

## Ambigua to Thomas

*Concerning various difficulties in the writings of  
Saint Dionysios the Areopagite and Saint Gregory the Theologian,  
to Thomas the Sanctified*

### Prologue

{1} [1032A] To the sanctified servant of God, spiritual father and teacher, lord Thomas, from the humble and sinful Maximos, his unworthy servant and disciple:

{2} From your concerted zeal in the pursuit of divine things, you have acquired, dearly beloved of God, a habit of undeviating contemplation, and have become a most chaste *lover*, not simply *of wisdom*, but *of her beauty*. Now the beauty of wisdom is knowledge embodied in practice, or practice informed by wisdom, whose common characteristic (inasmuch as it is completed through both) is the principle of divine providence and judgment.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this principle, you combined intellect and sensation through the spirit, showed truly how God is of a nature to *fashion man after His own image*, and made intelligible the riches of His goodness, lavishly showing forth in yourself—by means of the marvelous mixture [1032B] of opposites—God incarnated by means of the virtues. As an imitator of God, you have equally attained His exalted height and the depth of His self-emptying, and have not disdained to descend even to me, seeking things the knowledge of which you already possess through experience.

{3} These things pertain to certain passages in the writings of Dionysios and Gregory, those highly praised saints and [1033A] blessed and truly elect men, who from the beginning were appointed by God *according to His eternal purpose*. They received within themselves all the outpouring of wisdom that can truly be attained by the saints, and by setting aside a life conformed to nature they occupied themselves with the substance of the soul and so took hold of the living, unique Christ, who—to say what is even greater—became the soul of their souls, manifest to all through all their deeds, words, and thoughts, by which one is persuaded that the passages cited hereinafter were authored, not by them, but by Christ, who by grace has exchanged places with them.

{4} But as for me, how can I say *Jesus is Lord*, when I have not yet received the Spirit of holiness? How can I *speak of the Lord's powers* when I am *mute*, having firmly closed my intellect through attachment to corruptible things? How [1033B] can I *render audible* even some of *His praises* when I am deaf? For the ear of my soul, on account of my love for the passions, is entirely turned away from the blessed voice of the Word. How will the Word, who by nature *conquers the world*, but *does not appear to the world*, appear to me, conquered as I am by the world, since He is essentially unknowable to minds enamored of material things? How would it not be an act of insolence for a profane man to rush in among sacred things, and for the impure to lay hands on the pure?

{5} I would have therefore declined to take in hand the execution of your directives, fearing the reproach of impetuosity, had I not feared still more the danger [1033C] of disobedience. Being caught between these two, I prefer the reproach of impetuosity, which is *more tolerable*, to the danger of disobedience, which is unforgivable. By the intercession of the saints, then, and with the help of your own prayers, and with *Christ our great God and Savior* granting me reverent thoughts and suitable speech, I will

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### Ambigua to Thomas: Prologue

<sup>1</sup> On these key terms, see below, Amb 10.37, n. 135.

set forth a response as concise as is possible to each heading (for my treatise is addressed to a teacher who can infer great things from small). I begin with Gregory of godly mind, since he is rather closer to us in time.

### **Ambiguum 1**

{1.1} [1033D] From Saint Gregory the Theologian's First Oration on the Son:

For this reason the Monad from the beginning moved toward a dyad and at the Trinity came to a halt.<sup>2</sup>

And again, from his Second Oration [1036A] on Peace:

The Monad moved on account of its abundance, the dyad was surpassed—for it is beyond matter and form, out of which bodies are made—the Trinity was defined, on account of its perfection.<sup>3</sup>

{1.2} If, while considering the apparent contradiction, O servant of God, you were at a loss regarding the real agreement, it would nevertheless not be possible for two statements to be more unified in meaning than these. For the phrase “the dyad was surpassed” means the same thing as “not coming to a halt in the dyad,” just as the phrase “the Trinity was defined” means the same thing as the “movement of the Monad comes to a halt in the Trinity.” For we believe in a monarchy that is neither begrudging of its bounty (in the sense of being restricted to a single person), nor disorderly (in the sense of being poured out *ad infinitum*), but which is constituted by a Trinity that is equal in honor by nature: Father, Son, [1036B] and Holy Spirit, “whose wealth is their identity of nature and the single manifestation of their splendor,”<sup>4</sup> and whose “divinity is neither poured out beyond these three, lest we introduce a multitude of gods, nor bounded within them, lest we be condemned for poverty in divinity.”<sup>5</sup>

{1.3} This is not, however, a causal explanation of the cause of beings, which is itself beyond all being, but the demonstration of a pious opinion about it, since the Godhead is a Monad (but not a dyad), and a Trinity (but not a multitude), for it is without beginning, bodily form, or internal strife. For the Monad is truly a Monad: it is not the origin of the things that come after it, as if it had expanded after a state of contraction, like something naturally poured out and proliferating into a multitude, but is rather the inherently personal reality of the consubstantial Trinity. And the Trinity is truly a Trinity, not the sum of a divisible number (for it is not an aggregation of monads, that it might suffer division), but [1036C] the inherently essential subsistence of the three-personed Monad. The Trinity is truly a Monad, for such it is; and the Monad is truly a Trinity, for as such it subsists, since there is one Godhead that in essence is a Monad and in subsistence a Trinity.<sup>6</sup>

{1.4} If, finally, having heard the word “movement,” you wondered how the Godhead, which is beyond infinity, is said to “move,” understand that movement is something that happens to us, and not to the Godhead. For first we are illumined by

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### **Ambiguum 1**

<sup>2</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.2 (SC 250:180, lines 13-14).

<sup>3</sup> Id., Or. 23.8, which is the third (not the second) oration On Peace (SC 270:298, lines 9-11); cf. below, Amb 10.106. About four years before he wrote to Thomas, Maximos had commented on the first of these two excerpts in the *Ambigua to John* (below, Amb 23), having previously commented on the second excerpt in a still earlier work, QD 105 (CCSG 10:79-80), written by 626, a fact which underscores both the unity of the two sets of *Ambigua* and the continuity of Maximos's thinking across different theological contexts.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.5 (SC 358:204, lines 8-10).

<sup>5</sup> Id., Or. 38.8 (SC 358:118, lines 15-17).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Proklos, *Platonic Theology* 162 (ed. Saffrey and Westerink 1978, 3:81, lines 5-6).

the principle of its being, after which we are enlightened regarding the mode of its subsistence, for the fact of being is always grasped before the manner of being. Thus the “movement” of the Godhead is the knowledge—through illumination—of its existence and how it subsists, manifested to those who are able to receive it.

## Ambiguum 2

{2.1} [1036D] From Saint Gregory’s same First Oration on the Son:

In sum: you must attribute the more sublime expressions to the Godhead, to the nature that transcends [1037A] the sufferings of the body, and you must attribute the lowlier ones to the compound, to Him who because of you was *emptied*, became incarnate, and (to use equally valid language), was made man.<sup>7</sup>

{2.2} The Word of God is whole, complete essence (for He is God), and He is whole, undiminished hypostasis (for He is the Son). Having *emptied Himself*, He became the seed of His own flesh, and being thus compounded by means of His ineffable conception, He became the hypostasis of the flesh that He assumed. In this new mystery, He truly and without change became whole man, being Himself the hypostasis of two natures, uncreated and created, impassible and passible, for He accepted without exception all the attributes of human nature, of which, as we have said, He was the hypostasis.

{2.3} If, therefore, He accepted essentially all the principles of human nature—of which He Himself was the [1037B] hypostasis—it was with great wisdom that the teacher (i.e., Saint Gregory) allocated the sufferings of the flesh to Him who became composite according to hypostasis by assuming the flesh, precisely so that His sufferings would not be deemed merely nominal, because the flesh in question was His own, and it was by virtue of the flesh that truly “God is able to suffer in opposition to sin.”<sup>8</sup>

{2.4} In this passage, then, the teacher is making a distinction between “essence,” according to which the Word remained simple, even though He became flesh, and “hypostasis,” according to which He became composite, by the assumption of the flesh, so that in the work of salvation the incarnate Word can be properly called a “suffering God.” Saint Gregory said these things so that we might not out of ignorance ascribe the properties of the person to nature and, like the Arians, unwittingly worship a God who by nature is susceptible to suffering.

{2.5} He added the words, “To use equally valid language, He was made man,” both in response to the Arians, who contend that the Godhead took the place of the soul, and to the [1037C] Apollinarians, who contend that He assumed a soul devoid of intellect—by which they truncate the perfect human nature of the Word and attribute His suffering to the nature of His divinity. The teacher also said this to show us that for our sakes *the only-begotten God* truly became perfect man, and that it was precisely by means of living flesh endowed with a rational soul and intellect that He Himself personally accomplished our salvation. He truly became man *in all things, but without sin*, of which absolutely no principle was sown in His nature—but He did not become man without the energy that is proper to human nature, for the principle of natural energy is what defines the essence of a thing, and as a rule characterizes the nature of every being in which it essentially inheres. For that which is commonly and generically predicated of certain things constitutes the definition of their essence, the

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## Ambiguum 2

<sup>7</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.18 (SC 250:216, lines 21-25).

<sup>8</sup> Id., Or. 30.1 (SC 250:226, lines 10-11).

privation of which [1037D] brings about the destruction of their nature, since no beings remain what they are when they are deprived of their natural, constituent elements.

