

0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – De theologia

Oration XXVIII

The Second Theological Oration.

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The Second Theological Oration.

I. IN the former Discourse we laid down clearly with respect to the Theologian, both what sort of character he ought to bear, and on what kind of subject he may philosophize, and when, and to what extent. We saw that he ought to be, as far as may be, pure, in order that light may be apprehended by light; and that he ought to consort with serious men, in order that his word be not fruitless through falling on an unfruitful soil; and that the suitable season is when we have a calm within from the whirl of outward things; so as not like madmen³⁴¹⁵ to lose our breath; and that the extent to which we may go is that to which we have ourselves advanced, or to which we are advancing. Since then these things are so, and we have broken up for ourselves the fallows of Divinity³⁴¹⁶, so as not to sow upon thorns,³⁴¹⁷ and have made plain the face of the ground,³⁴¹⁸ being moulded and moulding others by Holy Scripture...let us now enter upon Theological questions, setting at the head thereof the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of Whom we are to treat; that the Father may be well pleased, and the Son may help us, and the Holy Ghost may inspire us; or rather that one illumination may come upon us from the One God, One in diversity, diverse in Unity, wherein is a marvel.

II. Now when I go up eagerly into the Mount³⁴¹⁹—or, to use a truer expression, when I both eagerly long, and at the same time am afraid (the one through my hope and the other through my weakness) to enter within the Cloud, and hold converse with God, for so God commands; if any be an Aaron, let him go up with me, and let him stand near, being ready, if it must be so, to remain outside the Cloud. But if any be a Nadab or an Abihu, or of the Order of the Elders, let him go up indeed, but let him stand afar off, according to the value of his purification. But if any be of the multitude, who are unworthy of this height of contemplation, if he be altogether impure let him not approach at all,³⁴²⁰ for it would be dangerous to him; but if he be at least temporarily purified, let him remain below and listen to the Voice alone, and the trumpet,³⁴²¹ the bare words of piety, and let him see the Mountain smoking and lightening, a terror at once and a marvel to those who cannot get up. But if any is an evil and savage beast, and altogether incapable of taking in the subject



³⁴¹⁵ A marginal reading noted by the Benedictines gives “*sobbing*” or “*panting*,” which is a better sense.

³⁴¹⁶ Jerem. iv. 3.

³⁴¹⁷ Matt. xiii. 7.

³⁴¹⁸ Isa. xxviii. 25.

³⁴¹⁹ Exod. xxiv. 1.

³⁴²⁰ Ib. xix. 14.

³⁴²¹ Ib. xix. 16–18.

matter of Contemplation and Theology, let him not hurtfully and malignantly lurk in his den among the woods, to catch hold of some dogma or saying by a sudden spring, and to tear sound doctrine to pieces by his misrepresentations, but let him stand yet afar off and withdraw from the Mount, or he shall be stoned and crushed, and shall perish miserably in his wickedness. For to those who are like wild beasts true and sound discourses are stones. If he be a leopard let him die with his spots.³⁴²² If a ravening and roaring lion, seeking what he may devour³⁴²³ of our souls or of our words; or a wild boar, trampling under foot the precious and translucent pearls of the Truth;³⁴²⁴ or an Arabian³⁴²⁵ and alien wolf, or one keener even than these in tricks of argument; or a fox, that is a treacherous and faithless soul, changing its shape according to circumstances or necessities, feeding on dead or putrid bodies, or on little vineyards³⁴²⁶ when the large ones have escaped them; or any other carnivorous beast, rejected by the Law as unclean for food or enjoyment; our discourse must withdraw from such and be engraved on solid tables of stone, and that on both sides because the Law is partly visible, and partly hidden; the one part belonging to the mass who remain below, the other to the few who press upward into the Mount.

III. What is this that has happened to me, O friends, and initiates, and fellow-lovers of the truth? I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the Mount, and drew aside the curtain of the Cloud, and entered away from matter and material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up, I scarce saw the back parts of God;³⁴²⁷ although I was sheltered by the Rock, the Word that was made flesh for us. And when I looked a little closer, I saw, not the First and unmingled Nature, known to Itself—to the Trinity, I mean; not That which abideth within the first³⁴²⁸ veil, and is hidden by the Cherubim; but only that Nature, which at last even reaches to us. And that is, as far as I can learn, the Majesty, or as holy David calls it, the Glory³⁴²⁹ which is manifested among the creatures, which It has produced and governs. For these are the Back Parts of God, which He leaves behind Him, as tokens of Himself³⁴³⁰ like the shadows and reflection of the sun in the water, which shew the sun to our weak eyes, because we cannot

³⁴²² Jer. xiii. 23.

³⁴²³ 1 Pet. v. 8.

³⁴²⁴ Matt. vii. 6.

³⁴²⁵ *Arabian*: So the LXX. renders the word which in A.V. Jer. v. 6, is translated “*of the evening*,” and in the Vulg. “*at evening*.” R.V. gives as an alternative, “*of the deserts*.”

³⁴²⁶ The LXX. in Cant. xi. 15, admits of this translation as well as of that followed by A.V.

³⁴²⁷ Exod. xxxiii. 23.

³⁴²⁸ This veil of the Mercy Seat, spoken of in Exod. xxvi. 31, signifies in Gregory’s sense the denial of contemplation of that Highest Nature.

³⁴²⁹ Ps. viii. 1.

³⁴³⁰ The Face of God signifies His Essence and Deity, which were before all worlds: His back parts are Creation and Providence, by which He reveals Himself.

look at the sun himself, for by his unmixed light he is too strong for our power of perception. In this way then shalt thou discourse of God; even wert thou a Moses and a god to Pharaoh,³⁴³¹ even wert thou caught up like Paul to the Third Heaven,³⁴³² and hadst heard unspeakable words; even wert thou raised above them both, and exalted to Angelic or Archangelic place and dignity. For though a thing be all heavenly, or above heaven, and far higher in nature and nearer to God than we, yet it is farther distant from God, and from the complete comprehension of His Nature, than it is lifted above our complex and lowly and earthward sinking composition.

IV. Therefore we must begin again thus. It is difficult to conceive God but to define Him in words is an impossibility, as one of the Greek teachers of Divinity³⁴³³ taught, not unskilfully, as it appears to me; with the intention that he might be thought to have apprehended Him; in that he says it is a hard thing to do; and yet may escape being convicted of ignorance because of the impossibility of giving expression to the apprehension. But in my opinion it is impossible to express Him, and yet more impossible to conceive Him. For that which may be conceived may perhaps be made clear by language, if not fairly well, at any rate imperfectly, to any one who is not quite deprived of his hearing, or slothful of understanding. But to comprehend the whole of so great a Subject as this is quite impossible and impracticable, not merely to the utterly careless and ignorant, but even to those who are highly exalted, and who love God, and in like manner to every created nature; seeing that the darkness of this world and the thick covering of the flesh is an obstacle to the full understanding of the truth. I do not know whether it is the same with the higher natures and purer Intelligences³⁴³⁴ which because of their nearness to God, and because they are illumined with all His Light, may possibly see, if not the whole, at any rate more perfectly and distinctly than we do; some perhaps more, some less than others, in proportion to their rank.

