissoluble dominion of stars that orchestrate our existence to suit themselves, or, I should say, are themselves moved to do so by some external necessity; and, further, conjunctions and oppositions on the part of certain planets and fixed stars as well as a universal motion that controls all things.<sup>123</sup> Others have resorted to inflicting their private fantasies upon the poor human race and have broken down every aspect of Providence that eludes their perception and understanding into diverse systems of jargon and belief. There are others still who charge that Providence actually has very limited resources at its disposal; while holding to the view that the realm above us is governed by it, they shrink from bringing it down to our human level where it is really needed, as though afraid that they will make our benefactor too benevolent if too many people profit from his benefactions, or that they will be neglected if God becomes exhausted from benefiting too many.<sup>125</sup>

33. But, as I have said, let us have nothing at all to do with these people. Scripture has in fact already dealt with them effectively. *Their senseless minds* became vain, the Bible says; *claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God by insulting universal Providence with fairy stories and shadowy figments.* As for us, let us

neither invent these monstrous fantasies ourselves if indeed we, who use reason and are devotees of reason, have any regard for reason, nor let us endorse those who entertain such ideas, even if their ridiculous theories and beliefs roll glibly off their tongues and they enjoy the novelty in them. No; let us rather both believe that God is the Maker and Creator of all things—for how could the whole have come into existence if someone did not give it substance and form?—and also include Providence, whose role it is to bind and keep this whole together, since one who creates necessarily also makes provision for his creation. The alternative is to assume that the whole proceeds under its own power and will, like a ship in the storm, founder and break up amid the turmoil of matter and revert to its original chaos and disorder. And let us have faith that our—call him what you will, Maker or Shaper—gives especial attention to our affairs even if our lives take an adverse turn quite unintelligible to us, perhaps for the purpose of having us admire, through our difficulty of comprehension, the reason that transcends all things. For everything that is easily grasped is easily despised, but what is beyond us increases our admiration in proportion to our difficulty in apprehending it; and everything that exceeds our reach whets our desire.

34. This is why we should neither admire health nor loathe disease indiscriminately; nor embrace ephemeral prosperity more warmly than behoves us and become caught up in its flux and in the process bankrupt, as it were, a portion of our soul on account of it; nor attack poverty as though it were thoroughly damned and despicable and in the class of hateful things. Instead, let us cultivate both contempt for that benighted health whose fruit is sin and respect for that disease that bears the badge of saintliness by showing reverence toward those who have triumphed through suffering, lest perchance there lie buried among the sick a second Job, one far more worthy of our reverence than the healthy, even if he is scraping away *the discharge*, even if he is suffering night and day *in the open air*, assailed by his wounds and his wife and his friends. Our aim must be both to turn away from ill-gotten gains—the reason why the rich man is justly tormented in the flame and pleads for a sip of refreshment—and to applaud the poverty that shows patience and gratitude, the one by which Lazarus secures salvation and is rich in repose in *Abraham's bosom*.

35. There is, however, in my opinion, an additional reason for regarding love of one's fellow man and compassion towards those in need as necessary: we are thus enabled to put a curb on those who feel as they do about these unfortunates, and we do not succumb to vacuous arguments and in the process lay the groundwork for cruelty against our own selves. There is one commandment and model that we should honour before any other. Which is it? Notice how timeless its truth is. Men of the Spirit have not

been content with making a pronouncement about the poor once or twice, and be done with it; nor have only some done so and not others, or some to a greater, and others to a lesser extent, as though one were dealing with a matter of no great importance or one not on the list of very pressing concerns. Quite the opposite: this is the first cause, or among the first, that everyone to a man urges with great feeling, sometimes with exhortations, sometimes with threats, sometimes with reproaches, and sometimes also with words of approbation for those who do good deeds in this way, in order that by their persistent reminders they might make the commandment a living force. Scripture says, *Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise, says the Lord.* Who does not fear the Lord aroused? It says, *Arise, O Lord my God; lift up thy hand; forget not the afflicted.* Let us pray that there be no such lifting up; let us be determined not to see his hand raised against those who reject him, or still more, raining blows on the pitiless. It says, *He does not forget the cry of the afflicted;* it says, *The needy shall not always be forgotten;* it says, *His eyes* (better and stronger than “eyelid”) *behold the poor.* It says, *His eyelids test the children of men*—the lesser, so to speak, and secondary form of oversight.

36. Someone might interject, “These remarks are by way of support for the destitute and impoverished who are the victims of injustice.” I do not disagree. Let this, however, be an added incentive to philanthropic effort on your part. So many words expended on their unjust treatment! If we gave them some actual help, their gratitude—do not doubt it—would be greater. For if he who mocks the poor insults his maker, then he honours the Creator, who looks after his creature. Again, when you read, *The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them both,* do not suppose that his making one poor and the other rich justifies harsh treatment of the poor on your part. There is no evidence that such a distinction originates with God. Both alike are God’s creation, according to Scripture, despite their superficial disparities. Let this fact shame you into showing sympathy and brotherhood, so that when your pride is puffed up by those externals, this realisation may chasten you and make you grow more humble. What else? *He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,* says Scripture. Who does not welcome such a debtor, who in time will repay the loan with interest? And again, *By alms and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for.*

37. Let us therefore purify ourselves through acts of mercy; let us take the fine soap and wash away the marks of filth and defilement from our souls; and let us become white, some *like wool* and others like snow according to the measure of our compassion. Let me mention something even more frightening: if you do not have a fracture, or a *bruise* or a *bleeding wound*, or any leprosy of the soul, either *an eruption* or a *spot*, conditions that require the healing power of Christ, since the old dispensation did little

to clear them away, still, you should revere him who endured wounds and frailty for our sakes; and you will show your reverence if you are kind and compassionate to one who is a member of Christ.<sup>141</sup> If, on the other hand, the thief and usurper of our souls by chance so crippled you either as you came down from Jerusalem to Jericho, or overtaking you in some other place, helpless and unarmed, so that you might with good reason utter those words of Scripture, *My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness*; if your attitude is such that you neither seek treatment nor are aware how you might be cured, woe indeed for your wound and the depth of your affliction! If, on the other hand, your condition is not yet completely and hopelessly incurable, approach the Healer, pray to him, heal your wounds through his, acquire like through like, or, rather, be cured of things greater by things lesser. He will say to your soul, *I am your deliverance*, and *Your faith has made you well*, and *See, you are well*, and all his words of compassion, provided he sees you compassionate towards those in pain.

38. *Blessed are the merciful*, says Scripture, *for they shall obtain mercy* (Mercy is not low on the list of the beatitudes); it says, *Blessed is the man who thinks on the poor and needy*; it says, *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends*; it says, *The just man is ever giving liberally and lending*. Let us appropriate the beatitude; let us earn a name for thoughtfulness; let us become good. Not even night should interrupt your mission of mercy. *Do not say, go and come again, tomorrow I will give it to you*. Do not let anything come between your impulse to do good and its execution: compassion, this alone, cannot be put off. *Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house*, and do so gladly. *He who does acts of mercy*, says Scripture, let him do so *with cheerfulness*. The good you do has twice the value when done promptly. What is done in bad grace or under duress is both distasteful and repellent. Doing good is cause for celebration, not complaint. *If you take away the yoke*, says Scripture, *the pointing of the finger* (I take this to mean hypercritical or suspicious scrutiny), *and speaking wickedness*, what will be the result? What a great and wonderful thing! What a magnificent reward for your actions! *Your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily*. Is there anyone who does not wish for light and healing?

39. I am moved also by Christ's *money box*, which urges us to feed the poor; and Peter and Paul's pact to include the poor in their evangelical mission;<sup>156</sup> and by the young man whose perfection is defined by the precept of giving one's goods to the poor. Do you think that compassion is not an obligation upon you but a matter of choice? Not rule but recommendation? This is what I myself also should very much like to think, but I stand in terror of his left hand, and the goats,<sup>158</sup> and the rebukes levelled against them by the one who has summoned them. They are condemned to take their places on the left not

because they stole, or committed sacrilege, or fornicated, or violated any other taboo, but because they did not serve Christ through the poor.

40. If, then, you place any credence in what I say, servants of Christ and brothers and follow heirs, while we may, let us visit Christ, let us heal Christ, let us feed Christ, let us clothe Christ, let us welcome Christ,<sup>160</sup> let us honour Christ, not with food alone, like some; nor with ointments, like Mary;<sup>162</sup> nor with tomb alone, like Joseph of Arimathea; nor with obsequies, like Nicodemus, who loved Christ in half measure; nor with gold and frankincense and myrrh as the Magi<sup>164</sup> did before these others. Rather, since the Lord of all will have *mercy, and not sacrifice* and since a kind heart is worth more than myriads of *fat sheep*, this let us offer to him through the poor who are today downtrodden, so that when we depart this world they may receive us into the eternal habitations in Christ himself, our Lord, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

### Endnotes

1 PG 35.857A–910D. Written in connection with the construction of a hospital complex in Caesarea in 368–72.

2 Ps 78:25 (LXX 77:25).

3 Ex 16:13–35.

4 Mt 14:15–21.

5 1 Cor 13:13.

6 Gn 15:6.

7 Gn 4:26 LXX.

8 Rom 9:3.

9 1 Jn 4:8.

10 Gn 19:3.

11 Jos 2:1–24; Heb 11:31.

12 Eph 2:10.

13 Mt 26:53; Lk 22:50–51; Jn 18:10–11.

14 Acts 7:58–60.

15 Nm 12:3.

16 Ps 132:1 (LXX 131:1) LXX.

17 Is 42:2, 53:7; Mt 12:19.

18 Nm 25:6–8.

19 1 Kgs 19:14.

20 2 Cor 11:2.

21 Ps 69:9 (LXX 68:10); Jn 2:17.

22 Rom 11:17–25; 1 Cor 9:27.

23 Mt 4:1–11.

24 Mt 26:36.

25 1 Cor 7:25–39.

26 2 Sm 23:15–17.

27 1 Kgs 18:42.

28 Lk 1:80.

29 Mt 14:23; Jn 6:15; et al.

30 1 Kgs 17:9–24.

31 Mt 3:4.

32 The allusion is not in Scripture, but cf. the Pseudo-Clementine Homily 12.6 (PC 2.305C). We thank Michael Slusser for this reference.

33 Phil 2:7.

34 Is 50:6.

35 Is 53:12.

36 Jn 1:29; 1 Jn 1:7.

37 Jn 13:5.

38 Lk 19:8.

39 Mt 19:21.

40 Jn 14:2.

41 Mt 7:13–14; Lk 13:24.

42 Mt 22:36–40.

43 Ps 89:14 (LXX 88:15) LXX: “steadfast love and faithfulness” RSV.

44 Lk 6:35–38.

45 Rom 12:15.

46 Although the term “sacred disease” normally refers to epilepsy, here it means leprosy. See LSJ, s.v., ἰερός IV.8, PGL, s.v., νόσος 1, and section 10, below. Cf. also Or. 43:63 (PG 36.577C–80C) where Gregory uses similar language in describing the leprosarium founded by his friend Basil as part of a larger hospital complex in Caesarea.

47 Ps 38:3 (LXX 37:4), 102:3–5 (LXX 101:4–6); cf. Jb 33:19–22.

48 Rom 12:5.

49 Gn 6:3.

50 Cf. Ezek 33:28, 35:15; Heb 11:38.

51 Jb 3:11–12.

52 Eccl 7:3.

53 Jb 10:11.

54 Gal 3:27; 2 Cor 4:16.

55 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5.

56 Jn 1:29.

57 Rom 8:17.

58 Col 2:12; Rom 6:4.

59 Rom 8:17.

60 Ex 19:5–6, 23:22; 1 Pt 2:9.

61 Ti 2:14.

62 Mt 11:29.

63 Cf. Or. 42:13 (PG 36.473A) for similar language.

64 Mt 8:17.

65 Phil 2:8; cf. 1 Cor 5:6–7; Gal 5:9.

66 Is 53:5; 2 Cor 8:9.

67 Jn 10:11.

68 Ezek 34:4–16; Mt 18:12; Lk 15:4.

69 Blindness is not a symptom of leprosy, at least in its modern form, although severe inflammation of the tissues surrounding the eye may produce the same practical result. Λώβη, “ravaging,” is also Galen’s term for the effect on the extremities of the limbs. See Pseudo-Galen, *Introductio seu medicus*, ed. C. G. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* (Leipzig, 1827; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), vol. 14, p. 757.

70 I.e., without slipping.

71 Cf. 1 Cor 6:13 and Or. 6.6.

72 Jb 31:40.

73 Lk 12:20.

74 Cf. Mt 6:20.

75 Jer 9:23.

76 Jer 9:24; cf. 1 Cor 4:6.

77 Hos 14:10 LXX.

78 Cf. Heb 4:12.

79 Ps 84:5–6 (LXX 83:6–7).

80 Col 3:1.

81 Gal 6:14.

82 Gn 49:17.

83 Gn 3:15.

84 Ps 4:2.

85 Mi 2:9–10 LXX.



86 Jn 14:31.

87 Lk 21:19.

88 Eccl 11:2.

89 1 Cor 13:12.

90 Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26.

91 Rom 8:17.

92 I.e., superior fare marks the superiority of those who eat it.

93 Gn 10:8.

94 Nm 13:32–33; Dt 9:2.

95 Gn 6:4–7.

96 1 Pt 4:10.

97 This citation of Petrine apocryphal material appears to be otherwise unattested except for a more extensive version preserved in the *Sacra Parallela*, an anthology attributed to John of Damascus (PG 95.1461D; K. Holl, *Fragmente vornicänischer Kirchenväter aus den Sacra Parallela* [Leipzig, 1899], p. 234, no. 503). See also E. von Dobschütz, *Das Kerygma Petri* (Leipzig, 1893), pp. 105–18, especially 110. Additional references in Gregory von Nazianz, *Reden: Über den Frieden. Über die Liebe zu den Armen*, trans. P. Haeuser, ed. M. Kertsch (Munich, 1983), p. 52, n. 3.

98 Am 8:5.

99 I.e., the sinners in Israel.

100 Am 6:4–7; Micah lapsu memoriae, or possibly conflated with Mi 6:10–16.

101 Mt 5:45.

102 Mt 19:8.

103 Eph 4:11.

104 Heb 2:4.

105 Mt 5:42.

106 Ps 37:26 (LXX 36:26).

107 Cf. 1 Cor 3:6–7.

108 Ps 10:14 (LXX 9:35).

109 Gregory uses the generic term for human being, *ἄνθρωπος*, in this phrase, which might be literally rendered as “Man, O man.”

110 Dt 22:1–4.

111 1 Cor 2:10.

112 I.e., Hermes. Cf. Or. 4.121 (PG 35.661A) and 5.32 (PG 35.705B).

113 Is 29:4.

114 Jb 25:4.

115 Sir 1:2–3.

116 Rom 11:33–34.

117 Jb 11:7.

118 Hos 14:9 LXX.

119 Jn 5:29.

120 Cf. 1 Cor 12:8.

121 The unifying theme of the following passage is the attack on those who from one perspective or another denied or in some way compromised the operation of Providence or *Πρόνοια*. The views put forward here thus do not represent the positions of any particular contemporary sect but rather reflect the rich eclecticism of late antiquity, an age when the educated elite, Christian as well as pagan, were conversant with the concepts and vocabulary of a philosophical tradition that extended from classical antiquity and the ancient near east to their own day. For further discussion and references, see F. Trisoglio, “Reminiscenze e consonanze classiche nella XIV orazione di San Gregorio Nazianzeno,” *Atti della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino* 99 (1964–65): 129–204, especially 189–93, and Haeuser and Kertsch, *Reden*, cited above in section 24.

122 On the terms *τύχη* and *τὸ αὐτόματον*, here translated as “fate and a mechanical universe,” see especially Aristotle, *Physics* 2.4–6 (196b31–98a12) and the collection of sources assembled by the fifth century A.D. anthologist Stobaeus 1.6, ed. Wachsmuth-Hense, vol. 1, pp. 83–90. These concepts reflect the views not only of the original Atomists, such as Democritus, and of course their latter-day representatives, the Epicureans, but also those Stoics who from an opposing standpoint found such terminology useful for describing the unknown modes of operation of a basically providential universe.

123 On the conjunctions of planets and stars, cf. Aristotle, *Meteorology* 1.6 (343b30), where such lore is attributed to the Egyptians; on the “universal motion that controls all things,” cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 2.4 (196a27).

124 Gregory is arguing here against the largely Peripatetic notion that limited the operation of Providence to the upper realm or steadily reduced its influence the closer it came to human affairs and the more distant from the heavens. Our author is basically on the side of the Stoics with their view of an all-pervading *Πρόνοια* (*Pronoia*). Cf. also Or. 27:10 (PG 36.24C), where Gregory is similarly critical of “Aristotle’s trifling providence.”

125 For this satirical approach, cf. Gregory’s *Poemata Dogmatica* 1.6, lines 8–9 (PG 37.430A): “Away with those who deny *Pronoia*, as if fearing salvation from God.” The technique adopted in this section as a whole owes much to the habits of Cynic-Stoic diatribe. Cf. also the Academic attack on the Stoic position in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3:92–93.

126 Rom 1:21–23.

127 Jb 2:8–9 LXX.

128 Lk 16:22–25.

129 Ps 12:5 (LXX 11:6).

130 Ps 10:12 (LXX 9:33).

131 Ps 9:12.

132 Ps 9:18.

133 Ps 11:4 (LXX 10:4).

134 Prv 17:5.  
135 Prv 22:2.  
136 Prv 19:17.  
137 Prv 16:6 (15:27 LXX); “alms,” LXX; “loyalty,” RSV.  
138 Ps 51:7 (LXX 50:9); Is 1:18.  
139 Is 1:6.  
140 Lv 13:2.  
141 1 Cor 6:15.  
142 Lk 10:30.  
143 Ps 38:5 (LXX 37:5).  
144 Ps 35:3 (LXX 34:3).  
145 Mt 9:22.  
146 Jn 5:14.  
147 Mt 5:7.  
148 Ps 41:1 (LXX 40:2) LXX.  
149 Ps 112:5 (LXX 111:5).  
150 Ps 37:26 (LXX 36:26).  
151 Prv 3:28.  
152 Is 58:7.  
153 Rom 12:8.  
154 Is 58:8–9.  
155 Jn 12:6.  
156 Gal 2:10.  
157 Mt 19:21.  
158 Mt 25:32–33.  
159 Rom 8:17; Eph 3:6; et. al.  
160 Mt 25:35.  
161 Lk 7:36.  
162 Jn 12:3.  
163 Jn 19:38–39.  
164 Mt 2:11.  
165 Mt 9:13.  
166 Dn 3:39 LXX.  
167 Lk 16:9.