### Ambiguum 3

{3.1} [1037D] From Saint Gregory's same First Oration on the Son:

He whom you now treat with contempt, was once [1040A] transcendent even over you. He who is now human was incomposite. He remained what He was; what He was not, He assumed. *In the beginning, He was* without cause (for what is the cause of God?), but later He came into being for a cause, namely, for your salvation, of you who *insult* Him and despise His Godhead for that very reason, because He deigned to take on your thick corporeality, consorting with the flesh through the medium of the intellect—and God on earth became man, for it (i.e., the flesh) was blended with God, and He became one, because the stronger predominated, so I might be made God to the same extent that He was made man.<sup>9</sup>

{3.2} “He whom you now treat with contempt,” he says, “was once transcendent even over you,” by which he means that, in Himself, the Word of God is beyond all time and every nature, even if now, for your sake, He has willingly become subject to both. “He who is now human was incomposite” and simple both in His nature [1040B] and hypostasis, for He was “solely God, naked of the body and all that belongs to the body.”<sup>10</sup> Now, however, through His assumption of human flesh possessing intellectual soul, He became the very thing “that He was not,” that is, composite in His hypostasis, “remaining” exactly “what He was,” that is, simple in nature, in order to save mankind. For this was the sole reason for His birth in the flesh: the salvation of human nature, and having become subject to the passibility of that nature, as if it were a kind of thick mass, He “consorted with the flesh through the medium of the intellect, and God on earth became man.” “For the sake of all *He became all* that we are, except for sin: body, soul, intellect—all that death pervades—and so He became what is the common lot from all these, a human being, indeed God visible in the flesh, to those capable of seeing beyond the flesh.”<sup>11</sup>

{3.3} It was, then, the Word Himself, who strictly without change *emptied Himself* to the limit of our passible nature. By taking on flesh He subjected Himself truly to being perceived by [1040C] the senses, and so was called the “visible God” and “God on earth.” Through the flesh, which by nature is passible, He manifested His infinitely immeasurable power, for “it”—obviously the flesh—was “blended with God and He became one, the stronger side predominating,” precisely because it was assumed by the Word, who deified it by identifying it with His own hypostasis.

{3.4} The teacher says, moreover, that He became “one” (i.e., a single subject), but not a single object, pointing to the fact that even in the identity of the one hypostasis, the natural difference of the unified natures remains unconfused, since the one (i.e., the single subject) is indicative of the hypostasis and the other (i.e., the single object) of nature.

{3.5} As for the words, “so that I might be made God to the same extent that He was made man,” they are not mine to utter, since I am stained by sin and utterly devoid of

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### Ambiguum 3

<sup>9</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.19 (SC 250:216-18, lines 1-10).

<sup>10</sup> Id., Letter 101.13 (SC 208:42, lines 3-4). The quotations in the following sentence are taken from the same letter.

<sup>11</sup> Id., Or. 30.21 (SC 250:272, lines 7-10).

appetite for what is life in the true sense. Instead, they are more appropriate for you, for through the complete abandonment of nature you are known by grace alone, [1040D] and you are destined to be glorified by its power to the same degree as He who is God by nature became flesh and shared in our weakness. For to the degree of His *self-emptying* He shall *measure out in return*, as He knows, the divinization of those who are being saved by grace, who will become “wholly like God and wholly contain God, and God alone, for this is the perfection to which hasten those”<sup>12</sup> who believe that this promise will truly be fulfilled.

#### **Ambiguum 4**

**{4.1}** [1041A] From Saint Gregory’s Second Oration on the Son:

As the Word He was neither obedient nor disobedient—for these terms apply to those under the authority of others and those inferior in rank, the former (i.e., obedience) pertaining to the willingly compliant, and the latter (i.e., disobedience) to those deserving of punishment. But as the *form of a slave* He comes down to the same level as His fellow-slaves and servants. And He receives an alien form, bearing the whole of me in Himself, along with all that is mine, so that He may consume within Himself the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the sun earthly mist, and so that I may share in what is His through the intermingling. For this reason He honors obedience by His actions, and experiences it by suffering. Just as in our case, the mere disposition is an unsatisfactory thing unless we give it practical effect—for deeds are the proof of dispositions. We may perhaps also make the not [1041B] invalid assumption that He tests our obedience by the art of His philanthropy, and measures all our sufferings against His own, so that He is able to understand our condition in light of His, taking frailty into account along with suffering, knowing how much can be demanded of us by the one, and how much we are to be excused by the other.<sup>13</sup>

**{4.2}** Insofar as the Word is God by nature, the teacher says He is absolutely free from obedience and disobedience, because being Lord by nature, He is the giver of every commandment, the observance of which is obedience, and the transgression of which is disobedience. For the [1041C] law and its commandments, along with their observance or transgression, apply to those who by nature are moved, and not to Him whose being by nature is immovable.

**{4.3}** Yet as the *form of the slave*, that is, having become man by nature, “He came down to the same level as His fellow-slaves and servants, and received an alien form,” clothing Himself in our nature together with our nature’s condition of passibility. For the penalty imposed on the sinner is alien to Him who by nature is sinless, and this penalty is precisely the passibility of human nature as a whole, a condition that has been condemned because of transgression.

**{4.4}** If, then, He *emptied Himself* and assumed “the *form of a slave*” (that is, if He became man), and if in “coming down to our level He received an alien form” (that is, if He became man, passible by nature), [1041D] it follows that in His “self-emptying” and “condescension” He is revealed as one who is good and loves mankind, for His self-emptying indicates that He truly became man, and His condescension demonstrates that He truly became man passible by nature. This is why the teacher says: [1044A] “He bears the whole of me in Himself, along with all that is mine,” that

<sup>12</sup> Id., Or. 30.6 (SC 250:238, lines 38-39).

**Ambiguum 4**

<sup>13</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.6 (SC 250:236, lines 5-20).

is, He bears the totality of human nature, including its natural, blameless passions, which He united to His own hypostasis.<sup>14</sup> Having through them “consumed the meaner element”—on account of which passibility was imposed on us in our sentence of condemnation, I mean *the law of sin* which arose from disobedience, whose power over us lies in the unnatural disposition of our will, establishing, in lesser or greater degrees, an impassioned state within the passible condition of our nature—He not only saved us who were “held captive by sin,”<sup>15</sup> but also, by having absolved our penalty in Himself, He gave us a share in *divine power*, which brings about immutability of soul and incorruptibility of body through the identification of the will with what is naturally good in those who struggle to honor this grace by their deeds. This is what I think Saint Gregory teaches when he says: “So that He may consume within Himself [1044B] the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the sun earthly mist, and so that I may share in what is His through the intermingling,” becoming, by grace of course, as pure of passion as He is.

{4.5} I know another interpretation of the phrase, “He receives an alien form,” which I learned from a certain holy man, who was wise in both word and way of life.<sup>16</sup> When he was questioned about this, he said that obedience is alien to the nature of the Word (just as subordination is). Nonetheless He rendered this in full for our sakes, since we had transgressed the commandment, and thus He accomplished the complete salvation of humanity, making what is ours His own.

{4.6} “For this reason He honors obedience by His actions”—becoming by nature a new Adam for the sake of the old—and “experiences it by suffering,” voluntarily accepting to endure the blameless passions of the human body. For this reason our great teacher said, “He *grew weary*, He *became hungry*, He *thirsted*, [1044C] He *endured agony*, He *wept*, all in conformity to the laws of the body.”<sup>17</sup> These “deeds” are a clear proof of His “disposition,” and a sign of His condescension to “His fellow slaves and servants.” For He remained Lord by nature, and became a slave for my sake, who am a slave by nature, so that He might make me lord over the one (i.e., the devil) who through deception despotically lorded it over me.

{4.7} It is precisely for this reason that He does the things of a slave in a lordly manner, that is, He does the things of the flesh as God, showing forth His impassible and naturally sovereign power by means of the flesh—a power which through His passion destroyed corruptibility, and which through His death created life indestructible. In doing lordly things in the manner of a slave, that is, the things of God by means of the flesh, He intimates His ineffable *self-emptying*, which through passible flesh divinized all humanity, [1044D] fallen to the ground through corruption. For in the exchange of the divinity and the flesh He clearly confirmed the presence of the two natures of which He Himself was the hypostasis, along with their essential energies, that is, their motions, of which He Himself was the unconfused union. And this union admits no division between the two natures—of which He Himself was the hypostasis—because in a manner consistent with His nature He acted

<sup>14</sup> John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 64.3.20, defines the “natural blameless passions” as natural conditions or processes that are not subject to voluntary control, such as hunger, thirst, growing tired, experiencing pain, etc. (ed. Kotter 1973, 162, lines 9-10).

<sup>15</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.3 (SC 250:230, line 5).

<sup>16</sup> The anonymous holy elder is mentioned seven times in the *Ambigua to John*: Amb 27.5; Amb 28.2; Amb 29.2; Amb 35.2; Amb 39.2; Amb 43.2; and Amb 66.2. As stated in the Introduction to this volume, he also figures prominently in *Myst* 1-7 (CCSG 69:10-36). While this individual is often said to be Sophronios of Jerusalem, Nikolaou, “Identität,” argues convincingly that he is someone Maximos had known before traveling to North Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.15 (SC 358:138, lines 2-3).

uniquely, that is, as a single agent, and in each of the things He did by the power of His own divinity, He showed forth—simultaneously and inseparably—the activity of His own flesh.

{4.8} For there is nothing more unified than He, who is truly one, and apart from Him there is nothing [1045A] more completely unifying or preserving of what is properly His own. Thus, even when He suffered, He was truly God, and when he worked miracles the same one was truly man, for He was the true hypostasis of true natures united in an ineffable union. Acting in both of these natures in a manner suitable and consistent with each, He was shown forth as one truly preserving them unconfused, while, at the same time, preserving Himself without change, insofar as He remained impassible by nature and passible, immortal and mortal, visible to the eyes and known by the intellect, as God by nature and man by nature.