V. But enough has been said on this point. As to what concerns us, it is not only the Peace of God³⁴³⁵ which passeth all understanding and knowledge, nor only the things which God hath stored up in promise for the righteous, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived”³⁴³⁶ except in a very small degree, nor the accurate knowledge of the Creation. For even of this I would have you know that you have only a shadow when you hear the words, “I will consider the heavens,



³⁴³¹ Exod. iv. 2.

³⁴³² 2 Cor. xii. 2.

³⁴³³ Plato, Tim., 28 E.

³⁴³⁴ No one doubts, say the Benedictine Editors, that the Angels do see God, and that men, too, will see Him, when they attain to Eternal Bliss. S. Thomas (Summa I. qu. xii. 4) argues that the Angels have cognition of God's Essence not by nature but by grace: but yet (Ib. qu. lvi. 3) that they have by nature a certain cognition of Him, as represented and as it were mirrored in their own essence; though not the actual vision of His Essence. The Angel, he says again (Ib. qu. lxiv. 1) has a higher cognition of God than man has, on account of the perfection of his intellect; and this cognition remains even in the fallen Angels.

³⁴³⁵ Phil. iv. 7.

³⁴³⁶ Isa. lxiv. 4; 1 Cor. ii. 9.

the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars,"³⁴³⁷ and the settled order therein; not as if he were considering them now, but as destined to do so hereafter. But far before them is That nature Which is above them, and out of which they spring, the Incomprehensible and Illimitable—not, I mean, as to the fact of His being, but as to Its nature. For our preaching is not empty, nor our Faith vain,³⁴³⁸ nor is this the doctrine we proclaim; for we would not have you take our candid statement as a starting point for a quibbling denial of God, or of arrogance on account of our confession of ignorance. For it is one thing to be persuaded of the existence of a thing, and quite another to know what it is.

VI. Now our very eyes and the Law of Nature teach us that God exists and that He is the Efficient and Maintaining Cause of all things: our eyes, because they fall on visible objects, and see them in beautiful stability and progress, immovably moving and revolving if I may so say; natural Law, because through these visible things and their order, it reasons back to their Author. For how could this Universe have come into being or been put together, unless God had called it into existence, and held it together? For every one who sees a beautifully made lute, and considers the skill with which it has been fitted together and arranged, or who hears its melody, would think of none but the lutemaker, or the luteplayer, and would recur to him in mind, though he might not know him by sight. And thus to us also is manifested That which made and moves and preserves all created things, even though He be not comprehended by the mind. And very wanting in sense is he who will not willingly go thus far in following natural proofs; but not even this which we have fancied or formed, or which reason has sketched for us, proves the existence of a God. But if any one has got even to some extent a comprehension of this, how is God's Being to be demonstrated? Who ever reached this extremity of wisdom? Who was ever deemed worthy of so great a gift? Who has opened the mouth of his mind and drawn in the Spirit,³⁴³⁹ so as by Him that searcheth all things, yea the deep thing of God,³⁴⁴⁰ to take in God, and no longer to need progress, since he already possesses the Extreme Object of desire, and That to which all the social life and all the intelligence of the best men press forward?

VII. For what will you conceive the Deity to be, if you rely upon all the approximations of reason? Or to what will reason carry you, O most philosophic of men and best of Theologians, who boast of your familiarity with the Unlimited? Is He a body? How then is He the Infinite and Limitless, and formless, and intangible, and invisible? or are these attributes of a body? What arrogance for such is not the nature of a body! Or will you say that He has a body, but not these attributes? O stupidity, that a Deity should possess nothing more than we do. For how is He an object of worship if He be circumscribed? Or how shall He escape being made of elements, and therefore subject to be resolved into them again, or even altogether dissolved? For every compound

³⁴³⁷ Ps. viii. 3.

³⁴³⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 19.

³⁴³⁹ Ps. cxix. 21.

³⁴⁴⁰ 1 Cor. ii. 10.



is a starting point of strife, and strife of separation, and separation of dissolution. But dissolution is altogether foreign to God and to the First Nature. Therefore there can be no separation, that there may be no dissolution, and no strife that there may be no separation, and no composition that there may be no strife. Thus also there must be no body, that there may be no composition, and so the argument is established by going back from last to first.

VIII. And how shall we preserve the truth that God pervades all things and fills all, as it is written “Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,”³⁴⁴¹ and “The Spirit of the Lord filleth the world,”³⁴⁴² if God partly contains and partly is contained? For either He will occupy an empty Universe, and so all things will have vanished for us, with this result, that we shall have insulted God by making Him a body, and by robbing Him of all things which He has made; or else He will be a body contained in other bodies, which is impossible; or He will be enfolded in them, or contrasted with them, as liquids are mixed, and one divides and is divided by another;—a view which is more absurd and anile than even the atoms of Epicurus³⁴⁴³ and so this argument concerning the body will fall through, and have no body and no solid basis at all. But if we are to assert that He is immaterial (as for example that Fifth Element which some³⁴⁴⁴ have imagined), and that He is carried round in the circular movement...let us assume that He is immaterial, and that He is the Fifth Element; and, if they please, let Him be also bodiless in accordance with the independent drift and arrangement of their argument; for I will not at present differ with them on this point; in what respect then will He be one of those things which are in movement and agitation, to say nothing of the insult involved in making the Creator subject to the same movement as the creatures, and Him That carries all (if they will allow even this) one with those whom He carries. Again, what is the force that moves your Fifth Element, and what is it that moves all things, and what moves that, and what is the force that moves that? And so on *ad infinitum*. And how can He help being altogether contained in space if He be subject to motion? But if they assert that He is something other than this Fifth Element; suppose it is an angelic nature that they attribute to Him, how will they shew that Angels are corporeal, or what sort of bodies they have? And how far in that case could God, to Whom the Angels minister, be superior to the Angels? And if He is above them, there is again brought in an irrational swarm of bodies, and a depth of nonsense, that has no possible basis to stand upon.

IX. And thus we see that God is not a body. For no inspired teacher has yet asserted or admitted such a notion, nor has the sentence of our own Court allowed it. Nothing then remains but to conceive of Him as incorporeal. But this term Incorporeal, though granted, does not yet set before

³⁴⁴¹ Jer. xxiii. 24.

³⁴⁴² Wisd. i. 7.

³⁴⁴³ Epicurus taught that Matter is eternal, and consists of an indefinite number of Atoms or indivisible units, floating about in space, and mutually attracting and repelling each other; and that all that exists is due to some chance meeting and coalition of these atoms.

