

0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – In patrem tacentem

Oration XVI

On His Father's Silence, Because of the Plague of Hail.

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willing subjects: since it is our practice not to lead by force, or by compulsion, but by good will. For this would not hold together even another form of government, since that which is held in by force is wont, when opportunity offers, to strike for freedom: but freedom of will more than anything else it is, which holds together our—I will not call it rule, but—tutorship. For the mystery of godliness³⁰⁴⁴ belongs to those who are willing, not to those who are overpowered.

6. This is my speech to you, my good men, uttered in simplicity and with all good will, and this is the secret of my mind. And may the victory rest with that which will be for the profit of both you and me, under the Spirit's guidance of our affairs, (for our discourse comes back again to the same point,)³⁰⁴⁵ to Whom we have given ourselves, and the head anointed with the oil of perfection, in the Almighty Father, and the Only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit, Who is God. For how long shall we hide³⁰⁴⁶ the lamp under the bushel,³⁰⁴⁷ and withhold from others the full knowledge of the Godhead, when it ought to be now put upon the lampstand and give light to all churches and souls and to the whole fulness of the world, no longer by means of metaphors, or intellectual sketches, but by distinct declaration? And this indeed is a most perfect setting forth of Theology to those Who have been deemed worthy of this grace in Christ Jesus Himself, our Lord, to Whom be glory, honour, and power for ever. Amen.

Oration XVI.

On His Father's Silence, Because of the Plague of Hail.

*This Oration belongs to the year A.D. 373. A series of disasters had befallen the people of Nazianzus. A deadly cattle plague, which had devastated their herds, had been followed by a prolonged drought, and now their just ripened crops had been ruined by a storm of rain and hail. The people flocked to the church, and finding S. Gregory the elder so overwhelmed by his sense of these terrible misfortunes that he was unable to address them, implored his coadjutor to enter the pulpit. The occasion gave no time for preparation, so S. Gregory poured out his feelings in a discourse which was in the fullest sense of the words *ex tempore*. Its present form, however, as Benoît suggests, may be due to a later polishing of notes taken down at the time of delivery.*

³⁰⁴⁴ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

³⁰⁴⁵ *The same point*, i.e. from which it started, § 1.

³⁰⁴⁶ *Hide*, etc. S. Gregory here alludes to the "economy" which refrained from distinctly declaring the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. Cf. Or. xliii., 68. This declaration of his was afterwards commented on by his audience and others, cf. Epist. 58, in which his mode of teaching is contrasted with that of S. Basil.

³⁰⁴⁷ S. Matt. v. 15.

1. WHY do you infringe upon the approved order of things? Why would you do violence to a tongue which is under obligation to the law? Why do you challenge a speech which is in subjection to the Spirit? Why, when you have excused the head, have you hastened to the feet? Why do you pass by Aaron³⁰⁴⁸ and urge forward Eleazar? I cannot allow the fountain to be dammed up, while the rivulet runs its course; the sun to be hidden, while the star shines forth; hoar hairs to be in retirement, while youth lays down the law; wisdom to be silent, while inexperience speaks with assurance. A heavy rain is not always more useful than a gentle shower. Nay, indeed, if it be too violent, it sweeps away the earth, and increases the proportion of the farmer's loss: while a gentle fall, which sinks deep, enriches the soil, benefits the tiller and makes the corn grow to a fine crop. So the fluent speech is not more profitable than the wise. For the one, though it perhaps gave a slight pleasure, passes away, and is dispersed as soon, and with as little effect, as the air on which it struck, though it charms with its eloquence the greedy ear. But the other sinks into the mind, and opening wide its mouth, fills it³⁰⁴⁹ with the Spirit, and, showing itself nobler than its origin, produces a rich harvest by a few syllables.

2. I have not yet alluded to the true and first wisdom, for which our wonderful husbandman and shepherd is conspicuous. The first wisdom is a life worthy of praise, and kept pure for God, or being purified for Him Who is all-pure and all-luminous, Who demands of us, us His only sacrifice, purification—that is, a contrite heart and the sacrifice of praise,³⁰⁵⁰ and a new creation in Christ,³⁰⁵¹ and the new man,³⁰⁵² and the like, as the Scripture loves to call it. The first wisdom is to despise that wisdom which consists of language and figures of speech, and spurious and unnecessary embellishments. Be it mine to speak five words with my understanding in the church, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue,³⁰⁵³ and with the unmeaning voice of a trumpet,³⁰⁵⁴ which does not rouse my soldier to the spiritual combat. This is the wisdom which I praise, which I welcome. By this the ignoble have won renown, and the despised have attained the highest honours. By this a crew of fishermen have taken the whole world in the meshes of the Gospel-net, and overcome by a word finished and cut short³⁰⁵⁵ the wisdom that comes to naught.³⁰⁵⁶ I count not wise the man who is clever in words, nor him who is of a ready tongue, but unstable and undisciplined in soul,



³⁰⁴⁸ Aaron, S. Gregory the elder. *Eleazar*, S. Gregory Nazianzen.

³⁰⁴⁹ Ps. lxxxi. 11.