{4.9} It is in this manner, then, as it seems to me, that He who is Lord by nature “honors obedience,” and “experiences it by suffering,” not simply to preserve what is properly his own, by cleansing all nature of the “meaner element,” but so that He who by [1045B] nature contains all knowledge might also “test our own obedience,” and *learn* that which concerns us by experiencing what is our own, namely, “how much could be demanded of us, and how much we are to be excused,” with a view to that perfect submission through which He habitually *leads* to the Father those who are saved in Him, revealed by the power of grace.

{4.10} How great and truly awesome is the mystery of our salvation! For He does not “demand” that we give more than He received from us, and He “excuses us” in the measure of His surpassing union with our nature, unless of course the habit of a sinful inclination should transform the weakness of our nature into material for evil. This is clearly the great teacher’s meaning, which he confirms in the following, when he says: “If the *light shining in the darkness* of this present life was pursued by the other darkness (I mean the *evil one*, [1045C] the tempter), because it had a covering over it, *how much more* will our *darkness* be pursued, seeing that [1045C] it has less power than the light? Is it to be wondered at, if, while He entirely escaped, we should to some degree be overcome? For those who keep a true reckoning of these things, His pursuit is a greater miracle than our capture.”<sup>18</sup>

## Ambiguum 5

{5.1} [1045D] On the Letter to Gaius, the servant of God, from Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens:

“How,” you ask, “is Jesus, who is beyond all things, ranked together with all men at the same level of essential being?” But here He is not called “man” insofar as He is the cause of men, but as being that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man.<sup>19</sup>

{5.2} According to the simple interpretation of Holy Scripture, God, as the cause of all, may be designated by the [1048A] names of all the things that have come from Him. With this in mind, it seems that Gaius, the servant of God, thought that, even after the Incarnation, God is called “man” simply by this same mode of predication. Therefore the great Dionysios corrects him with these words, teaching that the God of all, having been made flesh, is not said to be “man” simply or superficially, “but as

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<sup>18</sup> Id., Or. 30.6 (SC 250:236-38, lines 21-27).

## Ambiguum 5

<sup>19</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 4 (160, lines 1-3; 1072A). Unless otherwise noted, subsequent quotations are from Dionysios, Letter 4, a short document of some twenty lines, for which this Ambiguum offers a line-by-line commentary.

being that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man.” The only valid proof that this “essence” is present in its “entirety,” moreover, is its natural, constitutive power, which one would not be mistaken in calling a “natural energy,” properly and primarily characteristic of the nature in question, since it is the most generic motion constitutive of a species, and contains every property that naturally belongs to the essence, apart from which there is only non-being, since “only that which has absolutely no being whatsoever”—according to that great teacher—“has neither motion nor [1048B] existence.”<sup>20</sup>

**{5.3}** Thus he teaches quite clearly that none of our natural human properties should be denied to God incarnate, except sin—which in any case does not belong to our nature—and he explicitly states, not that He is superficially man, but is “that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man.” He consequently maintains that, by virtue of becoming man, even His given name is properly His, for after this he says: “We do not confine our definition of Jesus to merely human categories,” since we do not decree that He is a mere man, for this would be to divide the union that transcends thought. Thus when we call Him “man” it is not “insofar as He is the cause of men,” but because in truth He who is God by nature essentially imbued Himself with our substance. Again, “He is not only man,” for He himself is also God, and neither is He “only beyond being,” for He himself is also [1048C] a human being, thus He is neither mere man, nor naked God, “for the preeminent lover of mankind has truly become man.”

**{5.4}** Out of His infinite longing for human beings, He has become truly and according to nature the very thing for which He longed, neither suffering any change in His own being on account of His unutterable self-emptying,<sup>21</sup> nor altering or diminishing anything whatsoever from human nature on account of His ineffable assumption of the flesh. The combination of these established the constitution of His human nature both “above mankind”—for He was divinely conceived without the participation of a man—and “after the manner of men,” in a human way, for He was born “according to the law of conception,” and thus “the One who is beyond being came into being by taking upon Himself the being of humans.” For He did not simply project to our mind’s eye an imaginary appearance of Himself in the form of flesh, as the babblings of the Manicheans would have it, neither did He bring down flesh [1048D] from heaven fused together with His divine nature, according to the myths of Apollinarios, but He became “that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man,” clearly by the assumption of human flesh endowed with an intellectual soul, united to Him according to hypostasis.

**{5.5}** “He who eternally transcends being is no less overflowing with transcendent being,” for in becoming man He was not subjugated to nature, but on the contrary [1049A] He elevated nature to Himself, making nature itself another mystery, while He Himself remained entirely beyond comprehension, showing that His own Incarnation, which was granted a birth beyond being, was more incomprehensible than every mystery. As much as He became comprehensible through the fact of His birth, by so much more do we now know Him to be incomprehensible precisely because of that birth. “For He remains hidden even after His manifestation,” says the teacher, “or, to speak more divinely, He remains hidden *in* His manifestation. For the mystery remains concealed by Jesus, and can be drawn out by no word or mind, for

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 2 (69, lines 10-11; 392B).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Letter 243 (PG 46:1108A).



even when spoken of, it remains ineffable, and when conceived, unknown.”<sup>22</sup> Beyond this, what could be a more compelling demonstration of the Divinity’s transcendence of being? For it discloses its concealment by means of a manifestation, its ineffability through speech, and its transcendent unknowability through the mind, and, to say what is greatest of all, it shows itself to be beyond being [1049B] by entering essentially into being.

{5.6} “To be sure, by this superabundance of transcendent being, He truly came into being, and became a human being in a manner beyond being,” and thereby “innovated the laws of natural birth,”<sup>23</sup> for He truly became man without the seed of the male species. “And this was made clear by a virgin who, in a manner beyond nature, conceived” the “Word who is beyond being, shaped into human form from her virginal blood without the participation of a man,”<sup>24</sup> by a strange ordinance contrary to nature.

{5.7} “And in a manner beyond man He works the things of a man,” for without undergoing any change He innovated the nature of the elements, evident even in the simple act of walking. This is “made clear by the unstable element of water, which supported the weight of His material and earthly feet, for by His transcendent power it stood firm and did not yield.” Thus He truly “marched upon [1049C] the liquid and unstable substance without getting His feet wet, even though they had bodily mass and material weight,”<sup>25</sup> and so He *walked about on the surface of the sea* as if it were dry land. By walking about in this manner, He shows that the natural activity of His own flesh is inseparable from the power of His divinity, since movement from one place to another is an activity belonging to His human nature but not to the Divinity beyond infinity and being, which is united to it according to hypostasis.

{5.8} For once the “Word beyond being assumed human being,”<sup>26</sup> He possessed as His own, together with His human being, its undiminished power of movement, which characterizes Him generically as man, and which took on specific form through all that He performed naturally as man, because He truly became man: breathing, speaking, walking, moving His hands, [1049D] naturally making use of His senses for the perception of physical objects, hungering, thirsting, eating, sleeping, growing weary, weeping, and suffering agony—even though He was a self-existing Power.<sup>27</sup> And He did these things—and all the rest—moving willingly the assumed nature that truly had become and is called His own, in the way that the soul independently and naturally moves the body that is native to it, or to speak more precisely, He himself, without change, truly became what human nature is, and in actual fact fulfilled the divine plan of salvation on our behalf.

{5.9} Thus the teacher did not abrogate the [1052A] constitutive energy of the essence that He assumed, nor did he abrogate the essence itself, when he said: “He became a human being in a manner beyond being, and in a manner beyond man He works the

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<sup>22</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 3 (159, lines 6-10; 1069B). “Jesus” here is rendered as a dative of the agent (“the mystery remains concealed *by* Jesus”), though some translators render it as a genitive of possession (“the mystery *of* Jesus remains concealed”).

<sup>23</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 39.13 (SC 358:176, line 8); cf. below, Amb 41.

<sup>24</sup> This is a complex citation combining phrases from Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 4; id., DN 2.6, 9 (130, line 6 [644C]; 133, lines 8-9; 648A); and Gregory the Theologian, Letter 101.16 (SC 208:42, line 13).

<sup>25</sup> A complex citation drawing on Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 4; and id., DN 2.9 (133, lines 10-11; 648A).

<sup>26</sup> Id., DN 2.6 (130, line 6; 644C).

<sup>27</sup> Or “self-constituting Power,” on which cf. Gersh, *K I N H Σ I Σ A K I N H T O Σ*, 128-33.

things of a man,” but in both instances shows the newness of the modes preserved in the permanence of their natural principles, without which no being remains what it is. {5.10} If, however, we say that the “transcendent negation”<sup>28</sup> entails both the affirmation of the assumed human essence and the negation of its constitutive energy, on what grounds can we prove that the same principle of negation applied to both would not entail affirming the existence of the latter and the destruction of the former?