³⁴⁴⁴ This is a speculation of Aristotle, who imagined a Fifth Element, consisting of formless matter.

us—or contain within itself His Essence, any more than Unbegotten, or Unoriginate, or Unchanging, or Incorruptible, or any other predicate which is used concerning God or in reference to Him. For what effect is produced upon His Being or Substance³⁴⁴⁵ by His having no beginning, and being incapable of change or limitation? Nay, the whole question of His Being is still left for the further consideration and exposition of him who truly has the mind of God and is advanced in contemplation. For just as to say “It is a body,” or “It was begotten,” is not sufficient to present clearly to the mind the various objects of which these predicates are used, but you must also express the subject of which you use them, if you would present the object of your thought clearly and adequately (for every one of these predicates, corporeal, begotten, mortal, may be used of a man, or a cow, or a horse). Just so he who is eagerly pursuing the nature of the Self-existent will not stop at saying what He is *not*, but must go on beyond what He is not, and say what He *is*; inasmuch as it is easier to take in some single point than to go on disowning point after point in endless detail, in order, both by the elimination of negatives and the assertion of positives to arrive at a comprehension of this subject.

But a man who states what God is not without going on to say what He is, acts much in the same way as one would who when asked how many twice five make, should answer, “Not two, nor three, nor four, nor five, nor twenty, nor thirty, nor in short any number below ten, nor any multiple of ten;” but would not answer “ten,” nor settle the mind of his questioner upon the firm ground of the answer. For it is much easier, and more concise to shew what a thing is not from what it is, than to demonstrate what it is by stripping it of what it is not. And this surely is evident to every one.



292

X. Now since we have ascertained that God is incorporeal, let us proceed a little further with our examination. Is He Nowhere or Somewhere. For if He is Nowhere,³⁴⁴⁶ then some person of a very inquiring turn of mind might ask, How is it then that He can even exist? For if the non-existent is nowhere, then that which is nowhere is also perhaps non-existent. But if He is Somewhere, He must be either in the Universe, or above the Universe. And if He is *in* the Universe, then He must be either in some part or in the whole. If in some part, then He will be circumscribed by that part which is less than Himself; but if everywhere, then by one which is further and greater—I mean the Universal, which contains the Particular; if the Universe is to be contained by the Universe, and no place is to be free from circumscription. This follows if He is contained in the Universe. And besides, where was He before the Universe was created, for this is a point of no little difficulty. But if He is *above* the Universe, is there nothing to distinguish this from the Universe, and where is this *above* situated? And how could this Transcendence and that which is transcended be

³⁴⁵ Petavius (De Trin. IV. ii. 7) notes that ὑπόστασις seems used here of the Essence and Nature common to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

³⁴⁶ Nowhere is in this passage used in an ambiguous sense. As asserted of God, it means that His being is in no way limited by place: not that He has no existence in place, for He is everywhere, and He transcends all place. Before the creation of the Universe He existed, and He created Place, which therefore cannot be the seat of His Being.

distinguished in thought, if there is not a limit to divide and define them? Is it not necessary that there shall be some mean to mark off the Universe from that which is above the Universe? And what could this be but Place, which we have already rejected? For I have not yet brought forward the point that God would be altogether circumscribed, if He were even comprehensible in thought: for comprehension is one form of circumscription.

XI. Now, why have I gone into all this, perhaps too minutely for most people to listen to, and in accordance with the present manner of discourse, which despises noble simplicity, and has introduced a crooked and intricate³⁴⁴⁷ style? That the tree may be known by its fruits;³⁴⁴⁸ I mean, that the darkness which is at work in such teaching may be known by the obscurity of the arguments. For my purpose in doing so was, not to get credit for myself for astonishing utterances, or excessive wisdom, through tying knots and solving difficulties (this was the great miraculous gift of Daniel),³⁴⁴⁹ but to make clear the point at which my argument has aimed from the first. And what was this? That the Divine Nature cannot be apprehended by human reason, and that we cannot even represent to ourselves all its greatness. And this not out of envy, for envy is far from the Divine Nature, which is passionless, and only good and Lord of all;³⁴⁵⁰ especially envy of that which is the most honourable³⁴⁵¹ of all His creatures. For what does the Word prefer to the rational and speaking creatures? Why, even their very existence is a proof of His supreme goodness. Nor yet is this incomprehensibility for the sake of His own glory and honour, Who is full,³⁴⁵² as if His possession of His glory and majesty depended upon the impossibility of approaching Him. For it is utterly sophistical and foreign to the character, I will not say of God, but of any moderately good man, who has any right ideas about himself, to seek his own supremacy by throwing a hindrance in the way of another.

XII. But whether there be other causes for it also, let them see who are nearer God, and are eye witnesses and spectators of His unsearchable judgments;³⁴⁵³ if there are any who are so eminent in virtue, and who walk in the paths of the Infinite, as the saying is. As far, however, as we have attained, who measure with our little measure things hard to be understood, perhaps one reason is to prevent us from too readily throwing away the possession because it was so easily come by. For people cling tightly to that which they acquire with labour; but that which they acquire easily they quickly throw away, because it can be easily recovered. And so it is turned into a blessing, at least to all men who are sensible, that this blessing is not too easy. Or perhaps it is in order that we may

³⁴⁴⁷ v. 1. *Affected*. The allusion is especially to the ostentatious dialectics and tedious arguments of Aëtius and his followers, Eunomius and others.

³⁴⁴⁸ Luke vi. 44.

³⁴⁴⁹ cf. Dan. v. 12.

³⁴⁵⁰ Plato, *Tim.*, 10.

³⁴⁵¹ v. 1. Most Akin to Himself. Combefis.

³⁴⁵² Isa. i. 11.

³⁴⁵³ Rom. xi. 33.

not share the fate of Lucifer, who fell, and in consequence of receiving the full light make our necks stiff against the Lord Almighty, and suffer a fall, of all things most pitiable, from the height we had attained. Or perhaps it may be to give a greater reward hereafter for their labour and glorious life to those who have here been purified, and have exercised long patience in respect of that which they desired.

Therefore this darkness of the body has been placed between us and God, like the cloud of old between the Egyptians and the Hebrews;³⁴⁵⁴ and this is perhaps what is meant by “He made darkness His secret place,”³⁴⁵⁵ namely our dulness, through which few can see even a little. But as to this point, let those discuss it whose business it is; and let them ascend as far as possible in the examination. To us who are (as Jeremiah saith), “prisoners of the earth,”³⁴⁵⁶ and covered with the denseness of carnal nature, this at all events is known, that as it is impossible for a man to step over his own shadow, however fast he may move (for the shadow will always move on as fast as it is being overtaken) or, as it is impossible for the eye to draw near to visible objects apart from the intervening air and light, or for a fish to glide about outside of the waters; so it is quite impracticable for those who are in the body to be conversant with objects of pure thought apart altogether from bodily objects. For something in our own environment is ever creeping in, even when the mind has most fully detached itself from the visible, and collected itself, and is attempting to apply itself to those invisible things which are akin to itself.