³⁰⁵⁰ Ib. l. 23; li. 19.

³⁰⁵¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

³⁰⁵² Eph. iv. 24.

³⁰⁵³ 1 Cor. xiv. 19.

³⁰⁵⁴ Ib. xiv. 8.

³⁰⁵⁵ Isai. x. 22, 23 (LXX.); Rom. ix. 28.

³⁰⁵⁶ 1 Cor. ii. 6.

like the tombs which, fair and beautiful as they are outwardly, are fetid with corpses within,³⁰⁵⁷ and full of manifold ill-savours; but him who speaks but little of virtue, yet gives many examples of it in his practice, and proves the trustworthiness of his language by his life.

3. Fairer in my eyes, is the beauty which we can gaze upon than that which is painted in words: of more value the wealth which our hands can hold, than that which is imagined in our dreams; and more real the wisdom of which we are convinced by deeds, than that which is set forth in splendid language. For “a good understanding,” he saith, “have all they that do thereafter,”³⁰⁵⁸ not they who proclaim it. Time is the best touchstone of this wisdom, and “the hoary head is a crown of glory.”³⁰⁵⁹ For if, as it seems to me as well as to Solomon, we must “judge none blessed before his death,”³⁰⁶⁰ and it is uncertain “what a day may bring forth,”³⁰⁶¹ since our life here below has many turnings, and the body of our humiliation³⁰⁶² is ever rising, falling and changing; surely he, who without fault has almost drained the cup of life, and nearly reached the haven of the common sea of existence is more secure, and therefore more enviable, than one who has yet a long voyage before him.

4. Do not thou, therefore, restrain a tongue whose noble utterances and fruits have been many, which has begotten many children of righteousness—yea, lift up thine eyes round about and see,³⁰⁶³ how many are its sons, and what are its treasures; even this whole people, whom thou hast begotten in Christ through the Gospel.³⁰⁶⁴ Grudge not to us those words which are excellent rather than many, and do not yet give us a foretaste of our impending loss.³⁰⁶⁵ Speak in words which, if few, are dear and most sweet to me, which, if scarcely audible, are perceived from their spiritual cry, as God heard the silence of Moses, and said to him when interceding mentally, “Why criest thou unto Me?”³⁰⁶⁶ Comfort this people, I pray thee, I, who was thy nursling, and have since been made Pastor, and now even Chief Pastor. Give a lesson, to me in the Pastor’s art, to this people of obedience. Discourse awhile on our present heavy blow, about the just judgments of God, whether we grasp their meaning, or are ignorant of their great deep.³⁰⁶⁷ How again “mercy is put in the

³⁰⁵⁷ S. Matt. xxiii. 27.

³⁰⁵⁸ Ps. cxi. 10.

³⁰⁵⁹ Prov. xvi. 31.

³⁰⁶⁰ Eccles. xi. 28.

³⁰⁶¹ Prov. xxvii. 1.

³⁰⁶² Phil. iii. 21.

³⁰⁶³ Isai. xlix. 18.

³⁰⁶⁴ 1 Cor. iv. 15.

³⁰⁶⁵ *Loss*, i.e., the death of his father, which, from his age, could not be long delayed.

³⁰⁶⁶ Exod. xiv. 15.

³⁰⁶⁷ Ps. xxxvi. 6.

balance,³⁰⁶⁸ as holy Isaiah declares, for goodness is not without discernment, as the first labourers in the vineyard³⁰⁶⁹ fancied, because they could not perceive any distinction between those who were paid alike: and how anger, which is called “the cup in the hand of the Lord,”³⁰⁷⁰ and “the cup of falling which is drained,”³⁰⁷¹ is in proportion to transgressions, even though He abates to all somewhat of what is their due, and dilutes with compassion the unmixed draught of His wrath. For He inclines from severity to indulgence towards those who accept chastisement with fear, and who after a slight affliction conceive and are in pain with conversion, and bring forth³⁰⁷² the perfect spirit of salvation; but nevertheless he reserves the dregs,³⁰⁷³ the last drop of His anger, that He may pour it out entire upon those who, instead of being healed by His kindness, grow obdurate, like the hard-hearted Pharaoh,³⁰⁷⁴ that bitter taskmaster, who is set forth as an example of the power³⁰⁷⁵ of God over the ungodly.

5. Tell us whence come such blows and scourges, and what account we can give of them. Is it some disordered and irregular motion or some unguided current, some unreason of the universe, as though there were no Ruler of the world, which is therefore borne along by chance, as is the doctrine of the foolishly wise, who are themselves borne along at random by the disorderly spirit of darkness? Or are the disturbances and changes of the universe, (which was originally constituted, blended, bound together, and set in motion in a harmony known only to Him Who gave it motion,) directed by reason and order under the guidance of the reins of Providence? Whence come famines and tornadoes and hailstorms, our present warning blow? Whence pestilences, diseases, earthquakes, tidal waves, and fearful things in the heavens? And how is the creation, once ordered for the enjoyment of men, their common and equal delight, changed for the punishment of the ungodly, in order that we may be chastised through that for which, when honoured with it, we did not give thanks, and recognise in our sufferings that power which we did not recognise in our benefits? How is it that some receive at the Lord’s hand double for their sins,³⁰⁷⁶ and the measure of their wickedness is doubly filled up, as in the correction of Israel, while the sins of others are done away by a sevenfold recompense into their bosom?³⁰⁷⁷ What is the measure of the Amorites that is not