{5.11} Again, if we say that the assumed nature is not self-moved (since it is truly moved by the Godhead, united to it according to hypostasis), and in so doing we negate that nature’s constitutive motion, it follows that we shall not be able to affirm [1052B] the essence itself, which plainly is not a self-subsisting hypostasis, for it has no existence in and of itself, but instead receives its being in the person of God the Word, who truly assumed it. On these terms we would have, again, equal grounds for rejecting both nature and motion, and therefore we should admit the motion together with the nature, without which there is no nature, recognizing that the principle of being is one thing, and the mode of its existence is another, the one confirming nature, the other the dispensation of the Incarnation. The coming together of these two natures constitutes “the great mystery of the nature of Jesus, which is beyond nature,”<sup>29</sup> and shows that both the difference of the energies and their union are preserved intact, the former understood to be “without division” in the natural principle of what has been united, while the latter are “known without confusion” in the unified mode [1052C] of the Lord’s activities.<sup>30</sup>

{5.12} For what, who, where, and how could such a nature come to exist bereft of its constitutive power? For in the words of the great teacher, “that which is completely lacking in power neither exists, nor is it something in particular, nor can it have anything whatsoever predicated of it.”<sup>31</sup> And even if these arguments were not logically compelling, we would nonetheless be obliged reverently to confess the two natures of Christ, of which He Himself is the hypostasis, and the natural energies of His two natures, of which He is the true union, since He performs the activities proper to each nature as a single subject, and in all His activities He reveals the energy of His own flesh, united inseparably to His divine power. For how will He be God by nature and man by nature without possessing completely what belongs to each nature in its natural constitution? What and who will He be known to be—which is not subject to change—if this could not [1052D] be confirmed by what He performs by means of His natural energies? How could each of the natures—from which, and in which He is constituted, and indeed which very things He *is*—how, I say, can these constitutive elements be confirmed if they are devoid of their natural motion and activity?

{5.13} Thus, “though He was beyond being, He came into being,” fashioning within nature *a new origin of creation* and *a different mode of birth*, for He was conceived having become the seed of His own flesh, and He was born having become the seal of the virginity of the one who bore Him, showing that in her case mutually contradictory things can truly come together. For she herself is both virgin and mother, innovating nature by a coincidence of [1053A] opposites, since virginity and childbearing are opposites, and no one would have been able to imagine their natural combination. Therefore the Virgin is truly “Theotokos,” for in a manner beyond

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 7.2 (196, line 9; 869A).

<sup>29</sup> Id., DN 2.9 (133, lines 11-12; 648A).

<sup>30</sup> The phrases in quotation marks are from the *Definition of Faith* of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, which met in Chalcedon in 451 (ACO II 1,2, p. 129, line 31).

<sup>31</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 8.5 (203, lines 2-4; 893A).

nature, as if by seed, she conceived and gave birth to “the Word who is beyond being,” since the mother of one who was sown and conceived is properly she who gave Him birth.

**{5.14}** [1053B] “And in a manner beyond man, He does the things of man,” according to a supreme union involving no change, showing that the human energy is conjoined with the divine power, since the human nature, united without confusion to the divine nature, is completely penetrated by it, with absolutely no part of it remaining separate from the divinity to which it was united, having been assumed according to hypostasis. For “in a manner beyond us,” the “Word beyond being truly assumed our being,” and joined together the transcendent negation with the affirmation of our nature and its natural properties, and so became man, having united His transcendent mode of existence with the principle of His human nature, so that the ongoing existence of that nature might be confirmed by the newness of the mode of existence, not suffering any change at the level of its inner principle, and thereby make known His power that is beyond infinity, [1053C] recognized through the generation of opposites.

**{5.15}** By His power He transformed the passions of nature into acts of the will, so that they were not the results of natural necessity, as they are with us, but in His case it was just the opposite. He made His way through the passible element of our nature, authoritatively showing that what in His own will is moved naturally by His power, is in our case that which moves our will.<sup>32</sup> Clarifying this point in what follows, the teacher says: “And why go through all the rest, which are very many? For anyone who looks into them divinely will know, in a way that transcends the intellect, that even the affirmations concerning Jesus’ love for humanity have the power of transcendent negations.” For by virtue of His ineffable conception the Word beyond being clothed Himself in all the elements of nature along with nature itself, and He had nothing positively human (in the principle of His human nature) that was not also divinely [1053D] negated by the transcendent mode of existence.<sup>33</sup>

**{5.16}** The knowledge of these things is beyond human conception, for they are not subject to demonstration, and can only be grasped in faith by those who genuinely revere the mystery of Christ. The teacher expresses this mystery in summary fashion when he says: “To speak briefly, he was not man,” for He was free by nature from the necessity of nature, since He did not owe His existence to the law of generation that applies to us, “not because He was not a human being” (for He was “that which in the entirety of its essence is truly man,” having assumed by nature our natural attributes), “but rather like one who had come forth from human beings,” since He is consubstantial with us, a human being like us according to His nature, yet He is

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<sup>32</sup> That which human beings have no choice but to endure patiently (i.e., the natural, blameless passions, cf. above, n. 14), become in the incarnate Word freely chosen acts of the will, as Maximus explains in Pyrr: “These natural things of the will are present in Him, but not exactly in the same manner as they are in us. He truly experienced hunger and thirst, not in a mode similar to ours, but in a mode that surpasses us, in other words, voluntarily” (PG 91:297D); cf. John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 64.3.20: “Nothing is perceived in Him as taking place by necessity, but rather all things are voluntary, for He willed to be hungry, He willed to be thirsty, He willed to fear death, and He willed to die” (ed. Kotter 1973, 163, lines 25-27).

<sup>33</sup> “Negation” here does not mean the obliteration or destruction of the human energy assumed by the Word, but rather transcendence with respect to its effects; it is not, in other words, a negation of Christ’s human activities, but rather an affirmation of their excess of meaning and purpose insofar as they have been taken up into the life of the incarnate Word, whose human activities superabound with the divine power that fills them; cf. the remarks of John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on Letter 4 (PG 4:533B).

“beyond human beings,” [1056A] and encompasses nature in a newness of modes, a thing that was not within our power.

{5.17} “And in a manner beyond man, He truly became man,” since He maintained the modes of existence (which are above nature), along with the principles of being (which are according to nature), united and unimpaired. The conjunction of these was beyond what is possible, but He for whom nothing is impossible became their true union, and was the hypostasis in neither of them exclusively, in no way acting through one of the natures in separation from the other, but in all that He did He confirmed the presence of the one through the other, since He is truly both.

{5.18} As God, He was the motivating principle of His own humanity, and as man He was the revelatory principle of His own divinity. One could say, then, that He experienced suffering in a divine way, since it was voluntary (and He was not mere man); and that He worked miracles in a human way, since they were accomplished through the flesh (for He was not naked God). Therefore His sufferings are wondrous, for they have been renewed by [1056B] the natural divine power of the one who suffered. So too are His wonders wedded to passibility, for they were completed by the naturally passible power of the flesh of the one who worked them. Knowing this, the teacher said: “As for the rest, He did not do divine things after the manner of God,” for they were not done only divinely, as if separated from the flesh (for “He was not merely *beyond* being”), and “neither did He do human things in a human way, for they were not done solely by the flesh, separated from the divinity” (“for He was not *merely* a human being”). “Instead, as God having become man, He lived His life among us according to a certain new theandric energy.”<sup>34</sup>

{5.19} For by assuming flesh endowed with intellectual soul, “the preeminent lover of mankind truly” became “man,” and because His divine energy was humanized through its ineffable union with the natural energy of the flesh, He completed the plan of salvation on our behalf [1056C] in a “theandric” manner, which means that, in a way that was “simultaneously divine” and “human,” he “accomplished both human and divine things.” To put it more clearly, His “life among us” was such that divine and human energy coincided in a single identity.

{5.20} Yet in affirming the union of the divine and human energies by negating their division, the wise teacher was not ignorant of the natural distinction between the things that have been united. For the union, by excluding division, [1056D] does not impair the distinction. If, then, the mode of union preserves the principle of distinction, the expression of the saint is a circumlocution,<sup>35</sup> which by using the appropriate designation for the duality of Christ’s natures seeks to suggest the duality of His energies, since in respect of natural properties and qualities the essential principle of the united natures is in no way diminished by the union. Nonetheless it is

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<sup>34</sup> The notion of a “theandric energy” was the most contested theological formula of the day. It figured prominently in the “Pact of Union” (ACO ser. II 2,2, p. 598, lines 21-22), through which the Alexandrian Monophysites were officially reconciled to the Church of Constantinople (June 3, 633). The “Pact” cited the formula in an altered version (i.e., “*one* theandric energy”) designed to appeal to the Monophysites, and was quickly denounced by Sophronios (cf. ACO ser. II 2,1, p. 456, lines 13-18), and subsequently Maximos, who here provides the correct version (confirmed by all the manuscripts of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*), i.e., “a *certain new* theandric energy,” along with an orthodox interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> The “circumlocution” is Dionysios’s formula of “a certain new theandric energy,” cf. Pyrrh: “Pyrrhos: ‘Does the term “theandric” indicate one energy?’ Maximos: ‘By no means. To the contrary, this expression teaches by circumlocution the two energies’” (PG 91:348A); Opusc. 7: “The phrase ‘theandric energy’ uttered by the teacher obviously indicates by circumlocution the two energies of Him who is twofold in nature” (PG 91:84D-85A); and Opusc. 8 (PG 91:100C).

not, as some would have it, “by the negation of two extremes that we arrive at an affirmation”<sup>36</sup> of something in the middle, for there is no kind of intermediate nature in Christ that could be the positive remainder after the negation of two extremes.<sup>37</sup>

{5.21} He called this energy “new,” insofar as it is characteristic of a new mystery, the principle of which is the ineffable mode [1057A] of natural coinherence. For who can grasp the manner in which God becomes flesh and yet remains God? Or how, remaining true God, He is true man? Or how He shows Himself to be truly both in His natural existence, and truly each through the other, without undergoing any change in either? Faith alone can grasp these things, honoring in silence the Word, concerning whom the nature of created beings has not a word to say. And he called the energy “theandric,” but not because he thought it was something simple, or that it was some kind of composite thing. For the “theandric energy” is not the natural manifestation of either divinity or humanity alone, nor is it that of a composite nature occupying some kind of borderland between the two extremes. Instead it is the energy that belongs most naturally to “God made man,” to Him who became perfectly incarnate.