XIII. This will be made clear to you as follows:—Are not Spirit, and Fire, and Light, Love, and Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Mind and Reason, and the like, the names of the First Nature? What then? Can you conceive of Spirit apart from motion and diffusion; or of Fire without its fuel and its upward motion, and its proper colour and form? Or of Light unmingled with air, and loosed from that which is as it were its father and source? And how do you conceive of a mind? Is it not that which is inherent in some person not itself, and are not its movements thoughts, silent or uttered? And Reason...what else can you think it than that which is either silent within ourselves, or else outpoured (for I shrink from saying loosed)? And if you conceive of Wisdom, what is it but the habit of mind which you know as such, and which is concerned with contemplations either divine or human? And Justice and Love, are they not praiseworthy dispositions, the one opposed to injustice, the other to hate, and at one time intensifying themselves, at another relaxed, now taking possession of us, now leaving us alone, and in a word, making us what we are, and changing us as colours do bodies? Or are we rather to leave all these things, and to look at the Deity absolutely, as best we can, collecting a fragmentary perception of It from Its images? What then is this subtile thing, which is of these, and yet is not these, or how can that Unity which is in its Nature uncomposite and incomparable, still be all of these, and each one of them perfectly? Thus our mind faints to transcend corporeal things, and to consort with the Incorporeal, stripped of all clothing of corporeal

³⁴⁵⁴ Exod. xiv. 20.

³⁴⁵⁵ Ps. xviii. 11.

³⁴⁵⁶ Lam. iii. 34.

ideas, as long as it has to look with its inherent weakness at things above its strength. For every rational nature longs for God and for the First Cause, but is unable to grasp Him, for the reasons I have mentioned. Faint therefore with the desire, and as it were restive and impatient of the disability, it tries a second course, either to look at visible things, and out of some of them to make a god... (a poor contrivance, for in what respect and to what extent can that which is seen be higher and more godlike than that which sees, that this should worship that?) or else through the beauty and order of visible things to attain to that which is above sight; but not to suffer the loss of God through the magnificence of visible things.

XIV. From this cause some have made a god of the Sun, others of the Moon, others of the host of Stars, others of heaven itself with all its hosts, to which they have attributed the guiding of the Universe, according to the quality or quantity of their movement. Others again of the Elements, earth, air, water, fire, because of their useful nature, since without them human life cannot possibly exist. Others again have worshipped any chance visible objects, setting up the most beautiful of what they saw as their gods. And there are those who worship pictures and images, at first indeed of their own ancestors — at least, this is the case with the more affectionate and sensual — and honour the departed with memorials; and afterwards even those of strangers are worshipped by men of a later generation separated from them by a long interval; through ignorance of the First Nature, and following the traditional honour as lawful and necessary; for usage when confirmed by time was held to be Law. And I think that some who were courtiers of arbitrary power and extolled bodily strength and admired beauty, made a god in time out of him whom they honoured, perhaps getting hold of some fable to help on their imposture.

XV. And those of them who were most subject to passion deified their passions, or honoured them among their gods; Anger and Blood-thirstiness, Lust and Drunkenness, and every similar wickedness; and made out of this an ignoble and unjust excuse for their own sins. And some they left on earth, and some they hid beneath the earth (this being the only sign of wisdom about them), and some they raised to heaven.³⁴⁵⁷ O ridiculous distribution of inheritance! Then they gave to each of these concepts the name of some god or demon, by the authority and private judgment of their error, and set up statues whose costliness is a snare, and thought to honour them with blood and the steam of sacrifices, and sometimes even by most shameful actions, frenzies and manslaughter. For such honours were the fitting due of such gods. And before now men have insulted themselves by worshipping monsters, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things,³⁴⁵⁸ and of the very vilest and most absurd, and have made an offering to them of the glory of God; so that it is not easy to decide whether we ought most to despise the worshippers or the objects of their worship. Probably the worshippers are far the most contemptible, for though they are of a rational nature, and have received grace from God, they have set up the worse as the better. And this was



294

³⁴⁵⁷ Referring to the mythical partition of the Universe, which gave heaven to Zeus, the sea to Poseidon, and the infernal regions to Aidoneus.

³⁴⁵⁸ Rom. i. 23.

the trick of the Evil One, who abused good to an evil purpose, as in most of his evil deeds. For he laid hold of their desire in its wandering in search of God, in order to distort to himself³⁴⁵⁹ the power, and steal the desire, leading it by the hand, like a blind man asking a road; and he hurled down and scattered some in one direction and some in another, into one pit of death and destruction.

XVI. This was their course. But reason receiving us in our desire for God, and in our sense of the impossibility of being without a leader and guide, and then making us apply ourselves to things visible and meeting with the things which have been since the beginning, doth not stay its course even here. For it was not the part of Wisdom to grant the sovereignty to things which are, as observation tells us, of equal rank. By these then it leads to that which is above these, and by which being is given to these. For what is it which ordered things in heaven and things in earth, and those which pass through air, and those which live in water; or rather the things which were before these, heaven and earth, air and water? Who mingled these, and who distributed them? What is it that each has in common with the other, and their mutual dependence and agreement? For I commend the man, though he was a heathen, who said, What gave movement to these, and drives their ceaseless and unhindered motion? Is it not the Artificer of them Who implanted reason in them all, in accordance with which the Universe is moved and controlled? Is it not He who made them and brought them into being? For we cannot attribute such a power to the Accidental. For, suppose that its existence is accidental, to what will you let us ascribe its order? And if you like we will grant you this: to what then will you ascribe its preservation and protection in accordance with the terms of its first creation. Do these belong to the Accidental, or to something else? Surely not to the Accidental. And what can this Something Else be but God? Thus reason that proceeds from God, that is implanted in all from the beginning and is the first law in us, and is bound up in all, leads us up to God through visible things. Let us begin again, and reason this out.

XVII. What God is in nature and essence, no man ever yet has discovered or can discover. Whether it will ever be discovered is a question which he who will may examine and decide. In my opinion it will be discovered when that within us which is godlike and divine, I mean our mind and reason, shall have mingled with its Like, and the image shall have ascended to the Archetype, of which it has now the desire. And this I think is the solution of that vexed problem as to “We shall know even as we are known.”³⁴⁶⁰ But in our present life all that comes to us is but a little effluence, and as it were a small effulgence from a great Light. So that if anyone has known God, or has had the testimony of Scripture to his knowledge of God, we are to understand such an one to have possessed a degree of knowledge which gave him the appearance of being more fully enlightened than another who did not enjoy the same degree of illumination; and this relative superiority is spoken of as if it were absolute knowledge, not because it is really such, but by comparison with the power of that other.

³⁴⁵⁹ It was a very general belief in the early Church that the gods whom the heathen worshipped were in reality actual evil spirits; and this belief is certainly supported by S. Paul’s argument about εἰδωλόθυτον in 1 Cor. x. 19–21.

³⁴⁶⁰ 1 Cor. xiii. 12, but with a reading ἐπιγνώσεσθε, which is not in the New Testament.