³⁰⁶⁸ Is. xxviii. 17. (LXX).
³⁰⁶⁹ S. Matt. xx. 12.
³⁰⁷⁰ Ps. lxxv. 9.
³⁰⁷¹ Isai. li. 17 (LXX).
³⁰⁷² Ib. xxvi. 18.
³⁰⁷³ Ps. lxxv. 10.
³⁰⁷⁴ Exod. v. 6; vii. 22.
³⁰⁷⁵ Rom. ix. 17.
³⁰⁷⁶ Isai. xl. 2.
³⁰⁷⁷ Ps. lxxix. 12.

yet full?³⁰⁷⁸ And how is the sinner either let go, or chastised again, let go perhaps, because reserved for the other world, chastised, because healed thereby in this? Under what circumstances again is the righteous, when unfortunate, possibly being put to the test, or, when prosperous, being observed, to see if he be poor in mind or not very far superior to visible things, as indeed conscience, our interior and unerring tribunal, tells us. What is our calamity, and what its cause? Is it a test of virtue, or a touchstone of wickedness? And is it better to bow beneath it as a chastisement, even though it be not so, and humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God,³⁰⁷⁹ or, considering it as a trial, to rise superior to it? On these points give us instruction and warning, lest we be too much discouraged by our present calamity, or fall into the gulf of evil and despise it; for some such feeling is very general; but rather that we may bear our admonition quietly, and not provoke one more severe by our insensibility to this.

6. Terrible is an unfruitful season, and the loss of the crops. It could not be otherwise, when men are already rejoicing in their hopes, and counting on their all but harvested stores. Terrible again is an unseasonable harvest, when the farmers labour with heavy hearts, sitting as it were beside the grave of their crops, which the gentle rain nourished, but the wild storm has rooted up, whereof the mower filleth not his hand, neither he that bindeth up the sheaves his bosom,³⁰⁸⁰ nor have they obtained the blessing which passers-by bestow upon the farmers. Wretched indeed is the sight of the ground devastated, cleared, and shorn of its ornaments, over which the blessed Joel wails in his most tragic picture of the desolation of the land, and the scourge of famine;³⁰⁸¹ while another³⁰⁸² prophet wails, as he contrasts with its former beauty its final disorder, and thus discourses on the anger of the Lord when He smites the land: before him is the garden of Eden, behind Him a desolate wilderness.³⁰⁸³ Terrible indeed these things are, and more than terrible, when we are grieved only at what is present, and are not yet distressed by the feeling of a severer blow: since, as in sickness, the suffering which pains us from time to time is more distressing than that which is not present. But more terrible still are those which the treasures³⁰⁸⁴ of God's wrath contain, of which God forbid that you should make trial; nor will you, if you fly for refuge to the mercies of God, and win over by your tears Him Who will have mercy,³⁰⁸⁵ and avert by your conversion what remains of His wrath. As yet, this is gentleness and loving-kindness and gentle reproof, and the

³⁰⁷⁸ Gen. xv. 16.

³⁰⁷⁹ 1 Pet. v. 6.

³⁰⁸⁰ Ps. cxxix. 7.

³⁰⁸¹ Joel i. 10.

³⁰⁸² *Another.* Either this is a wrong reading, or S. Gregory's memory fails him. The second quotation is also from Joel.

³⁰⁸³ Joel ii. 3.

³⁰⁸⁴ Deut. xxxii. 34; Jer. l. 25.

³⁰⁸⁵ Hos. vi. 6.

first elements of a scourge to train our tender years: as yet, the smoke³⁰⁸⁶ of His anger, the prelude of His torments; not yet has fallen the flaming fire,³⁰⁸⁷ the climax of His being moved; not yet the kindled coals,³⁰⁸⁸ the final scourge, part of which He threatened, when He lifted up the other over us, part He held back by force, when He brought the other upon us; using the threat and the blow alike for our instruction, and making a way for His indignation, in the excess of His goodness; beginning with what is slight, so that the more severe may not be needed; but ready to instruct us by what is greater, if He be forced so to do.

7. I know the glittering sword,³⁰⁸⁹ and the blade made drunk in heaven, bidden to slay, to bring to naught, to make childless, and to spare neither flesh, nor marrow, nor bones. I know Him, Who, though free from passion, meets us like a bear robbed of her whelps, like a leopard in the way of the Assyrians,³⁰⁹⁰ not only those of that day, but if anyone now is an Assyrian in wickedness: nor is it possible to escape the might and speed of His wrath when He watches over our impieties, and His jealousy,³⁰⁹¹ which knoweth to devour His adversaries, pursues His enemies to the death.³⁰⁹² I know the emptying, the making void, the making waste, the melting of the heart, and knocking of the knees together,³⁰⁹³ such are the punishments of the ungodly. I do not dwell on the judgments to come, to which indulgence in this world delivers us, as it is better to be punished and cleansed now than to be transmitted to the torment to come, when it is the time of chastisement, not of cleansing. For as he who remembers God here is conqueror of death (as David³⁰⁹⁴ has most excellently sung) so the departed have not in the grave confession and restoration; for God has confined life and action to this world, and to the future the scrutiny of what has been done.