{5.22} Again, he did not say that it was “one” energy, because there would be no other way to understand “new” than “one,” as some have thought.<sup>38</sup> For “newness” is a quality, not a quantity, [1057B] because the latter will necessarily introduce by itself a new nature (since the definition of every nature is the principle of its essential energy), something that not even a fabricator of such chimeras as the goat-stag would countenance.<sup>39</sup> And how, moreover, if this is granted, could such a being, having but one energy, and a natural one at that, be able to perform miracles and endure sufferings, which differ from each other according to the principle of their nature, unless it be by the negation that follows on the destruction of those qualities that constitute its permanent condition? For no being, while remaining within the bounds and principles of its own nature, can perform things that are contrary by means of one and the same energy.

{5.23} Therefore it is not permitted to say that there is simply “one,” or a “natural,” energy common both to Christ’s divinity and His flesh, since divinity and flesh are not identical in natural quality. If they were, they would be identical [1057C] in nature, and the Trinity would consequently increase to a quaternity. For none of the things that identifies the Son with the Father and the Spirit in respect of the one essence was identified with the flesh through the union, even if the Son made that flesh life-giving in virtue of His union with it (for in its own nature it is mortal). Had He indeed changed the substance of flesh into something that it was not, identifying it

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<sup>36</sup> A reference to Pyrrhos of Constantinople, along with a brief citation from his *Dogmatic Tome* (ACO ser. II 2,2, p. 608, lines 1-2).

<sup>37</sup> The negation of the separation of the two natures and energies in Christ does not result in a single nature and energy emerging in the “middle” place left by the negated extremes, for according to Maximos such a “middle” does not exist in Christ, since it would mean that Christ is neither God nor man, or that one or both of the natures had been fused with the other.

<sup>38</sup> A reference to Severos of Antioch, *To John the Abbot* (fragment preserved in the *Doctrina Patrum*, ed. Diekamp 1907, 309, lines 19-22).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 31.6: “Not even the inventors of fabulous goat-stags could envisage a half-way being here, or anything that belonged to, or was composed out of, both sides” (SC 250:286, lines 14-17); and Maximos, Opusc. 9 (PG 91:121AB). The image of the “goat-stag” appears in Aristotle (e.g., *Phys* 208a30; *Int* 16a17, etc.), and in commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* becomes a stock example of a mere verbal construction without an actual referent, including an impossible fusion of natures; cf. Elias, *Commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge* 17 (CAG 18/1:47, lines 5-6); David, *Prolegomena Philosophiae* (CAG 18/2:1, line 17); and the *Commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge and Aristotle’s Categories*, ascribed to Maximos (ed. Roueché 1974, 71, lines 46, 54).

with the divine nature after the union, then He Himself would be found to exist in a nature subject to change.

**{5.24}** Let us then understand the “theandric energy” in the way that it has been interpreted. For the Word made flesh actively “lived” out this energy “among us” not for Himself but for our sake, and He renews our nature by means of things beyond nature. One’s way of life is lived in accordance with the law of nature, and since the Lord is double in nature, it is fitting that His life is lived in accordance with [1057D] both divine and human laws, indissolubly united without confusion. This life is also “new,” not simply because it is strange and astounding to those on earth, and without precedent in the nature of beings, but because it constitutes the form of the new energy as newly lived out by Him. Perhaps he who conceived of the appropriate designation for this mystery called it “theandric” so that he might show forth the mode of exchange of the natural properties inherent in the ineffable union—which makes whatever naturally belongs to each part of Christ interchangeable with the other—without changing or confusing either part with the other on the [1060A] level of their natural principles.

**{5.25}** It is just like what happens when a sword is heated in a fire: the quality of sharpness assumes the quality of heat, and the quality of heat that of sharpness (for just as the fire is united to the iron, so too is the heat of the fire diffused throughout the cutting edge of the sword), and the iron becomes burning hot through its union with the fire, and the fire acquires a cutting edge through its union with the iron. Yet neither of the elements undergoes any change in the exchange that results from their union, but each remains secure in its own natural properties, even though it has acquired the property of the other to which it has been joined.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, in the mystery of the divine Incarnation, divinity and humanity were united in the hypostasis of the Word: neither of the natural energies was displaced in the union, neither [1060B] functioned independently after the union, and neither was divided from that to which it had been conjoined and with which it coexisted.

**{5.26}** For in the indissoluble union, the Word made flesh possessed the whole active power of His own divinity together with the whole passive power of His own humanity. Being God he worked wonders in a human way, for they were accomplished through naturally passible flesh. Being man He experienced the sufferings of human nature, but in a divine way, for they unfolded at the command of His sovereign will. Or rather, both were done in a theandric way, since He is God and man at the same time. By means of the wonders he restored us to ourselves, revealing the state in which we were created. By means of the sufferings, He makes us His own, for we have become that which He revealed. By means of both He enables us to trust in the truth of the natures from which, in which, and which He is, for He alone *is true and* [1060C] *trustworthy*, and wishes to be confessed as such by us.

**{5.27}** Since He has taken shape in your speech and life, O sanctified ones,<sup>41</sup> imitate His *long-suffering*, and when you have received this present writing, show yourselves to me as a kind judge of what is contained herein. Overcome with compassion the failings of your child, who awaits only the reward of his obedience, and become the

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. below, Amb 7.10, 12.

<sup>41</sup> The shift to the plural form of address reflects Maximus’s awareness that his work will be read by others in addition to the primary addressee; cf. the introduction to QThal, which is also addressed to a single recipient: “I therefore beseech you, most holy ones, as well as all those who, as is likely, will read this work, not to take what I have said as a definitive statement of the spiritual interpretations of the texts contained herein” (CCSG 7:21, lines 89-92; cf. p. 13, lines 76-80). The same shift from singular to plural occurs in the *Ambigua to John*, e.g., Amb 45.2; Amb 71.11; cf. Amb 19.5.

means by which I may be reconciled to God. In doing this you will bring forth the *peace that passes all understanding*, the *prince* of which is the Savior Himself, who frees *those who fear Him* from the disturbance of their passions through perseverance in the practice of virtue. He is the *Father of the age to come*, who begets in the Spirit through love and knowledge “those who fill the world above.”<sup>42</sup> To Him be *glory, majesty* [1060D] *and dominion*, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to the ages. Amen.

## **Ambigua to John of Kyzikos**

### **Prologue**

#### **(Letter to John of Kyzikos)**

{1} [1061A] Greetings in the Lord from Maximos to John, the Archbishop of Kyzikos.

{2} Those who more ardently desire to apprehend beautiful things, and who exercise themselves with greater diligence in the science that pertains to them, are praised by all—and rightly so, it seems to me—when, on account of their love of learning, they seek out the best teachers of the greatest truths. For by asking questions they acquire (without incurring any shame) the knowledge and science of what had previously eluded them, and, by bringing an end to their ignorance, [1064A] they clear themselves of the stigma occasioned by their former deficiencies in theory and practice.

{3} But as for you, what speech could worthily praise you? Or who among men could encompass, even with his mind, the magnitude of your virtue? For being a seasoned shepherd of rational sheep, you lead and restore them to the heavenly sheepfold by the sounds of your spiritual pipe. And you are able to do this because you have acquired what most men fail to obtain, namely, a state of mind receptive to the mystical knowledge of God. Because of this, your hand has been placed on the rudder of the Church of Christ, which you skillfully hold to a steady course like a ship, carrying its cargo of faith and the dignity of a godly life to the harbor of the divine will, suffering none of the storms and shipwrecks that beset those who sail on the sea of life.

{4} It is therefore all the more remarkable that you do not consider it beneath your dignity to ask questions, not only of those more advanced in wisdom than yourself (if such indeed there be), but even of those unworthy of regard and completely devoid of learning, in the hope that you might discover something of significance among insignificant men. And this is your habit, even when the matter at hand is one you understand thoroughly, and of which God has [1064B] made you an authoritative interpreter.

{5} Thus, when I received your honorable letter, urging me to write down and send you the interpretations of the passages that perplexed us in the orations of Saint Gregory the Theologian, which we had labored over when we were together, I was amazed by your virtue and praised the luminous and lofty example of your Christ-like self-abnegation. Indeed I was moved to praise the Lord Himself, [1064C] who by and in your person is glorified in every possible way. For it is He who created you, and who, in a distinctly beautiful form, manifests even unto me—though I am but a small, worthless, and unlearned man, utterly bereft of virtue and knowledge—the power to become worthy of Him by means of His attributes, a power which has been granted to you on account of your deeds themselves and the truth.

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<sup>42</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.2 (SC 358:106, lines 9-10).

{6} Seeing your humility in this matter, I forced myself to respond to your request, to the extent that this was possible, for your sake taking no account of the fact that many will judge me to have acted impetuously. I beg you then to grant me, who am awaiting the beloved and longed-for reward of my obedience, your customarily *fervent prayers*, so that Christ our God, the ready help of all who fear Him, “might be the ally of my words,”<sup>43</sup> or rather that, as the very Word of God, He might grant me to bring forth all my words [1064D] with reverence.

{7} I ask that when reading the following, you not look to me for any literary refinement, since I have not that power over words to make them ring winningly in the ears of the audience, and know not how to round them out with calculated pauses and stops; insofar as I am unschooled in the rules of style and inexperienced in their practical exercise, it seems preferable, indeed [1065A] desirable, for me to concentrate on the inner meaning of what our holy and great teacher has written, though I do so in rough-hewn phrases, and only partially at that. Moreover, I implore you not to reproach me on account of my drawn-out explanations,<sup>44</sup> for you are well aware that Saint Gregory the Theologian was a man of profound thoughts but of comparatively few words,<sup>45</sup> and so he compels his interpreters—even those who command extraordinary powers of speech and philosophical brilliance—to go on at great length and touch on a wide range of subjects. How much more so, then, will this be true of someone as uncultivated as myself.

{8} If, however, your customary godly zeal should prompt you to revise what I have written into something more pointed and precise, or even to correct the sense of my words and transpose them into a more elevated style, you will receive a perfect reward, namely, the intercessions of Saint Gregory to the Lord of all, for I know you will not suffer his sacred thoughts, which soar high above the earth, to be dragged down by my lame [1065B] and limping jottings. In accordance with your letter, therefore, I have undertaken an investigation of each of the passages in question, and committed the results to writing, beseeching you to be a kind and merciful judge of my words.

## Ambiguum 6

{6.1} From Gregory the Theologian’s oration *On Love for the Poor*:

I show it (i.e., my body) consideration as my co-worker, but have no means of fleeing its rebellion, or of not falling away from God, being weighed down by its bonds dragging me down or binding me to the earth.<sup>46</sup>

{6.2} The words “dragging down” and “binding” do not mean the same thing for the blessed Gregory, and neither should they for you, most esteemed one, if you wish to understand here something that is worthy of his great intellect. He would indeed appear to be merely redundant, or simply incapable of expressing himself clearly, if we failed to grasp the extent to which he imbues virtually every syllable with the

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## Ambigua to John: Prologue

<sup>43</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 6.12 (SC 405:152, line 14).

<sup>44</sup> Citing the authority of Porphyry, Ammonios, *Commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge*, argues that works of philosophy should not be “long and drawn out” (CAG 4/3:38, line 14-18).

<sup>45</sup> Gregory frequently stresses the importance of brevity, especially in theological discourse; cf. Orr. 29.1 (SC 250:178 lines 15-23); 30.1 (SC 250:226, lines 6-7, 11-13); 34.10 (SC 318:214, lines 5-7); 38.6 (SC 318: lines 19-21); and below, Amb 37.3.

## Ambiguum 6

<sup>46</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 14.7 (PG 35:865B); cf. id., Or. 38.3 (SC 358:108, lines 7-9); and below, Amb 7.30.



[1065C] most suitable meaning, since even in his mannerisms of speech he was determined to direct his disciples to what is most beautiful and useful.<sup>47</sup> And this is surely the case here, where he frames his words with great wisdom, fitting a sublime phrase to a meaning still more sublime, so that the sublime might herald the sublime, and that both together might afford a partial view of the magnitude of the truth, which hitherto had been inaccessible not simply to the many but to all. Let us, then, consider closely the words of this blessed man just as they are, so that their entire mystery might be revealed to us.

{6.3} “I show it (i.e., my body) consideration as a co-worker, but have no means of fleeing its rebellion, or of not falling away from God, being weighed down by its bonds dragging me down or binding me to the earth.” In the first place, he did not address these words merely to himself, but through himself [1065D] he holds a dialogue with humanity as a whole, knowing that whoever longs for salvation devotes himself to a life of either practice or contemplation—for without virtue and knowledge no one has ever been able to attain salvation.<sup>48</sup> If, then, he says, through contemplation I find myself among those who are close to God, and who delight in His blessed beauty, experiencing *peace in all things* and *holiness*, [1068A] having simplified myself for God by the undivided identification of my will with His, it is because I have fittingly brought the irrational powers of the soul—I mean anger and desire—under the control of reason, and through reason have led them into intimate association with the intellect, so that anger is transformed into love and desire into joy. Now the chief characteristic of joy is a leaping and rejoicing in God, which we see quite clearly in John the Baptist, the great forerunner and herald of the truth, who *leaped in the womb*; we see it also in David, the king of Israel, who *leaped for joy* when the ark *came to its rest*.<sup>49</sup> For it is true—though it may be a jarring and unusual thing to say—that both man and the Word of God, the Creator and Master of the universe, exist in a kind of womb, owing to the present condition of our life. In this sense-perceptible world, just as if He were enclosed in a womb, the Word of God appears only obscurely, and only to those who have [1068B] the spirit of John the Baptist. Human beings, on the other hand, gazing through the womb of the material world, catch but a glimpse of the Word who is concealed within beings (and this, again, only if they are endowed with John’s spiritual gifts). For when compared to the ineffable glory and splendor of the age to come, and to the kind of life that awaits us there, this present life differs in no way from a womb swathed in darkness, in which, for the sake of us who were infantile in mind, the infinitely perfect Word of God, who loves mankind, became an infant.

{6.4} If, then, as he says, I have attained the heights of contemplation; if I have risen to the very perfection of God (to the extent that this is possible in this present life), and then grow lax regarding the “deiform habit of mind,”<sup>50</sup> and of my own accord stoop to pander to the body, then I am “weighed down by bonds dragging me down.”

<sup>47</sup> Cf. id., Or. 8.3: “My most serious concern is to use each of my words and actions to form those entrusted to my care” (SC 405:250, lines 8-10).

<sup>48</sup> A central feature of Maximus’s thought, the pair “virtue and knowledge” (like its cognate “practice and contemplation”) designates the whole of the spiritual life in its two basic, interdependent components, i.e., its practical, ascetical dimension (often called “practical philosophy”), which struggles against the passions in the realization of the virtues, and its cognitive and theoretical dimension (“natural contemplation” and “theology”), which is concerned with the apprehension of visible realities (including the words of Scripture) in light of their inner, spiritual principles.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. below, Amb 37.

<sup>50</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 2.6 (77, lines 2-3; 401C); *ibid.*, 3.1 (81, line 15; 428A); *ibid.*, 3.7 (87, lines 16-17; 436B); *ibid.*, 4.3 (98, line 3; 477A); *ibid.*, 7.6 (127, line 6; 561B).

[1068C] These bonds are *the cares of life*, and it is under their weight that I “fall away from God,” since my concern for and *seeking for* nothing but *the kingdom of heaven* has been diverted to something that is not permitted, by which I mean an earthly life, and I have chosen to wander among the senses rather than direct my mind to God.

{6.5} If, however, I am someone who is still battling the passions with the weapons of practical ascetic struggle, and if, being still vulnerable to ambush by my enemies who seek to ensnare me in the passions, I should indulge in unreserved love for my body, it is obvious that I have been “bound” by the body, insofar as I have preferred my affection for the body over separation from it through virtue. From this we see that the person devoted to contemplation, even though his stable habit of mind has separated him from the body, is “dragged down” when he grows lax concerning the vision of God. The man of practical ascetic struggle, on the other hand, who is still battling with the body, is “bound to the earth” when he gives up the fight and sets aside the labors necessary for virtue—which latter constitutes the freedom of the soul—preferring instead to become a slave of the passions.

### **Ambiguum 7**

{7.1} [1068D] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Love for the Poor:

What is this wisdom that I embody? And what is this great mystery? Or is it God’s will that we, who are a portion of God that has flowed down from above, not become exalted and lifted up on account of this dignity, and so despise our Creator? Or is it not rather that, in our struggle and battle with the body, [1069A] we should always look to Him, so that this very weakness that has been yoked to us might be an education concerning our dignity?<sup>51</sup>

### **The unity of rational beings**

{7.2} Some people, reading these words and expecting, as it seems, no reward for labor undertaken in search of the truth, have resorted to a rather facile interpretation, which in fact is derived largely from the doctrines of the Greeks. According to the opinion of these people, there once existed a unity of rational beings, by virtue of which we were connatural with God, in whom we had our remaining and abode.<sup>52</sup> In addition to this they speak of a “movement” that came about, as a result of which the rational beings were variously dispersed, prompting God to look towards the creation of this corporeal world, so that He could bind them in bodies as a punishment for their former sins. This is what they [1069B] think our teacher Gregory is alluding to in this passage. They do not realize, however, that their theories are completely untenable, and that their assumptions are all unsound, as a truthful examination will presently demonstrate by means of more reasonable arguments.

### **Rest and motion**

{7.3} If, in the first place, we accept that the Divine is immovable (since it fills all things), whereas everything that has received its being *ex nihilo* is in motion (since all things are necessarily carried along toward some cause), then nothing that moves has

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### **Ambiguum 7**

<sup>51</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 14.7 (PG 35:865C).

<sup>52</sup> The doctrine of “a unity (*henad*) of rational beings” epitomizes the cosmology of Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254) and Evagrius of Pontus (ca. 345-399), and was officially condemned during the reign of Justinian; cf. his *Letter to the Holy Synod Concerning Origen*, dated to 553 (PG 86:991AB); and the appended anathemas (ACO 4.1, pp. 248-49). See also below, Amb 15.10-11. That Maximus identifies such a view with the “doctrines of the Greeks” means that the implications of his critique go far beyond Origenism, for he is undermining one of the most cherished principles of traditional pagan Neoplatonism, namely, that “remaining” in the One is prior to “procession” or “emanation” from it.

yet come to rest, because its capacity for appetitive movement has not yet come to repose in what it ultimately desires, for nothing but the appearance of the ultimate object of desire can bring to rest that which is carried along by the power of its own nature. It follows, then, that nothing that is in motion has come to rest, since it has not yet attained its ultimate desired end, because that which can arrest the motion of whatever is moved in relation to it has not yet appeared.<sup>53</sup>

{7.4} But if, [1069C] as they maintain, what happened was the inevitable result of certain conditions, so that rational beings were moved from their abode and remaining in what alone is ultimately desirable, and consequently were broken up and scattered into multiplicity, we must ask in no uncertain terms: what proof do they have? For if what they say is true, it necessarily follows that rational beings, when found in the same circumstances, will undergo the same changes *ad infinitum*. For anyone who through experience is able even once to spurn something will find no reason to cease from doing so for all eternity.<sup>54</sup> And if rational beings are to be swept about in this way, and are to be without any hope for an immovable foundation of stability in the Beautiful, what more pitiful condition of existence could there possibly be?

{7.5} If, on the other hand, they should say that, because of their experience of the contrary, these rational beings were able, but not willing (i.e., to abide in the Beautiful), then the Beautiful would of necessity be loved not for its own sake, but because of its opposite, as if it were [1069D] not something naturally or properly desirable in and of itself. For whatever is not good and desirable in itself, and that does not attract all motion to itself, strictly speaking cannot be the Beautiful. Neither would it be capable of satisfying the desire of those who find delight in it. Moreover, those who espouse such a theory would be indebted to evil, [1072A] since through it they were instructed in what was proper and right, learning much better the condition of fixity in the Beautiful. They would have to acknowledge, in other words, that evil is of necessity the origin of the Beautiful, and—if they knew how to think consistently—that evil is even more beneficial than nature itself, since it teaches them what is to their own advantage, and gives birth to the most precious of all possessions, I mean love, through which all things created by God are naturally gathered up in God, permanently and without change or deviation.

### **Genesis precedes motion**

{7.6} When, moreover, we consider all the things that come into being from God, whether intelligible or sensible, their coming into being (*genesis*) is conceived of before their motion (*kinesis*), for motion cannot precede coming into being.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, the motion of intelligible beings is an intelligible motion, whereas that of sensible beings is a sense-perceptible motion. [1072B] According to those who have examined these matters carefully, no being in principle is devoid of motion (including beings that are inanimate and merely objects of sense perception), for these experts affirm that “all things move in either a linear, circular, or spiral manner.”<sup>56</sup> All motion, in other words, unfolds in simple and composite patterns. If, then, coming into being must necessarily be posited before beings can begin to move, it follows that

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<sup>53</sup> Here “motion” denotes, not the physical locomotion of objects in space, but a logical relationship on a spiritual level; it is the highest form of causation, the mode by which spiritual entities exercise their causal function, and by which effects return to their causes.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on EH 6.6: “Let none of Origen’s disciples think that this passage supports his erroneous opinion that the heavenly minds eternally fall, return, and fall again, as he says in the first book of his *On First Principles*: ‘After the consummation of all things, again there will come about a flowing away (*apporeusis*) and a fall’” (PG 4:173A).

<sup>55</sup> For this, and what follows, see below, Amb 15.

<sup>56</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.8-9, 9.9 (153-54, 213; 704D-705D, 916CD); cf. below, Amb 10.9

motion is subsequent to the manifestation of being, for it is something that the intellect perceives only after the apprehension of being.<sup>57</sup>

{7.7} Motion which is impelled toward its proper end they call either a “natural power,” or else a “passion,” that is, a motion that “passes from one thing to another,” having impassibility as its end, or an “effective activity,” having self-perfection as its end.<sup>58</sup> Yet nothing that has come into being is its own proper end, insofar as it is not self-caused, for if it were, it would be uncreated, without beginning, and without motion, [1072C] having no way of being moved toward something else. For that which is self-caused transcends the nature of beings, since it exists for the sake of nothing else. Hence the definition of it is true, even though it was expressed by a man who was an outsider to the faith: “The end is that for the sake of which all things exist; it, however, is for the sake of nothing.”<sup>59</sup> And nothing that has come into being is perfect in itself, for if it were, it would be devoid of activity, having no want or need of anything, since it owes its origin to nothing outside itself. Hence that which is perfect in itself is, in some manner, uncaused.<sup>60</sup> In the same way, nothing that has come into being is impassible, for this belongs only to what is unique, infinite, and uncircumscribed. That which is impassible is in no way subject to the movement of the passions, for there is nothing that it desires, neither can it be moved by desire toward something else. Therefore no created being which is in motion has yet come to rest, either because it has not yet attained its first and sole cause, to which it owes its existence, or because it does not yet find itself within its ultimate desired end. Therefore it cannot be maintained that a movement of rational beings previously at rest in a primordial unity [1072D] subsequently brought corporeal bodies into being.

#### **Testimonies from Scripture**

{7.8} The saints Moses, David, and Paul bear witness to this, as does Christ their Lord. For Moses, in relating the story of Adam, said: You will not taste *of the tree of life*; and elsewhere he said: *You have not yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord our God gives you.* And David, crying out, says: [1073A] *I will be satisfied when Your glory appears to me, and: My soul thirsts for the strong and living God; when shall I go and appear before the face of God?* Writing to the Philippians, Paul says: *That if possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead; not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.* And to the Hebrews he says: *For whoever enters into God’s rest also ceases from his labors, just as God did from His.* And again in the same letter he affirms that no one has yet *received what was promised.* And Christ Himself says: *Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*

#### **Motion comes to rest only in God**

{7.9} Accordingly, no created being has yet ceased from the natural power [1073B] that moves it to its proper end, neither has it found rest from the activity that impels it toward its proper end, nor harvested the fruit of this passionate movement, by which I mean impassibility and immobility. For it belongs to God alone to be the end, and the

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. above, Amb 1.4.

<sup>58</sup> The quotations are adapted from Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 16 (ed. Morani 1987, 74, lines 6-7). Despite the use of Stoic (“effective activity”) and Neoplatonic (“self-perfect”) terms, Maximus’ argument is fundamentally Aristotelian, cf. *Met* 999b; *Phys* 224a. On the “self-perfect,” cf. Dionysios DN 13.1 (226-27; 977BC); and *ibid.*, 9.4 (210, lines 1-4; 912C).

<sup>59</sup> A reference ultimately to Aristotle, *Met* 994b or 999b, but derived indirectly from Evagrius, *Selecta in psalmos* (PG 12:1053A); cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.16 (SC 250:134, lines 12-14).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 5.10 (189-90; 825B); *ibid.*, 9.4 (209-10; 912C); *ibid.*, 13.1 (226-27; 977B); and *id.*, CH 10.3 (41, lines 6-7; 273C).

completion, and the impassible, since He is unmoved, complete, and not subject to passion.<sup>61</sup> It belongs to beings, on the other hand, to be moved toward that end which has no beginning, and to cease from their activity in that perfect end which is devoid of all quantity, and passively to experience the Unqualified, without being or becoming it in essence, for everything which has come to be and is created is clearly not absolute. It is important to understand correctly what is meant by this “passivity,” for the kind of passivity spoken of here does not refer to that which is according to change or destruction of power, but to that which by nature coexists with beings. For all things that have come to be passively experience being moved, since they are neither motion itself nor power itself.<sup>62</sup>

**{7.10}** If, then, [1073C] rational creatures are created beings, then surely they are subject to motion, since they are moved from their natural beginning in being, toward a voluntary end in well-being. For the end of the motion of things that are moved is to rest within eternal well-being itself, just as their beginning was being itself, which is God, who is the giver of being and the bestower of the grace of well-being, for He is the *beginning and the end*. For from God come both our general power of motion (for He is our beginning), and the particular way that we move toward Him (for He is our end). If an intellective being is moved intellectually, that is, in a manner appropriate to itself, then it will necessarily become a knowing intellect. But if it knows, it surely loves that which it knows; and if it loves, it certainly suffers an ecstasy towards it as an object of love. If it suffers this ecstasy, it obviously urges itself onward, and if it urges itself onward, it surely intensifies and greatly accelerates its motion. And if its motion is intensified in this way, [1073D] it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, [1076A] will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber, in the same way that air is thoroughly permeated by light, or iron in a forge is completely penetrated by the fire, or anything else of this sort.<sup>63</sup>

**{7.11}** From these examples we are able conjecturally to derive an image—not of that participation in goodness which existed long ago and fell to corruption—but that of which the worthy<sup>64</sup> shall partake in the age to come; and I say an “image” because what we hope for is beyond all images, surpassing vision and hearing and understanding, according to Scripture. Moreover, this perhaps may be the *subjection* of which Saint Paul speaks when he describes the Son *subjecting to the Father* those who freely accept to be subjected to Him, after which, or rather on account of which, the *last enemy, death, will be destroyed*. And this will take place because that which is within our power, I mean our free will—through which death made [1076B] its entry among us, and confirmed at our expense the power of corruption—will have surrendered voluntarily and wholly to God, and perfectly subjected itself to His rule, by eliminating any wish that might contravene His will. And this is precisely why the

<sup>61</sup> Cf. id., DN 4.28 (174, lines 5-7; 729A).

<sup>62</sup> That is, in an absolute sense, since this belongs only to God; cf. Pyrr (PG 91:352AB).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. above, Amb 5.26; and below, Amb 13.3.

<sup>64</sup> I.e., in the Dionysian sense of “analogy” or “proportion,” so that grace is received to the degree of purification and virtue, in the measure appropriate to each level of created being; cf. EH 6.3.6 (119-20; 537C); CH 7.2 (28-29; 208B); DN 4.1 (144, lines 3-5; 693B); and John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on DN 1.1: “God reveals Himself to all according to the capacity of each, not because He begrudges giving more, but to preserve justice in the measuring out of divine knowledge ... The knowledge of God is without measure, but we have need of measures, for if it were revealed without measure, it would destroy us, just as the bodily eye cannot receive the whole sun” (PG 4:188D).

Savior, exemplifying within Himself our condition, says to the Father: *Yet not as I will, but as thou wilt*. And this is also why Saint Paul, as if he had *denied himself* and was no longer conscious of his own life, said: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*.

{7.12} Let not these words disturb you,<sup>65</sup> for I am not implying the destruction of our power of self-determination, but rather affirming our fixed and unchangeable natural disposition, that is, a voluntary surrender of the will, so that from the same source whence we received our being, we should also long to receive being moved, like an image that has ascended to its [1076C] archetype, corresponding to it completely, in the way that an impression corresponds to its stamp, so that henceforth it has neither the inclination nor the ability to be carried elsewhere, or to put it more clearly and accurately, it is no longer able to desire such a thing, for it will have received the divine energy—or rather it will have become God by divinization—experiencing far greater pleasure in transcending the things that exist and are perceived to be naturally its own. This occurs through the grace of the Spirit which has conquered it, showing that it has God alone acting within it, so that through all there is only one sole energy, that of God and of those worthy of God, or rather of God alone,<sup>66</sup> who in a manner befitting His goodness wholly interpenetrates all who are worthy. For all things without exception necessarily cease from their willful [1076D] movement toward something else when the ultimate object of their desire and participation appears before them and is, if I may put it this way, contained in them uncontainably according to the measure of the participation of each. And it is to this end that every lofty way of life and mind hastens, an end “in which all desire comes to rest, and beyond which they cannot be carried, for there is nothing [higher] ‘toward which all good and excellent movement is directed’ than the repose found in total contemplation by those who have reached that point,” as our blessed teacher says.<sup>67</sup> [1077A] For in that state nothing will appear apart from God, nor will there be anything opposed to God that could entice our will to desire it, since all things intelligible and sensible will be enveloped in the ineffable manifestation and presence of God, not unlike what happens during the day, when neither the light of the stars nor the stars themselves are visible, since the sun has appeared shining with its incomparably greater light, by which the stars are so completely hidden that we are no longer able even to perceive their very existence. Of course with respect to God this

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Cat* 3a29.

<sup>66</sup> In speaking of “one sole energy” of God and the saints, Maximus is not referring to a mixture or fusion of divine and human energy, but to the divine energy alone acting in the saints, who have voluntarily set aside their natural energies in order to allow God to act within them. The phrase itself, however, could be misconstrued as supporting the heresy of Monoenergism, and Maximus was later to return to it in his first *Opusculum*, but not, as is often said, to “retract” it: “Concerning the phrase ‘one energy’ found in the seventh chapter of the *Ambigua* of the great Gregory, the argument is clear. In describing the future state of the saints, I spoke of ‘one energy of God and the saints.’ This energy, which has the power to divinize all the saints . . . belongs to God by nature, but to the saints by grace. I added that this energy is of ‘God alone,’ for the divinization of the saints is exclusively the result of divine energy, and not a power found within our own nature” (PG 91:33AB). Maximus therefore makes a real distinction between essence and energy, which alone enables divinized human beings to act by means of an energy that is not theirs by nature or essence, and God to act in them without imparting to them His essence (PG 91:33BC).

<sup>67</sup> This quotation is a conflation of passages from two different orations by Gregory the Theologian: Or. 21.1 (the word “higher” is supplied from Gregory’s text, which Maximus discusses below, Amb 9) (SC 270:112, lines 21-23, 25-26); and id., Or. 25.1 (= ‘toward . . . directed’) (PG 35:1200A).

happens to an infinitely greater degree, given the infinite distance and difference between the uncreated and the created.<sup>68</sup>

{7.13} Having learned the essential structure of beings, in terms of their nature, mode, and reason for existence, it seems to me that we shall no longer be moved toward some thing by the desire to know it. For our knowledge of each and every thing created by God will have reached its limit, and there will remain for us only the enjoyment of participation in the infinite and incomprehensible [1077B] knowledge of God, in the measure that each is able to receive it. And this, according to the divinely inspired teacher, is the meaning of the apostle's "great philosophical axiom," that "we shall, in time to come, *know even as we are known*," which, he says, "will take place when this Godlike, divine thing, I mean our intellect and reason, mingles with its kin, when the image ascends to the archetype it now longs after."<sup>69</sup>

{7.14} Let these arguments suffice to demonstrate that this windily iterated "unity" does not exist; and let our conclusions, drawn from those concepts and ideas in Scripture that are now within our grasp, suffice to give some indication of what our future state will be like. With God's help, I shall now say a word about how we, "being portions of God, flowed down from above."<sup>70</sup>

### **The Logos and the logoi**

{7.15} [1077C] Who—knowing that it was with reason and wisdom that God brought beings into existence out of nothing—if he were carefully to direct the contemplative power of his soul to their infinite natural differences and variety, and, with the analytical power of reason, were (together with these) to distinguish in his mind the logos according to which they were created, would not, I ask, fail to know the one Logos as many logoi, indivisibly distinguished amidst the differences of created things, owing to their specific individuality, which remains unconfused both in themselves and with respect to one another? Moreover, would he not also know that the many logoi are one Logos, seeing that all things are related to Him without being confused with Him, who is the essential and personally distinct Logos of God the Father, the origin and cause of all things, *in whom all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and* [1077D] *invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities* [1080A] *or authorities: all things were created from Him, through Him, and return unto Him?*

{7.16} From all eternity, He contained within Himself the pre-existing logoi of created beings. When, in His good will, He formed out of nothing the substance of the visible and invisible worlds, He did so on the basis of these logoi. By His *word (logos) and His wisdom He created* and continues to create *all things*—universals as well as particulars—at the appropriate time. We believe, for example, that a logos of angels preceded and guided their creation; and the same holds true for each of the beings and powers that fill the world above us.<sup>71</sup> A logos of human beings likewise preceded their creation, and—in order not to speak of particulars—a logos preceded the creation of everything that has received its being from God. We believe that He Himself, by virtue of His infinite transcendence, is ineffable and incomprehensible,

<sup>68</sup> Cf. below, Amb 10.59, and Amb 10.73.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.17 (SC 250:134-36, lines 4-9); note that Maximus first cites lines 8-9, followed by lines 4-7.

<sup>70</sup> Id., Or. 14.7, cited above, at Amb 7.1.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. below, Amb 42.13; and Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 7.2: "The divine intellect encompasses all things by the transcendent knowledge of all things, pre-containing the knowledge of all things in Himself as the cause of all things, knowing and producing angels before angels came to be" (196, lines 12-15; 869A). Maximus's doctrine of the logoi is derived in part from the *scholia* by John of Skythopolis; cf. PG 4:253B, 316D-317C, 320B-321A, 324AD, 329BC, 349D-352B, 353B.

and exists beyond all creation and beyond all the differences and distinctions which exist and can be conceived of within it. We also believe [1080B] that this same One is manifested and multiplied in all the things that have their origin in Him, in a manner appropriate to the being of each, as befits His goodness. And *He recapitulates all things in Himself*, for it is owing to Him that all things exist and remain in existence, and it is from Him that all things came to be in a certain way, and for a certain reason, and (whether they are stationary or in motion) participate in God. For by virtue of the fact that all things have their being from God, they participate in God in a manner appropriate and proportionate to each, whether by intellect, by reason, by sensation, by vital motion, or by some essential faculty or habitual fitness, according to the great theologian, Dionysios the Areopagite.<sup>72</sup>

{7.17} It follows, then, that each of the intellective and rational beings, whether angels or men, insofar as it has been created in accordance with the logos that exists in and *with God*, is and is called a “portion of God,” precisely because of that logos, which, as we said, pre-exists in God. [1080C] If such a being moves according to its logos, it comes to be in God—in whom its logos of being pre-exists—as its Origin and Cause. As long as it wishes and yearns to know nothing apart from its own origin, it does not flow away from God, but rather, in its upward movement toward God, it becomes God and is said to be a “portion” of God through its proper mode of participation in God, because, according to nature, wisely and rationally, and through a properly ordered movement, it attains its own origin and cause, having nowhere else to be moved besides its own beginning, or beyond the ascent and restoration to the logos according to which it was created, nor any other way of being moved, since its movement toward the divine goal clearly takes as its final limit the divine goal itself.

{7.18} Saint Basil makes this clear in his commentary on the prophet Isaiah, [1080D] when he says: “True Sabbaths are the rest prepared *for the people of God*, and God can *bear them* because they are true. These Sabbaths of rest are attained by the person in whom *the world has been crucified*, for he has moved away from worldly things, and has arrived at his own place of spiritual rest. Whoever finds himself in such a place will never be moved from it, for it is his own, [1081A] and is characterized by tranquility and imperturbability.”<sup>73</sup> God is thus the “place” for all those deemed worthy of such blessedness, just as it is written: *Be Thou to me a protecting God, and a strong place to save me.*

{7.19} In God the logoi of all things are steadfastly fixed, and it is on the basis of these that God is said *to know all things before they come into being*, for in absolute truth, in Him and with Him are all things, even though all things—things present and things to come—were not called into existence simultaneously with their logoi or with their being known by God. