

CHAPTER THREE

Translation of Oration 38

1. Christ is born, give glory; Christ is from the heavens, meet him; Christ is upon the earth, be exalted. Sing to the Lord, all the earth, and that I may say both ideas as one, let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice on account of the one who is heavenly, then earthly. Christ is in the flesh, exalt with trembling and joy; trembling on account of sin; joy on account of hope. Christ is of a virgin; women, live as virgins, in order that you may become mothers of Christ. Who does not worship the One from the beginning? Who does not glorify He who is the last?
2. Again the darkness is destroyed; again the light is established, again Egypt is punished by means of darkness; again Israel is illumined by a pillar. Let the people who sat in the darkness of ignorance behold the great light of knowledge. “The ancient things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” The letter recedes, the spirit advances; the shadows pass away, the truth enters after. Melchizedek is completed; the motherless one becomes fatherless; he is motherless first, fatherless second. The laws of nature are dissolved. It is necessary for the world above to be filled. Christ commands, let us not resist. All nations, clap your hands, because to us a child is born, and to us a son is given, whose government is upon his shoulder, it is lifted up by means of the cross and his name is called the Angel of the great counsel of the Father. Let John cry out, “prepare the way of the Lord.” And I will proclaim the power of the days. The fleshless one takes on flesh, the Word becomes corporeal, the invisible one is seen, the impalpable one is touched, the timeless one has a beginning, the Son of God becomes Son of Man,

Jesus Christ, “yesterday and today, the same even unto the ages.” Let the Jews be scandalized, let the Greeks mock, let heretics blaspheme. They will believe then, when they see him ascending into heaven, and if not then, when they see him coming from the heavens and sitting as judge.

3. These things come later. As regards the present things, now is the feast of the Theophany, or the Nativity; for it is called both, two appellations given to one deed. For God appeared to human beings through birth. On the one hand he is the existing one, and ever existing from the ever-existing one, beyond causation and word, “(for there was no word before the Word)”. On the other hand, entering time for our sake, in order that the one who has given being, also grant well-being. Or rather, so that he might lead us, who had drifted through well-being on account of wickedness, back to that state through the incarnation. The name for the appearance is “Theophany”, and for the birth, “Nativity”.
4. This is our festival; we celebrate this today: God’s stay among men, in order that we may dwell with God; or rather return (for to speak thus is more appropriate); in order that, having laid aside the old man, we may put on the new, and just as in Adam we died, so we live in Christ, born, crucified, buried, and raised together with Christ. For it is necessary for me to experience the beautiful conversion, and just as the painful things came after the more advantageous, so after the painful, more advantageous things return. “For where sin abounded, grace superabounded”, and if the taste condemned, how much more does Christ’s suffering justify? Therefore let us celebrate, not after the pagan fashion, but in a godly manner, not in a worldly way, but in an otherworldly way; not our own things, but things of Him who is ours, or rather the things of our Master; things not of weakness, but of healing, not of the creation, but of the re-creation.

5. And how will this be? Let us not crown our fore-courts, nor assemble the choruses, nor decorate the streets, nor let us feast the eye, nor charm the hearing, nor make effeminate our smelling, nor prostitute the taste, nor gratify the touch. These are ready paths to evil – entrances of sin – let us not be softened by apparel, delicate and extravagant clothing, the highest beauty of which is inutility, nor by the translucency of stones, nor the brilliance of gold, nor the artifice of colors deceiving natural beauty, and invented in opposition to the image of God; nor let us be softened by revelries and drunkenness, to which I know fornication and licentiousness are linked, since the teachings of wicked teachers are wicked, or rather the crops of wicked seeds are wicked. Let us not build high beds making shelters for the deeds of debauchery in the stomach. Let us not honor the bouquet of wines, the trickeries of cooks, the great cost of perfumes. Let earth and sea not bring to us the honored dung as presents, for thus I know to value luxury. Let one not be eager to conquer each other in self-indulgence. For to me self-indulgence, is everything in excess and beyond need; and these things take place when others are hungering and lacking, who are from the same clay and the same mixture.
6. But let us leave these things to the Greeks and to Greek boasting and festivals. They, who even name as gods being who enjoy the odor of burning fat sacrifices, and constantly serve the divine with their stomach, wicked servants of wicked spirits, makers, guides, and initiates of demons. But to us, for whom the Logos is our object of worship, if there is any need for revelry, let us revel in the Word, in divine law, in narratives, and especially those from this present feast, in order that our reveling be fitted, and not far from to the one who has called us. Do you wish (for I am your host today) that I set before you, my beautiful guests, the account, as abundantly and lavishly as I am able, in

order that you may know how a stranger is able to feed the locals; a rustic, the city dwellers; one without luxury, the luxurious; and one poor and homeless, those brilliant in wealth. I will begin from this point; and purify for me, mind, hearing, and understanding, as many of you as enjoy these sort of things, since the discourse is concerning God, and the divine Word; in order that you may depart having enjoyed the things that really are not empty. This account will be at the same time most full and most concise, so as neither to make sad by its poverty nor be disagreeable on account of satiety.

7. God always was and is and will be, but rather always “is”. For “was” and “will be” are divisions of time and flowing nature appropriate to us; for the ever-existing One himself names himself even this, when giving commandments to Moses on the mountain. For gathering everything together in himself, he has being, neither beginning nor ending, like some sea of being, boundless and limitless, surpassing every conception both of time and of nature; being outlined by the mind alone, and this in a very faint and moderate way, not from things pertaining to himself but from things around him, the impressions being collected from here and there into some image of the truth, one fleeing before it is attained and escaping before it is understood, an image illumining our rational capacity, if we are pure, in regard to as many things as fleeting lightning illumines in our sight. It seems to me that he is capable of being apprehended, in order to draw us to himself by means of the comprehensible – for the utterly incomprehensible is beyond hope and attainment – and to produce wonder by means of the incomprehensible, and being an object of wonder, be more desired, purify us, and purifying, make us deiform, and converse forthwith with those who have become such as with those of his household – my account dares something headstrong – God uniting with us and making himself

known to us as gods, perhaps to the extent that he already knows those known by Him. The divine, then is infinite and difficult to contemplate, and this alone is graspable in every way, His infiniteness, even if some suppose that by being simple of nature, either He is wholly ungraspable or perfectly graspable. Let us, therefore, investigate further what being simple is. Simplicity itself is not in nature, just as combination is not alone the nature of combined things.

8. The infinity contemplated being twofold, according to beginning and to end (for what is beyond these points and not in them is infinite), whenever the mind looks away into the depth above, not having somewhere to stand and settling on the appearances concerning God, it is called that boundless and inescapable abyss without beginning, but whenever it looks at things below and subsequent, “undying and indestructible”; and whenever it gathers the whole together, eternal. For eternity is neither time, nor some part of time – for neither is it measurable – but what time is to us, being measured by the movement of the sun, this is, for everlasting beings, eternity, being co-extensive with their being, like some kind of movement and interval of time. For me let these things concerning God suffice for now. For it is not the appropriate time to go beyond these things, because theology is not the matter that lies before us but the divine economy. Whenever I say “God”, I mean Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit; not of divinity diffused beyond these, in order that we may not introduce a crowd of gods, nor of divinity limited within these, in order that we not be condemned for stinginess toward divinity, either Judaizing on account of the monarchy, or Hellenizing on account of the abundance. For the evil is similar in both cases, although it is found in opposites. Thus the Holy of Holies, which is veiled by the seraphim, and glorified with their thrice-holy hymns, comes together into

one lordship and divinity; which another before us explained in both the most beautiful and most exalted way.

9. But since this was not sufficient for the divine goodness, to be in motion only in contemplation of itself, but it was necessary that the good be poured forth and travel, in order that the things being benefitted multiply (for this was of the highest goodness), first he conceived of the angelic and heavenly powers; and the thought was deed, accomplished by the Word, and perfected by the Spirit. And thus the second radiance existed, servants of the first radiance; and we must understand them either as intelligent spirits, some kind of immaterial and bodiless fire, or as some other nature that is nearest the beings described. I wish to say that they are unmoved toward evil, and have only the movement toward the beautiful, because they are around God, and illumined chiefly from God; for here, things are illumined second. But the one called “Morning Star” on account of his radiance persuades me, to opine and to say that these powers are not immovable, but difficult to move, but became and is called “darkness” on account of his rebellion, and the powers who revolted under him, who became artisans of evil in their flight from the beautiful, and the causes of evil within us.
10. Therefore, the intelligible world exists for him and on account of these things, at least, insofar as I investigate concerning these things, measuring great things by my small word. And when the first things were faring well in his sight, he conceived a second world material and visible; and this is both the system and combination of heaven and earth, and the things between them, praiseworthy for the shapeliness of each, but more praiseworthy for the well-joined nature and harmony of the whole, with each part holding well in regard to any other and all in relations to all things, unto the completion of the

whole cosmos; so that he may show forth, not only the nature appropriate to himself, but also that he is able to bring into being something utterly other than himself. For natures that are intelligible and comprehensible by mind alone are something suitable to divinity; but as many natures as are subject to sense perception are entirely foreign, and are further removed from these, the types which are entirely without soul and motionless. But what concern are these matters to us, someone may say quickly who is excessively “burning” and “feast-loving”; spur on the pony toward the goal post. Talk to us about thing pertaining to this feast, and why we sit here today. And indeed I will do this, even if I began on a higher level, longing and the argument having so overpowering me.

11. Mind and sense perception then, having been distinguished from one another in this way, stood within their own limits, and bore in themselves the magnificence of the creator Word, being silent they praise the great work and are brilliant heralds. There was not yet was not yet a blending of the two natures, nor any mixing of opposites, a sign of a greater wisdom and generosity as regards the natures; nor was the entire richness of goodness known. Then the Creator Word, having willed to show this forth, also crafts one life from both, I mean both invisible and visible natures, the man; and taking the body from the matter already created, and from himself he added the breath of life, “which thing Scripture knows as the noetic soul and the image of God”, He set upon earth a sort of second cosmos, a great in a small, another angel, a composite worshiper, a beholder of the visible creation, an initiate into the intelligible, king of things on earth, subject to what is above, earthly and heavenly, transitory and immortal, visible and intelligible, a mean between greatness and lowliness, the same spirit and flesh; spirit on account of grace, flesh on account of pride, the one that he might remain steadfast and glorify his

Benefactor, the other that he might suffer and in suffering remember and, when striving for greatness, be corrected. He is a living creature governing in this place and transferred elsewhere, and – limit of the mystery – he is deified by his inclination toward God. For the modest light of truth here seems to me toward this end, to see and experience the radiance of God, which is worthy of the one who has bound us together and will loose us and bind us together again in more exalted fashion.

12. He put this man in paradise, whatever this paradise was, having honored him with free will, in order that the good belong to him though choice no less that is true for the one who provided the seeds, that he be a cultivator of immortal plants, equally of divine thoughts, both the simpler and the more complete, naked in simplicity and life without artifice, and without any covering or defence. For it was fitting for the man to be this sort at the beginning. And He gave a law, a material for the will. And the law was a command, a command about those plants of which he was allowed to partake, of the one he was not to touch. It was the tree of knowledge, which was neither planted from the beginning in evil, nor forbidden jealously (let the enemies of God not send their tongues in that direction, nor imitate the serpent); but would have been good, if received in due season (for the tree was contemplation, according to my interpretation, the approach to which is safe only for those more complete in condition), but it is not good for those who are still rather simple, gluttonous with respect to their appetite, just as mature food is not useful for those ones still simple and the ones still having need of milk. But when, by the jealousy of the Devil and the assault on the woman, which she underwent because she was weaker, and which she passed on because she was more persuasive (alas of my weakness! For that of the forbear is mine), he forgot the commandment given to him,

and yielded to the bitter taste; and at the same time he was banished from the tree of life, from paradise, and from God on account of his wickedness, and he dressed in tunics of skin, equal to the more coarse and mortal and rebellious flesh; and he knew this first: his own shame, and hid himself from God. He gained a certain advantage even from this: death, and being cut off from sin, in order that evil might not be immortal; and the punishment become love for humankind. For thus, I am persuaded, God punishes.

13. In former ages, man was disciplined in many ways in return for his many sins, that the root of wickedness produced at various provocations and times; disciplined by word, law, prophets, kindnesses, threats, blows, floods, conflagrations, wars, victories, defeats; signs from heaven, signs from the air, from earth, from sea, unexpected changes of men, cities, and nations; by these things the aim sought was that wickedness be wiped out. Finally a stronger remedy was necessary for more dreadful diseases: killing one another, adulteries, false oaths, homosexual lust, and the first and last of all evils, idolatry, the transfer of worship from the Creator to created things. Since these things were requiring a greater help, they also obtain something greater. And that help was the Word of God himself, the one who is before the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the incorporeal, the Beginning from the Beginning, the light from the light, the fountain of life and of immortality, the mold of the archetypal beauty, the immovable seal, the unchanging image, the boundary and Word of the Father; he approaches his own image, and wears flesh for the sake of my flesh, and mixes himself with a rational soul for the sake of my soul, purifying like by like. And with respect to all things he becomes a man, except sin; He was conceived from the Virgin, both who was purified with respect to both body and soul by the Spirit (for birthgiving should be honored, and virginity should be

honored more); as God coming forth with his incarnation, one from two opposites, from flesh and spirit; of these, the one deified and the other was deified. O the new mixture! O the paradoxical blending! The 'Existing One' comes into being, the uncreated is created, and the uncontainable is contained, through the rational soul which mediates between the divinity and the coarseness of flesh. And the enriching one becomes poor; he is poor in my flesh, in order that I will become rich in his divinity. The full one empties himself; for he empties himself of his own glory for a short time, in order that I might receive the fullness of that one. What is the wealth of his goodness? What is this mystery concerning me? I partook of the image, and I did not keep it; he partakes of my flesh in order both to save the image and to make the flesh immortal. He communes us a second communion, one much much more paradoxical than the first; by as great a degree as what is superior, now he shares in what is inferior. This is more godlike than the first; this, to those who have the mind understanding, is more exalted.

14. Concerning these things, what do the slanderers say to us, the bitter calculators of divinity, the accusers of laudable things, the blind ones concerning the light, the uneducated concerning wisdom, for whom Christ died freely, the unthankful creatures, things shaped by the Evil One? Do you bring this as a charge against God, doing good? On account of this is he small, because he is humble on account of you? Because the Good Shepherd came upon the straying one, the one who laid down his life for the sheep, and he found the wandering one, "upon the mountains and the hills, in which you were offering sacrifice"; and having found it, he took it upon his shoulder, on which also he carried the cross, and having taken it, brought it back to the life on high, and bringing it on high, counted it again among the remaining ones? Because he lit a lamp, his own

flesh, and swept the house, cleansing the world of sin, and he searched for the coin, the royal image covered with a heap of passions, then calls together the powers dear to him at the finding of the drachma, and makes them participants of his joy, whom he had made initiates of the divine economy? Because the super-radiant light follows the forerunning lamp, and the Word follows the voice, and the bridegroom follows the best man, the one preparing for the Lord a special people and purifying them through water for the Spirit? Do you blame God for these things? Do you understand him to be inferior because he girds himself with a towel and washes the feet of his disciples, and shows the best path to exaltation, lowliness? Because he humbles himself on account of the soul bent down to the ground, in order to lift up what inclines downward because of sin? But how do you not accuse this issue, that he eats even with with tax collectors, and at the homes of tax collectors, and makes tax collectors his disciples, in order that he also may make some profit for himself? What profit is this? The salvation of sinners. Unless someone should also blame the physician, because he bends over the illnesses, and endures the foul stenchs, in order to give health to those ailing; and the one leaning over the pit for the sake of compassion so that he may save, in accordance with the law, the animal having fallen into it.

15. He was sent, but as a human, for he was twofold; since he grew weary, and hungered, and thirsted, and endured agony, and wept by the law of the body; but if he did these things also as God, what is this? Reckon that the good will of the Father is a mission, to whom the Son offers his own things, both as honoring the timeless source, so that he not seem to be a rival god. And the Scriptures say that “he was given over” and also “gave himself over”; that he “was raised by the Father” and “taken up” into heaven, but also

“resurrected” himself and “ascended” again. The former expressions address his good will; the latter, his power. You speak of the things belittling him, but you run past the things exalting him; and you recognize the fact that he suffered; but you neglect that fact that he did so willingly? Even now the Word suffers similar things! He is honored as God by some and conceived as coalescing; He is dishonored as flesh by others and separated. At which of these groups is he more angry? But rather, which will he pardon? Those conjoining in wicked manner, or those cutting? For it was necessary that the former distinguish and the latter conjoin; the one, in number; the other, in divinity. Do you take offense at the flesh? The Jews do likewise. Or stigmatize him as a Samaritan also? I will be silent with regard to what follows. Do you disbelieve in his divinity? The demons do not even do this. O you who are more unbelieving than demons, and more senseless than Jews! Those reckoned that the salutation “Son” was an expression of equal honor; these knew that God was driving them out. For they believed from those things which they suffered. But you neither receive the equality nor confess the divinity. It was better for you to be circumcised and demon possessed – so that I may say something ridiculous – than in uncircumcision and soundness to be disposed to wickedness and atheism.

16. Therefore a little later you will see even Jesus being purified in the Jordan for my purification; or rather, sanctifying the waters by means of cleansing (for he himself indeed did not need purification, the one taking away the sin of the world), and you will see the heavens split, and attested by the co-originate Spirit, being tempted, and conquering, and being served by angels, and healing every sickness and every infirmity, and giving life to the dead (as he must also do for you, who lie dead in false doctrine),

and driving out demons, some by himself, and others through his disciples, feeding multitudes with a few loaves, and walking upon the sea, and being betrayed, and being crucified, and crucifying with Him my sin; being offered as a lamb, and making the offering as a priest, being buried as a human, being raised as God, then also ascending, and coming again with his own glory. How many feast days there are for me for each of the mysteries of Christ! Yet they all are of one principle aim, my completion and refashioning, and rising to the first Adam.

17. But now receive for me the conception, and leap for joy; if not indeed like John in the womb, then like David when the ark stopped. Be awed at the census, on account of which you have been written in heaven; and revere the birth, on account of which you have been released of the bonds of birth; and honor little Bethlehem, which brought you back to paradise, and venerate the manger, on account of which you, being devoid of reason, were nourished by the Word. Know, as an ox, the one owning you –Isaiah exhorts you– and as a donkey, know the manger of the Lord himself; whether you are one of the pure beasts, and under the law, offering up the cud-chewing of the word, and suitable for sacrifice; or whether you are still among the unclean, unfit for both eating and sacrifice, a part of the gentile race. Run with the star, and bring gifts with the magi, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, as to a king, and as to a God, and as to one dead for your sake. Give glory with the shepherds, sing with the angels, dance with the archangels. Let there be a shared feast of the heavenly and earthly powers. For I am convinced that those ones rejoice and celebrate today; if indeed they love humankind and love God, just as those that David describes, ascending with Christ after the Passion, and going to meet him, and exhorting each other to raise up the gates.

18. Hate one thing pertaining to the birth of Christ, Herod's murder of children; or rather revere even this, the sacrifice of those Christ's age, those offered in place of the new victim. If he flees to Egypt, be banished with him willingly. It is a fine thing to flee with the persecuted Christ. If Christ delays in Egypt, call him forth from Egypt, where he is worshiped well. Travel blamelessly through all the stages of Christ's life and all his powers, as a disciple of Christ. Be purified, be circumcised, remove the veil from birth. After this teach in the temple, drive out the traders in divine things, be stoned if it is necessary that you suffer this; you will escape the notice of those throwing the stones, I know well, you will even flee through the midst of them like God. For the Word is not stoned. If you are brought before Herod, do not answer for the most part. He will revere your silence more than the long discourses of others. If you are scourged, seek the other tortures. Taste the gall because of His taste. Drink the vinegar, seek the spittings, accept the blows, the beatings; be crowned with thorns, the harshness of a life in accord with God. Put on the scarlet robe, accept the reed, be worshiped by those mocking the truth. Finally, be crucified with him, die with him, be buried with him eagerly, in order to resurrect with him and be glorified with him and reign with him, seeing God as far as is possible and being seen by him, the one who is worshiped is worshipped and glorified in Trinity, whom even now we ask to enlighten us as clearly as is attainable to prisoners of the flesh, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.