8. What shall we do in the day of visitation,³⁰⁹⁵ with which one of the Prophets terrifies me, whether that of the righteous sentence of God against us, or that upon the mountains and hills, of which we have heard, or whatever and whenever it may be, when He will reason with us, and oppose us, and set before us³⁰⁹⁶ those bitter accusers, our sins, comparing our wrongdoings with our benefits, and striking thought with thought, and scrutinising action with action, and calling us

³⁰⁸⁶ Ps. xviii. 8.
³⁰⁸⁷ Ib. cv. 32.
³⁰⁸⁸ Ib. lxxviii. 50.
³⁰⁸⁹ Ezek. xxi. 9.
³⁰⁹⁰ Hos. xiii. 7, 8.
³⁰⁹¹ Isai. xxvi. 11 (LXX.).
³⁰⁹² Hos. viii. 3.
³⁰⁹³ Nahum ii. 10.
³⁰⁹⁴ Ps. vi. 5 (LXX.).
³⁰⁹⁵ Isai. x. 3.
³⁰⁹⁶ Ps. l. 21.

to account for the image³⁰⁹⁷ which has been blurred and spoilt by wickedness, till at last He leads us away self-convicted and self-condemned, no longer able to say that we are being unjustly treated—a thought which is able even here sometimes to console in their condemnation those who are suffering.

9. But then what advocate shall we have? What pretext? What false excuse? What plausible artifice? What device contrary to the truth will impose upon the court, and rob it of its right judgment, which places in the balance for us all, our entire life, action, word, and thought, and weighs against the evil that which is better, until that which preponderates wins the day, and the decision is given in favour of the main tendency; after which there is no appeal, no higher court, no defence on the ground of subsequent conduct, no oil obtained from the wise virgins, or from them that sell, for the lamps going out,³⁰⁹⁸ no repentance of the rich man wasting away in the flame,³⁰⁹⁹ and begging for repentance for his friends, no statute of limitations; but only that final and fearful judgment-seat, more just even than fearful; or rather more fearful because it is also just; when the thrones are set and the Ancient of days takes His seat,³¹⁰⁰ and the books are opened, and the fiery stream comes forth, and the light before Him, and the darkness prepared; and they that have done good shall go into the resurrection of life,³¹⁰¹ now hid in Christ³¹⁰² and to be manifested hereafter with Him, and they that have done evil, into the resurrection of judgment,³¹⁰³ to which they who have not believed have been condemned already by the word which judges them.³¹⁰⁴ Some will be welcomed by the unspeakable light and the vision of the holy and royal Trinity, Which now shines upon them with greater brilliancy and purity and unites Itself wholly to the whole soul, in which solely and beyond all else I take it that the kingdom of heaven consists. The others among other torments, but above and before them all must endure the being outcast from God, and the shame of conscience which has no limit. But of these anon.

10. What are we to do now, my brethren, when crushed, cast down, and drunken but not with strong drink nor with wine,³¹⁰⁵ which excites and obfuscates but for a while, but with the blow which the Lord has inflicted upon us, Who says, And thou, O heart, be stirred and shaken,³¹⁰⁶ and

³⁰⁹⁷ Gen. i. 26.

³⁰⁹⁸ S. Matt. xxv. 8.

³⁰⁹⁹ S. Luke xvi. 24.

³¹⁰⁰ Dan. vii. 9.

³¹⁰¹ S. John v. 29.

³¹⁰² Col. iii. 3.

³¹⁰³ S. John v. 29.

³¹⁰⁴ S. John iii. 18; xii. 48.

³¹⁰⁵ Isai. xxix. 9.

³¹⁰⁶ Hab. ii. 16.

gives to the despisers the spirit of sorrow and deep sleep to drink:³¹⁰⁷ to whom He also says, See, ye despisers, behold, and wonder and perish?³¹⁰⁸ How shall we bear His convictions; or what reply shall we make, when He reproaches us not only with the multitude of the benefits for which we have continued ungrateful, but also with His chastisements, and reckons up the remedies with which we have refused to be healed? Calling us His children³¹⁰⁹ indeed, but unworthy children, and His sons, but strange sons³¹¹⁰ who have stumbled from lameness out of their paths, in the trackless and rough ground. How and by what means could I have instructed you, and I have not done so? By gentler measures? I have applied them. I passed by the blood drunk in Egypt from the wells and rivers and all reservoirs of water³¹¹¹ in the first plague: I passed over the next scourges, the frogs, lice, and flies. I began with the flocks and the cattle and the sheep, the fifth plague, and, sparing as yet the rational creatures, I struck the animals. You made light of the stroke, and treated me with less reason and attention than the beasts who were struck. I withheld from you the rain; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered,³¹¹² and ye said “We will brave it.”³¹¹³ I brought the hail upon you, chastising you with the opposite kind of blow, I uprooted your vineyards and shrubberies, and crops, but I failed to shatter your wickedness.