XVIII. Thus Enos “hoped to call upon the Name of the Lord.”³⁴⁶¹ Hope was that for which he is commended; and that, not that he should *know* God, but that he should call *upon* him. And Enoch was translated,³⁴⁶² but it is not yet clear whether it was because he already comprehended the Divine Nature, or in order that he might comprehend it. And Noah’s³⁴⁶³ glory was that he was pleasing to God; he who was entrusted with the saving of the whole world from the waters, or rather of the Seeds of the world, escaped the Deluge in a small Ark. And Abraham, great Patriarch though he was, was justified by faith,³⁴⁶⁴ and offered a strange victim,³⁴⁶⁵ the type of the Great Sacrifice. Yet he saw not God as God, but gave Him food as a man.³⁴⁶⁶ He was approved because he worshipped as far as he comprehended.³⁴⁶⁷ And Jacob dreamed of a lofty ladder and stair of Angels, and in a mystery anointed a pillar³⁴⁶⁸ — perhaps to signify the Rock that was anointed for our sake — and gave to a place the name of The House of God³⁴⁶⁹ in honour of Him whom he saw; and wrestled with God in human form; whatever this wrestling of God with man may mean...possibly it refers to the comparison of man’s virtue with God’s; and he bore on his body the marks of the wrestling, setting forth the defeat of the created nature; and for a reward of his reverence he received a change of his name; being named, instead of Jacob, Israel — that great and honourable name. Yet neither he nor any one on his behalf, unto this day, of all the Twelve Tribes who were his children, could boast that he comprehended the whole nature or the pure sight of God.

XIX. To Elias neither the strong wind, nor the fire, nor the earthquake, as you learn from the story,³⁴⁷⁰ but a light breeze adumbrated the Presence of God, and not even this His Nature. And who was this Elias? The man whom a chariot of fire took up to heaven, signifying the superhuman excellency of the righteous man. And are you not amazed at Manoah the Judge of yore, and at

³⁴⁶¹ Gen. iv. 26. The verb has by some been taken as passive, and not middle, “hoped that the Name of the Lord would be called upon.”

³⁴⁶² Ib. v. 24, Eccclus. xlix. 14.

³⁴⁶³ Gen. vi. 8.

³⁴⁶⁴ Ib. xviii. 18.

³⁴⁶⁵ Ib. xxviii. 2.

³⁴⁶⁶ Gen. xviii. 2. Elias Cretensis sees in this occurrence a foreshadowing of the Incarnation; and also with many others, a revelation of the Trinity, in that Abraham saw Three and conversed with One.

³⁴⁶⁷ Gen. xxxii. 28.

³⁴⁶⁸ Ib. ver. 28.

³⁴⁶⁹ v. 1. *The Form of God*, which would refer to the occasion cited below. The reading is grammatically easier, as an accusative is required; but in that case we might have expected the wrestling with the Angel to have been mentioned first, as the name Penuel was given by Jacob on the day following the night in which he wrestled, and received his own change of name. The Benedictines, while retaining *House* in text and version, express a preference for *Form*, because the subject of the argument is the Vision of God.

³⁴⁷⁰ 1 Kings xix. 11, 12. LXX. has a Sound of a Light breeze.

Peter the disciple in later days; the one being unable to endure the sight even of one in whom was a representation of God; and saying, “We are undone, O wife, we have seen God;”³⁴⁷¹ speaking as though even a vision of God could not be grasped by human beings, let alone the Nature of God; and the other unable to endure the Presence of Christ in his boat and therefore bidding Him depart;³⁴⁷² and this though Peter was more zealous than the others for the knowledge of Christ, and received a blessing for this,³⁴⁷³ and was entrusted with the greatest gifts. What would you say of Isaiah or Ezekiel, who was an eyewitness of very great mysteries, and of the other Prophets; for one of these saw the Lord of Sabaoth sitting on the Throne of glory,³⁴⁷⁴ and encircled and praised and hidden by the sixwinged Seraphim, and was himself purged by the live coal, and equipped for his prophetic office. And the other describes the Cherubic Chariot³⁴⁷⁵ of God, and the Throne upon them, and the Firmament over it, and Him that shewed Himself in the Firmament, and Voices, and Forces, and Deeds.³⁴⁷⁶ And whether this was an appearance by day, only visible to Saints, or an unerring vision of the night, or an impression on the mind holding converse with the future as if it were the present; or some other ineffable form of prophecy, I cannot say; the God of the Prophets knoweth, and they know who are thus inspired. But neither these of whom I am speaking, nor any of their fellows ever stood before the Council³⁴⁷⁷ and Essence of God, as it is written, or saw, or proclaimed the Nature of God.

XX. If it had been permitted to Paul to utter what the Third Heaven³⁴⁷⁸ contained, and his own advance, or ascension, or assumption thither, perhaps we should know something more about God’s Nature, if this was the mystery of the rapture. But since it was ineffable, we too will honour it by silence. Thus much we will hear Paul say about it, that we know in part and we prophesy in part.³⁴⁷⁹ This and the like to this are the confessions of one who is not rude in knowledge,³⁴⁸⁰ who threatens

³⁴⁷¹ Judg. xiii. 22.

³⁴⁷² Luke v. 8.

³⁴⁷³ Matt. xvi. 16, 17.

³⁴⁷⁴ Isa. vi. 1 sqq.

³⁴⁷⁵ Ezek. i. 4–28.

³⁴⁷⁶ v. l. Orders, i.e. of angels.

³⁴⁷⁷ This is a quotation from the LXX. of Jer. xxiii. 18, where for ὑποστήματι Aquila has ἀπορρήτω, and Symmachus ὀμιλία, (according to Trommius). ὑπόστημα properly means a Station of troops, and such is the meaning in the other two places where the word occurs in the LXX., viz.:—2 Sam. xxiii. 14, and 1 Chron. xi. 16. The Hebrew word which it represents in this passage is one of frequent use, and means “a Council,” or, in a sense derived from this, Familiar Intercourse. In Job xv. 8 it is rendered in A.V. The Secret of God, where the LXX. has σύνταγμα. The Vulgate in both cases has Concilium Dei; the Benedictines however render it Substance. A.V. has Counsel, and in marg. Secret; while R.V. reads Council, with no marginal alternative.

³⁴⁷⁸ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

³⁴⁷⁹ 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

³⁴⁸⁰ 2 Cor. xi. 6.



to give proof of Christ speaking in him, the great doctor and champion of the truth. Wherefore he estimates all knowledge on earth only as through a glass darkly,³⁴⁸¹ as taking its stand upon little images of the truth. Now, unless I appear to anyone too careful, and over anxious about the examination of this matter, perhaps it was of this and nothing else that the Word Himself intimated that there were things which could not now be borne, but which should be borne and cleared up hereafter,³⁴⁸² and which John the Forerunner of the Word and great Voice of the Truth declared even the whole world could not contain.³⁴⁸³

XXI. The truth then, and the whole Word is full of difficulty and obscurity; and as it were with a small instrument we are undertaking a great work, when with merely human wisdom we pursue the knowledge of the Self-existent, and in company with, or not apart from, the senses, by which we are borne hither and thither, and led into error, we apply ourselves to the search after things which are only to be grasped by the mind, and we are unable by meeting bare realities with bare intellect to approximate somewhat more closely to the truth, and to mould the mind by its concepts.

Now the subject of God is more hard to come at,³⁴⁸⁴ in proportion as it is more perfect than any other, and is open to more objections, and the solutions of them are more laborious. For every objection, however small, stops and hinders the course of our argument, and cuts off its further advance, just like men who suddenly check with the rein the horses in full career, and turn them right round by the unexpected shock. Thus Solomon, who was the wisest of all men,³⁴⁸⁵ whether before him or in his own time, to whom God gave breadth of heart, and a flood of contemplation, more abundant than the sand, even he, the more he entered into the depth, the more dizzy he became, and declared the furthest point of wisdom to be the discovery of how very far off she was from him.³⁴⁸⁶ Paul also tries to arrive at, I will not say the nature of God, for this he knew was utterly impossible, but only the judgments of God; and since he finds no way out, and no halting place in the ascent, and moreover, since the earnest searching of his mind after knowledge does not end in any definite conclusion, because some fresh unattained point is being continually disclosed to him (O marvel, that I have a like experience), he closes his discourse with astonishment, and calls this the riches of God,³⁴⁸⁷ and the depth, and confesses the unsearchableness of the judgments of God, in almost the very words of David, who at one time calls God's judgments the great deep whose foundations cannot be reached by measure or sense;³⁴⁸⁸ and at another says that His knowledge of

³⁴⁸¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

³⁴⁸² John xvi. 12.

³⁴⁸³ S. John xxi. 25. By a curious slip of the tongue S. Gregory here attributes to the Baptist words of the Evangelist.

³⁴⁸⁴ cf. Petav. de Deo, iii., c. 7.

³⁴⁸⁵ 1 Kings iii. 12.

³⁴⁸⁶ Ecc. vii. 23.

³⁴⁸⁷ Rom. xi. 23.

³⁴⁸⁸ Ps. xxxvi. 7.

him and of his own constitution was marvellous,³⁴⁸⁹ and had attained greater strength than was in his own power or grasp.

XXII. For if, he says, I leave everything else alone, and consider myself and the whole nature and constitution of man, and how we are mingled, and what is our movement, and how the mortal was compounded with the immortal, and how it is that I flow downwards, and yet am borne upwards, and how the soul is circumscribed,³⁴⁹⁰ and how it gives life and shares in feelings; and how the mind is at once circumscribed and unlimited,³⁴⁹¹ abiding in us and yet travelling over the Universe in swift motion and flow; how it is both received and imparted by word, and passes through air, and enters with all things; how it shares in sense, and enshrouds itself away from sense. And even before these questions—what was our first moulding and composition in the workshop of nature, and what is our last formation and completion? What is the desire for and imparting of nourishment, and who brought us spontaneously to those first springs and sources of life? How is the body nourished by food, and the soul by reason? What is the drawing of nature, and the mutual relation between parents and children, that it should be held together by a spell of love? How is it that species are permanent, and are different in their characteristics, although there are so many that their individual marks cannot be described? How is it that the same animal is both mortal and immortal³⁴⁹², the one by decease, the other by coming into being? For one departs, and another takes its place, just like the flow of a river, which is never still, yet ever constant. And you might discuss many more points concerning men's members and parts, and their mutual adaptation both for use and beauty, and how some are connected and others disjointed, some are more excellent and others less comely, some are united and others divided, some contain and others are contained, according to the law and reason of Nature. Much too might be said about voices and ears. How is it that the voice is carried by the vocal organs, and received by the ears, and both are joined by the smiting and resounding of the medium of the air? Much too of the eyes, which have an indescribable communion with visible objects, and which are moved by the will alone, and that together, and are affected exactly as is the mind. For with equal speed the mind is joined to the objects of thought, the eye to those of sight. Much too concerning the other senses, not objects of the research of reason. And much concerning our rest in sleep, and the figments of dreams, and of memory and remembrance; of calculation, and anger, and desire; and in a word, all by which this little world called Man is swayed.

XXIII. Shall I reckon up for you the differences of the other animals, both from us and from each other,—differences of nature, and of production, and of nourishment, and of region, and of temper, and as it were of social life? How is it that some are gregarious and others solitary, some

297

³⁴⁸⁹ Ib. cxxxix. 6.

³⁴⁹⁰ v. l. And how the soul is carried round.

³⁴⁹¹ v. l. Invisible.

³⁴⁹² Gregory is not here speaking of the immortality of the individual soul, but of that of the Race, which it shares with other animals, and which is effected by continual succession.

herbivorous and others carnivorous, some fierce and others tame, some fond of man and domesticated, others untamable and free? And some we might call bordering on reason and power of learning, while others are altogether destitute of reason, and incapable of being taught. Some with fuller senses, others with less; some immovable, and some with the power of walking, and some very swift, and some very slow; some surpassing in size or beauty, or in one or other of these respects; others very small or very ugly, or both; some strong, others weak, some apt at self-defence, others timid and crafty³⁴⁹³ and others again are unguarded. Some are laborious and thrifty, others altogether idle and improvident. And before we come to such points as these, how is it that some are crawling things, and others upright; some attached to one spot, some amphibious; some delight in beauty and others are unadorned; some are married and some single; some temperate and others intemperate; some have numerous offspring and others not; some are long-lived and others have but short lives? It would be a weary discourse to go through all the details.

XXIV. Look also at the fishy tribe gliding through the waters, and as it were flying through the liquid element, and breathing its own air, but in danger when in contact with ours, as we are in the waters; and mark their habits and dispositions, their intercourse and their births, their size and their beauty, and their affection for places, and their wanderings, and their assemblings and departings, and their properties which so nearly resemble those of the animals that dwell on land; in some cases community, in others contrast of properties, both in name and shape. And consider the tribes of birds, and their varieties of form and colour, both of those which are voiceless and of songbirds. What is the reason of their melody, and from whom came it? Who gave to the grasshopper the lute in his breast, and the songs and chirruping on the branches, when they are moved by the sun to make their midday music, and sing among the groves, and escort the wayfarer with their voices? Who wove the song for the swan when he spreads his wings to the breezes, and makes melody of their rustling? For I will not speak of the forced voices, and all the rest that art contrives against the truth. Whence does the peacock, that boastful bird of Media, get his love of beauty and of praise (for he is fully conscious of his own beauty), so that when he sees any one approaching, or when, as they say, he would make a show before his hens, raising his neck and spreading his tail in circle around him, glittering like gold and studded with stars, he makes a spectacle of his beauty to his lovers with pompous strides? Now Holy Scripture admires the cleverness in weaving even of women, saying, Who gave to woman skill in weaving and cleverness in the art of embroidery?³⁴⁹⁴ This belongeth to a living creature that hath reason, and exceedeth in wisdom and maketh way even as far as the things of heaven.

XXV. But I would have you marvel at the natural knowledge even of irrational creatures, and if you can, explain its cause. How is it that birds have for nests rocks and trees and roofs, and adapt them both for safety and beauty, and suitably for the comfort of their nurslings? Whence do bees and spiders get their love of work and art, by which the former plan their honeycombs, and join

³⁴⁹³ The Benedictines here insert Some well protected; but it is their own conjecture, and is not found in the Manuscripts.

³⁴⁹⁴ Job xxxviii. 36. LXX.

them together by hexagonal and co-ordinate tubes, and construct the foundation by means of a partition and an alternation of the angles with straight lines; and this, as is the case, in such dusky hives and dark combs; and the latter weave their intricate webs by such light and almost airy threads stretched in divers ways, and this from almost invisible beginnings, to be at once a precious dwelling, and a trap for weaker creatures with a view to enjoyment of food? What Euclid ever imitated these, while pursuing philosophical enquiries with lines that have no real existence, and wearying himself with demonstrations? From what Palamedes came the tactics, and, as the saying is, the movements and configurations of cranes, and the systems of their movement in ranks and their complicated flight? Who were their Phidiæ and Zeuxides, and who were the Parrhasii and Aglaophons who knew how to draw and mould excessively beautiful things? What harmonious Gnosian chorus of Dædalus, wrought for a girl³⁴⁹⁵ to the highest pitch of beauty? What Cretan Labyrinth, hard to get through, hard to unravel, as the poets say, and continually crossing itself through the tricks of its construction? I will not speak of the ants' storehouses and storekeepers, and of their treasurings of wood in quantities corresponding to the time for which it is wanted, and all the other details which we know are told of their marches and leaders and their good order in their works.

298

XXVI. If this knowledge has come within your reach and you are familiar with these branches of science, look at the differences of plants also, up to the artistic fashion of the leaves, which is adapted both to give the utmost pleasure to the eye, and to be of the greatest advantage to the fruit. Look too at the variety and lavish abundance of fruits, and most of all at the wondrous beauty of such as are most necessary. And consider the power of roots, and juices, and flowers, and odours, not only so very sweet, but also serviceable as medicines; and the graces and qualities of colours; and again the costly value, and the brilliant transparency of precious stones. Since nature has set before you all things as in an abundant banquet free to all, both the necessities and the luxuries of life, in order that, if nothing else, you may at any rate know God by His benefits, and by your own sense of want be made wiser than you were. Next, I pray you, traverse the length and breadth of earth, the common mother of all, and the gulfs of the sea bound together with one another and with the land, and the beautiful forests, and the rivers and springs abundant and perennial, not only of waters cold and fit for drinking, and on the surface of the earth; but also such as running beneath the earth, and flowing under caverns, are then forced out by a violent blast, and repelled, and then filled with heat by this violence of strife and repulsion, burst out by little and little wherever they get a chance, and hence supply our need of hot baths in many parts of the earth, and in conjunction with the cold give us a healing which is without cost and spontaneous. Tell me how and whence are these things? What is this great web unwrought by art? These things are no less worthy of admiration, in respect of their mutual relations than when considered separately.

How is it that the earth stands solid and unswerving? On what is it supported? What is it that props it up, and on what does that rest? For indeed even reason has nothing to lean upon, but only

³⁴⁹⁵ The allusion is to a group made by Dædalus for Ariadne, representing a chorus of youths and maidens, which seemed to be moving in musical rhythm. It is described by Homer (Il., xviii., 592 sqq.).

the Will of God. And how is it that part of it is drawn up into mountain summits, and part laid down in plains, and this in various and differing ways? And because the variations are individually small, it both supplies our needs more liberally, and is more beautiful by its variety; part being distributed into habitations, and part left uninhabited, namely all the great height of Mountains, and the various clefts of its coast line cut off from it. Is not this the clearest proof of the majestic working of God?

XXVII. And with respect to the Sea even if I did not marvel at its greatness, yet I should have marvelled at its gentleness, in that although loose it stands within its boundaries; and if not at its gentleness, yet surely at its greatness; but since I marvel at both, I will praise the Power that is in both. What collected it? What bounded it? How is it raised and lulled to rest, as though respecting its neighbour earth? How, moreover, does it receive all the rivers, and yet remain the same, through the very superabundance of its immensity, if that term be permissible? How is the boundary of it, though it be an element of such magnitude, only sand? Have your natural philosophers with their knowledge of useless details anything to tell us, those men I mean who are really endeavouring to measure the sea with a wineglass, and such mighty works by their own conceptions? Or shall I give the really scientific explanation of it from Scripture concisely, and yet more satisfactorily and truly than by the longest arguments? “He hath fenced the face of the water with His command.”³⁴⁹⁶ This is the chain of fluid nature. And how doth He bring upon it the Nautilus that inhabits the dry land (i.e., man) in a little vessel, and with a little breeze (dost thou not marvel at the sight of this,—is not thy mind astonished?), that earth and sea may be bound together by needs and commerce, and that things so widely separated by nature should be thus brought together into one for man? What are the first fountains of springs? Seek, O man, if you can trace out or find any of these things. And who was it who cleft the plains and the mountains for the rivers, and gave them an unhindered course? And how comes the marvel on the other side, that the Sea never overflows, nor the Rivers cease to flow? And what is the nourishing power of water, and what the difference therein; for some things are irrigated from above, and others drink from their roots, if I may luxuriate a little in my language when speaking of the luxuriant gifts of God.



XXVIII. And now, leaving the earth and the things of earth, soar into the air on the wings of thought, that our argument may advance in due path; and thence I will take you up to heavenly things, and to heaven itself, and things which are above heaven; for to that which is beyond my discourse hesitates to ascend, but still it shall ascend as far as may be. Who poured forth the air, that great and abundant wealth, not measured to men by their rank or fortunes; not restrained by boundaries; not divided out according to people's ages; but like the distribution of the Manna,³⁴⁹⁷ received in sufficiency, and valued for its equality of distribution; the chariot of the winged creation; the seat of the winds; the moderator of the seasons; the quickener of living things, or rather the preserver of natural life in the body; in which bodies have their being, and by which we speak; in

³⁴⁹⁶ Job xxvi. 10. LXX.

³⁴⁹⁷ Exod. xvi. 18.

which is the light and all that it shines upon, and the sight which flows through it? And mark, if you please, what follows. I cannot give to the air the whole empire of all that is thought to belong to the air. What are the storehouses of the winds?³⁴⁹⁸ What are the treasuries of the snow? Who, as Scripture hath said, hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of Whose womb came the ice? and Who bindeth the waters in the clouds, and, fixing part in the clouds (O marvel!) held by His Word though its nature is to flow, poureth out the rest upon the face of the whole earth, and scattereth it abroad in due season, and in just proportions, and neither suffereth the whole substance of moisture to go out free and uncontrolled (for sufficient was the cleansing in the days of Noah; and He who cannot lie is not forgetful of His own covenant);...nor yet restraineth it entirely that we should not again stand in need of an Elias³⁴⁹⁹ to bring the drought to an end. If He shall shut up heaven, it saith, who shall open it? If He open the floodgates, who shall shut them up?³⁵⁰⁰ Who can bring an excess or withhold a sufficiency of rain, unless he govern the Universe by his own measures and balances? What scientific laws, pray, can you lay down concerning thunder and lightning, O you who thunder from the earth, and cannot shine with even little sparks of truth? To what vapours from earth will you attribute the creation of cloud, or is it due to some thickening of the air, or pressure or crash of clouds of excessive rarity, so as to make you think the pressure the cause of the lightning, and the crash that which makes the thunder? Or what compression of wind having no outlet will account to you for the lightning by its compression, and for the thunder by its bursting out?

Now if you have in your thought passed through the air and all the things of air, reach with me to heaven and the things of heaven. And let faith lead us rather than reason, if at least you have learnt the feebleness of the latter in matters nearer to you, and have known reason by knowing the things that are beyond reason, so as not to be altogether on the earth or of the earth, because you are ignorant even of your ignorance.

XXIX. Who spread the sky around us, and set the stars in order? Or rather, first, can you tell me, of your own knowledge of the things in heaven, what *are* the sky and the stars; you who know not what lies at your very feet, and cannot even take the measure of yourself, and yet must busy yourself about what is above your nature, and gape at the illimitable? For, granted that you understand orbits and periods, and waxings and wanings, and settings and risings, and some degrees and minutes, and all the other things which make you so proud of your wonderful knowledge; you have not arrived at comprehension of the realities themselves, but only at an observation of some movement, which, when confirmed by longer practice, and drawing the observations of many individuals into one generalization, and thence deducing a law, has acquired the name of Science (just as the lunar phenomena have become generally known to our sight), being the basis of this knowledge. But if you are very scientific on this subject, and have a just claim to admiration, tell

³⁴⁹⁸ Job xxxvii. 9, 10.

³⁴⁹⁹ 1 Kings xviii. 44.

³⁵⁰⁰ Job xii. 14.

me what is the cause of this order and this movement. How came the sun to be a beacon-fire to the whole world, and to all eyes like the leader of some chorus, concealing all the rest of the stars by his brightness, more completely than some of them conceal others. The proof of this is that they shine against him, but he outshines them and does not even allow it to be perceived that they rose simultaneously with him, fair as a bridegroom, swift and great as a giant³⁵⁰¹ for I will not let his praises be sung from any other source than my own Scriptures—so mighty in strength that from one end to the other of the world he embraces all things in his heat, and there is nothing hid from the feeling thereof, but it fills both every eye with light, and every embodied creature with heat; warming, yet not burning, by the gentleness of its temper, and the order of its movement, present to all, and equally embracing all.

300

XXX. Have you considered the importance of the fact that a heathen writer³⁵⁰² speaks of the sun as holding the same position among material objects as God does among objects of thought? For the one gives light to the eyes, as the Other does to the mind; and is the most beautiful of the objects of sight, as God is of those of thought. But who gave him motion at first? And what is it which ever moves him in his circuit, though in his nature stable and immovable, truly unwearied, and the giver and sustainer of life, and all the rest of the titles which the poets justly sing of him, and never resting in his course or his benefits? How comes he to be the creator of day when above the earth, and of night when below it? or whatever may be the right expression when one contemplates the sun? What are the mutual aggressions and concessions of day and night, and their regular irregularities—to use a somewhat strange expression? How comes he to be the maker and divider of the seasons, that come and depart in regular order, and as in a dance interweave with each other, or stand apart by a law of love on the one hand, and of order on the other, and mingle little by little, and steal on their neighbour, just as nights and days do, so as not to give us pain by their suddenness. This will be enough about the sun.

Do you know the nature and phenomena of the Moon, and the measures and courses of light, and how it is that the sun bears rule over the day, and the moon presides over the night; and while She gives confidence to wild beasts, He stirs Man up to work, raising or lowering himself as may be most serviceable? Know you the bond of Pleiades, or the fence of Orion³⁵⁰³ as He who counteth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names?³⁵⁰⁴ Know you the differences of the glory³⁵⁰⁵ of each, and the order of their movement, that I should trust you, when by them you weave the web of human concerns, and arm the creature against the Creator?

XXXI. What say you? Shall we pause here, after discussing nothing further than matter and visible things, or, since the Word knows the Tabernacle of Moses to be a figure of the whole

³⁵⁰¹ Ps. xix. 5.

³⁵⁰² Plato.

³⁵⁰³ Job xxxviii. 31.

³⁵⁰⁴ Ps. cxlvii. 4.

³⁵⁰⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

creation—I mean the entire system of things visible and invisible—shall we pass the first veil, and stepping beyond the realm of sense, shall we look into the Holy Place, the Intellectual and Celestial creation? But not even this can we see in an incorporeal way, though it is incorporeal, since it is called—or is—Fire and Spirit. For He is said to make His Angels spirits, and His Ministers a flame of fire³⁵⁰⁶...though perhaps this “making” means preserving by that Word by which they came into existence. The Angel then is called spirit and fire; Spirit, as being a creature of the intellectual sphere; Fire, as being of a purifying nature; for I know that the same names belong to the First Nature. But, relatively to us at least, we must reckon the Angelic Nature incorporeal, or at any rate as nearly so as possible. Do you see how we get dizzy over this subject, and cannot advance to any point, unless it be as far as this, that we know there are Angels and Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Princedoms, Powers, Splendours, Ascents, Intelligent Powers or Intelligencies, pure natures and unalloyed, immovable to evil, or scarcely movable; ever circling in chorus round the First Cause (or how should we sing their praises?) illuminated thence with the purest Illumination, or one in one degree and one in another, proportionally to their nature and rank...so conformed to beauty and moulded that they become secondary Lights, and can enlighten others by the overflowings and largesses of the First Light? Ministrants of God’s Will, strong with both inborn and imparted strength, traversing all space, readily present to all at any place through their zeal for ministry and the agility of their nature...different individuals of them embracing different parts of the world, or appointed over different districts of the Universe, as He knoweth who ordered and distributed it all. Combining all things in one, solely with a view to the consent of the Creator of all things; Hymners of the Majesty of the Godhead, eternally contemplating the Eternal Glory, not that God may thereby gain an increase of glory, for nothing can be added to that which is full—to Him, who supplies good to all outside Himself but that there may never be a cessation of blessings to these first natures after God. If we have told these things as they deserve, it is by the grace of the Trinity, and of the one Godhead in Three Persons; but if less perfectly than we have desired, yet even so our discourse has gained its purpose. For this is what we were labouring to shew, that even the secondary natures surpass the power of our intellect; much more then the First and (for I fear to say merely That which is above all), the only Nature.



Oration XXIX.

The Third Theological Oration.

On the Son.

³⁵⁰⁶ Ps. civ. 4.