11. Perchance He will say to me, who am not reformed even by blows, I know that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew,³¹¹⁴ the heedless is heedless and the lawless man acts lawlessly,³¹¹⁵ naught is the heavenly correction, naught the scourges. The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed,³¹¹⁶ as I once reproached you by the mouth of Jeremiah, the founder melted the silver in vain, your wickednesses are not melted away. Can ye abide my wrath, saith the Lord. Has not My hand the power to inflict upon you other plagues also? There are still at My command the blains breaking forth from the ashes of the furnace,³¹¹⁷ by sprinkling which toward heaven, Moses, or any other minister of God’s action, may chastise Egypt with disease. There remain also the locusts, the darkness that may be felt, and the plague which, last in order, was first in suffering and power, the destruction and death of the firstborn, and, to escape this, and to turn aside the destroyer, it were better to sprinkle the doorposts of our mind, contemplation and action, with the



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³¹⁰⁷ Ps. lx. 2, 3; Isai. xxix. 10.

³¹⁰⁸ Hab. i. 5; Acts xiii. 41.

³¹⁰⁹ Deut. xxxii. 5.

³¹¹⁰ Ps. xviii. 46.

³¹¹¹ Exod. vii. 19.

³¹¹² Amos iv. 7.

³¹¹³ Jer. xviii. 12 (LXX.).

³¹¹⁴ Isai. xlvi. 4.

³¹¹⁵ Ib. xxi. 2 (LXX.).

³¹¹⁶ Jer. vi. 29.

³¹¹⁷ Exod. ix. 10.

great and saving token, with the blood of the new covenant, by being crucified and dying with Christ, that we may both rise and be glorified and reign with Him both now and at His final appearing, and not be broken and crushed, and made to lament, when the grievous destroyer smites us all too late in this life of darkness, and destroys our firstborn, the offspring and results of our life which we had dedicated to God.

12. Far be it from me that I should ever, among other chastisements, be thus reproached by Him Who is good, but walks contrary to me in fury³¹¹⁸ because of my own contrariness: I have smitten you with blasting and mildew, and blight;³¹¹⁹ without result. The sword from without³¹²⁰ made you childless, yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord. May I not become the vine of the beloved, which after being planted and entrenched, and made sure with a fence and tower and every means which was possible, when it ran wild and bore thorns, was consequently despised, and had its tower broken down and its fence taken away, and was not pruned nor digged, but was devoured and laid waste and trodden down by all!³¹²¹ This is what I feel I must say as to my fears, thus have I been pained by this blow, and this, I will further tell you, is my prayer. We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly,³¹²² for we have forgotten Thy commandments and walked after our own evil thought,³¹²³ for we have behaved ourselves unworthily of the calling and gospel of Thy Christ, and of His holy sufferings and humiliation for us; we have become a reproach to Thy beloved, priest and people, we have erred together, we have all gone out of the way, we have together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth judgment and justice, no not one.³¹²⁴ We have cut short Thy mercies and kindness and the bowels and compassion of our God, by our wickedness and the perversity of our doings, in which we have turned away. Thou art good, but we have done amiss; Thou art long-suffering, but we are worthy of stripes; we acknowledge Thy goodness, though we are without understanding, we have been scourged for but few of our faults; Thou art terrible, and who will resist Thee?³¹²⁵ the mountains will tremble before Thee; and who will strive against the might of Thine arm? If Thou shut the heaven, who will open it? And if Thou let loose Thy torrents, who will restrain them? It is a light thing in Thine eyes to make poor and to make rich, to make alive and to kill, to strike and to heal, and Thy will is perfect action. Thou art angry, and we have sinned,³¹²⁶ says one of old, making confession; and it is now time for me to

³¹¹⁸ Lev. xxvi. 27, 28.

³¹¹⁹ Lev. xxvi. 1 (LXX.); Amos iv. 9.

³¹²⁰ Deut. xxxii. 25.

³¹²¹ Isai. v. 1.

³¹²² Dan. ix. 5.

³¹²³ Isai. lxv. 2.

³¹²⁴ Ps. xiv. 3.

³¹²⁵ Ib. lxxvi. 7.

³¹²⁶ Isai. lxiv. 5.

say the opposite, “We have sinned, and Thou art angry:” therefore have we become a reproach to our neighbours.³¹²⁷ Thou didst turn Thy face from us, and we were filled with dishonour. But stay, Lord, cease, Lord, forgive, Lord, deliver us not up for ever because of our iniquities, and let not our chastisements be a warning for others, when we might learn wisdom from the trials of others. Of whom? Of the nations which know Thee not, and kingdoms which have not been subject to Thy power. But we are Thy people,³¹²⁸ O Lord, the rod of Thine inheritance; therefore correct us, but in goodness and not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring us to nothingness³¹²⁹ and contempt among all that dwell on the earth.

13. With these words I invoke mercy: and if it were possible to propitiate His wrath with whole burnt offerings or sacrifices, I would not even have spared these. Do you also yourselves imitate your trembling priest, you, my beloved children, sharers with me alike of the Divine correction and loving-kindness. Possess your souls in tears, and stay His wrath by amending your way of life. Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly,³¹³⁰ as blessed Joel with us charges you: gather the elders, and the babes that suck the breasts, whose tender age wins our pity, and is specially worthy of the loving-kindness of God. I know also what he enjoins both upon me, the minister of God, and upon you, who have been thought worthy of the same honour, that we should enter His house in sackcloth and lament night and day between the porch and the altar, in piteous array, and with more piteous voices, crying aloud without ceasing on behalf of ourselves and the people, sparing nothing, either toil or word, which may propitiate God: saying “Spare, O Lord, Thy people, and give not Thine heritage to reproach,”³¹³¹ and the rest of the prayer; surpassing the people in our sense of the affliction as much as in our rank, instructing them in our own persons in compunction and correction of wickedness, and in the consequent long-suffering of God, and cessation of the scourge.

14. Come then, all of you, my brethren, let us worship and fall down, and weep before the Lord our Maker;³¹³² let us appoint a public mourning, in our various ages and families, let us raise the voice of supplication; and let this, instead of the cry which He hates, enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Let us anticipate His anger by confession;³¹³³ let us desire to see Him appeased, after He was wroth. Who knoweth, he says, if He will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?³¹³⁴ This I know certainly, I the sponsor of the loving-kindness of God. And when He has laid aside that which is unnatural to Him, His anger, He will betake Himself to that which is natural,



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³¹²⁷ Ps. lxxix. 4.

³¹²⁸ Ib. 6, 13.

³¹²⁹ Jer. x. 24.

³¹³⁰ Joel ii. 15.

³¹³¹ Joel ii. 17.

³¹³² Ps. xcvi. 6.

³¹³³ Ib. xcvi. 2 (LXX.).

³¹³⁴ Joel ii. 14.

His mercy. To the one He is forced by us, to the other He is inclined. And if He is forced to strike, surely He will refrain, according to His Nature. Only let us have mercy on ourselves, and open a road for our Father's righteous affections. Let us sow in tears, that we may reap in joy,³¹³⁵ let us show ourselves men of Nineveh, not of Sodom.³¹³⁶ Let us amend our wickedness, lest we be consumed with it; let us listen to the preaching of Jonah, lest we be overwhelmed by fire and brimstone, and if we have departed from Sodom let us escape to the mountain, let us flee to Zoar, let us enter it as the sun rises; let us not stay in all the plain, let us not look around us, lest we be frozen into a pillar of salt, a really immortal pillar, to accuse the soul which returns to wickedness.

15. Let us be assured that to do no wrong³¹³⁷ is really superhuman, and belongs to God alone. I say nothing about the Angels, that we may give no room for wrong feelings, nor opportunity for harmful altercations. Our unhealed condition arises from our evil and unsubdued nature, and from the exercise of its powers. Our repentance when we sin, is a human action, but an action which bespeaks a good man, belonging to that portion which is in the way of salvation. For if even our dust contracts somewhat of wickedness, and the earthly tabernacle presseth down the upward flight of the soul,³¹³⁸ which at least was created to fly upward, yet let the image be cleansed from filth, and raise aloft the flesh, its yoke-fellow, lifting it on the wings of reason; and, what is better, let us neither need this cleansing, nor have to be cleansed, by preserving our original dignity, to which we are hastening through our training here, and let us not by the bitter taste of sin be banished from the tree of life: though it is better to turn again when we err, than to be free from correction when we stumble. For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,³¹³⁹ and a rebuke is a fatherly action; while every soul which is unchastised, is unhealed. Is not then freedom from chastisement a hard thing? But to fail to be corrected by the chastisement is still harder. One of the prophets, speaking of Israel, whose heart was hard and uncircumcised, says, Lord, Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved, Thou hast consumed them but they have refused to receive correction;³¹⁴⁰ and again, The people turned not to Him that smiteth them;³¹⁴¹ and Why is my people slidden back by a perpetual backsliding,³¹⁴² because of which it will be utterly crushed and destroyed?

³¹³⁵ Ps. cxxvi. 5.

³¹³⁶ Gen. xix. 17, 23; Jonah iii. 5.

³¹³⁷ *To do no wrong.* etc. Clémencet quotes this as an aphorism from Demosth. de Cor.

³¹³⁸ Wisd. ix. 15.

³¹³⁹ Prov. iii. 12.

³¹⁴⁰ Jer. v. 3.

³¹⁴¹ Isai. ix. 13.

³¹⁴² Jer. viii. 5.

16. It is a fearful thing, my brethren, to fall into the hands of a living God,³¹⁴³ and fearful is the face of the Lord against them that do evil,³¹⁴⁴ and abolishing wickedness with utter destruction. Fearful is the ear of God, listening even to the voice of Abel speaking through his silent blood. Fearful His feet, which overtake evildoing. Fearful also His filling of the universe, so that it is impossible anywhere to escape the action of God,³¹⁴⁵ not even by flying up to heaven, or entering Hades, or by escaping to the far East, or concealing ourselves in the depths and ends of the sea.³¹⁴⁶ Nahum the Elkoshite was afraid before me, when he proclaimed the burden of Nineveh, God is jealous, and the Lord takes vengeance in wrath upon His adversaries,³¹⁴⁷ and uses such abundance of severity that no room is left for further vengeance upon the wicked. For whenever I hear Isaiah threaten the people of Sodom and rulers of Gomorrah,³¹⁴⁸ and say Why will ye be smitten any more, adding sin to sin?³¹⁴⁹ I am almost filled with horror, and melted to tears. It is impossible, he says, to find any blow to add to those which are past, because of your newly added sins; so completely have you run through the whole, and exhausted every form of chastisement, ever calling upon yourselves some new one by your wickedness. There is not a wound, nor bruise, nor putrefying sore;³¹⁵⁰ the plague affects the whole body and is incurable: for it is impossible to apply a plaster, or ointment or bandages. I pass over the rest of the threatenings, that I may not press upon you more heavily than your present plague.

17. Only let us recognise the purpose of the evil. Why have the crops withered, our storehouses been emptied, the pastures of our flocks failed, the fruits of the earth been withheld, and the plains been filled with shame instead of with fatness: why have valleys lamented and not abounded in corn, the mountains not dropped sweetness, as they shall do hereafter to the righteous, but been stript and dishonoured, and received on the contrary the curse of Gilboa?³¹⁵¹ The whole earth has become as it was in the beginning, before it was adorned with its beauties. Thou visitedst the earth, and madest it to drink³¹⁵²—but the visitation has been for evil, and the draught destructive. Alas! what a spectacle! Our prolific crops reduced to stubble, the seed we sowed is recognised by scanty remains, and our harvest, the approach of which we reckon from the number of the months, instead of from the ripening corn, scarcely bears the firstfruits for the Lord. Such is the wealth of the



3143 Heb. x. 31.
 3144 Ps. xxxiv. 16.
 3145 Jer. xxiii. 24.
 3146 Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8.
 3147 Nahum i. 1, 2.
 3148 Isai. i. 10.
 3149 Isai. i. 5 (LXX.).
 3150 Ib. i. 6.
 3151 2 Sam. i. 21.
 3152 Ps. lxxv. 9.

ungodly, such the harvest of the careless sower; as the ancient curse runs, to look for much, and bring in little,³¹⁵³ to sow and not reap, to plant and not press,³¹⁵⁴ ten acres of vineyard to yield one bath:³¹⁵⁵ and to hear of fertile harvests in other lands, and be ourselves pressed by famine. Why is this, and what is the cause of the breach? Let us not wait to be convicted by others, let us be our own examiners. An important medicine for evil is confession, and care to avoid stumbling. I will be first to do so, as I have made my report to my people from on high, and performed the duty of a watcher.³¹⁵⁶ For I did not conceal the coming of the sword that I might save my own soul³¹⁵⁷ and those of my hearers. So will I now announce the disobedience of my people, making what is theirs my own, if I may perchance thus obtain some tenderness and relief.

18. One of us has oppressed the poor, and wrested from him his portion of land, and wrongly encroached upon his landmark by fraud or violence, and joined house to house, and field to field, to rob his neighbour of something, and been eager to have no neighbour, so as to dwell alone on the earth.³¹⁵⁸ Another has defiled the land with usury and interest, both gathering where he had not sowed and reaping where he had not strawed,³¹⁵⁹ farming, not the land, but the necessity of the needy. Another has robbed God,³¹⁶⁰ the giver of all, of the firstfruits of the barnfloor and winepress, showing himself at once thankless and senseless, in neither giving thanks for what he has had, nor prudently providing, at least, for the future. Another has had no pity on the widow and orphan, and not imparted his bread and meagre nourishment to the needy, or rather to Christ, Who is nourished in the persons of those who are nourished even in a slight degree; a man perhaps of much property unexpectedly gained, for this is the most unjust of all, who finds his many barns too narrow for him, filling some and emptying others, to build greater³¹⁶¹ ones for future crops, not knowing that he is being snatched away with hopes unrealised, to give an account of his riches and fancies, and proved to have been a bad steward of another's goods. Another has turned aside the way of the meek,³¹⁶² and turned aside the just among the unjust; another has hated him that reproveth in the gates,³¹⁶³ and abhorred him that speaketh uprightly;³¹⁶⁴ another has sacrificed to his net which

³¹⁵³ Hag. i. 9.

³¹⁵⁴ Deut. xxviii. 39.

³¹⁵⁵ Isai. v. 10.

³¹⁵⁶ Ib. xxi. 6; lxii. 6; Habak. ii. 1.

³¹⁵⁷ Ezek. xxxiii. 3.

³¹⁵⁸ Isai. v. 8.

³¹⁵⁹ S. Matt. xxv. 26.

³¹⁶⁰ Mal. iii. 8.

³¹⁶¹ S. Luke xii. 18.

³¹⁶² Amos ii. 7.

³¹⁶³ Isai. xxix. 21.

³¹⁶⁴ Amos v. 10.

catches much,³¹⁶⁵ and keeping the spoil of the poor in his house,³¹⁶⁶ has either remembered not God, or remembered Him ill—by saying “Blessed be the Lord, for we are rich,”³¹⁶⁷ and wickedly supposed that he received these things from Him by Whom he will be punished. For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.³¹⁶⁸ Because of these things the heaven is shut, or opened for our punishment; and much more, if we do not repent, even when smitten, and draw near to Him, Who approaches us through the powers of nature.

19. What shall be said to this by those of us who are buyers and sellers of corn, and watch the hardships of the seasons, in order to grow prosperous, and luxuriate in the misfortunes of others, and acquire, not, like Joseph, the property of the Egyptians,³¹⁶⁹ as a part of a wide policy, (for he could both collect and supply corn duly, as he also could foresee the famine, and provide against it afar off,) but the property of their fellow countrymen in an illegal manner, for they say, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell, and the sabbaths, that we may open our stores?”³¹⁷⁰ And they corrupt justice with divers measures and balances,³¹⁷¹ and draw upon themselves the ephah of lead.³¹⁷² What shall we say to these things who know no limit to our getting, who worship gold and silver, as those of old worshipped Baal, and Astarte and the abomination Chemosh?³¹⁷³ Who give heed to the brilliance of costly stones, and soft flowing garments, the prey of moths, and the plunder of robbers and tyrants and thieves; who are proud of their multitude of slaves and animals, and spread themselves over plains and mountains, with their possessions and gains and schemes, like Solomon’s horseleach³¹⁷⁴ which cannot be satisfied, any more than the grave, and the earth, and fire, and water; who seek for another world for their possession, and find fault with the bounds of God, as too small for their insatiable cupidity? What of those who sit on lofty thrones and raise the stage of government, with a brow loftier than that of the theatre, taking no account of the God over all, and the height of the true kingdom that none can approach unto, so as to rule their subjects as fellow-servants, as needing themselves no less loving-kindness? Look also, I pray you, at those who stretch themselves upon beds of ivory, whom the divine Amos fitly upbraids, who anoint themselves with the chief ointments, and chant to the sound of instruments of music, and attach themselves to transitory things as though they were stable, but have not grieved nor had compassion



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³¹⁶⁵ Habak. i. 16.

³¹⁶⁶ Isai. iii. 14.

³¹⁶⁷ Zech. xi. 5.

³¹⁶⁸ Eph. v. 6.

³¹⁶⁹ Gen. xli. 39.

³¹⁷⁰ Amos viii. 5.

³¹⁷¹ Prov. xx. 10.

³¹⁷² Zech. v. 8.

³¹⁷³ 1 Kings xi. 33.

³¹⁷⁴ Prov. xxx. 15.

for the affliction of Joseph;³¹⁷⁵ though they ought to have been kind to those who had met with disaster before them, and by mercy have obtained mercy; as the fir-tree should howl, because the cedar had fallen,³¹⁷⁶ and be instructed by their neighbours' chastisement, and be led by others' ills to regulate their own lives, having the advantage of being saved by their predecessors' fate, instead of being themselves a warning to others.

20. Join with us, thou divine and sacred person, in considering these questions, with the store of experience, that source of wisdom, which thou hast gathered in thy long life. Herewith instruct thy people. Teach them to break their bread to the hungry, to gather together the poor that have no shelter, to cover their nakedness and not neglect those of the same blood,³¹⁷⁷ and now especially that we may gain a benefit from our need instead of from abundance, a result which pleases God more than plentiful offerings and large gifts. After this, nay before it, show thyself, I pray, a Moses,³¹⁷⁸ or Phinehas³¹⁷⁹ to-day. Stand on our behalf and make atonement, and let the plague be stayed, either by the spiritual sacrifice,³¹⁸⁰ or by prayer and reasonable intercession.³¹⁸¹ Restrain the anger of the Lord by thy mediation: avert any succeeding blows of the scourge. He knoweth to respect the hoar hairs of a father interceding for his children. Intreat for our past wickedness: be our surety for the future. Present a people purified by suffering and fear. Beg for bodily sustenance, but beg rather for the angels' food that cometh down from heaven. So doing, thou wilt make God to be our God, wilt conciliate heaven, wilt restore the former and latter rain:³¹⁸² the Lord shall show loving-kindness³¹⁸³ and our land shall yield her fruit;³¹⁸⁴ our earthly land its fruit which lasts for the day, and our frame, which is but dust, the fruit which is eternal, which we shall store up in the heavenly winepresses by thy hands, who presentest both us and ours in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for evermore. Amen.

Oration XVIII.

3175	Amos vi. 4–6.
3176	Zech. xi. 2.
3177	Isai. lviii. 7.
3178	Exod. xxxii. 11.
3179	Ps. cvi. 23, 30.
3180	1 Pet. ii. 5.
3181	Rom. xii. 1.
3182	Joel ii. 23.
3183	Ps. lxxxv. 13.
3184	Ib. lxvii. 6.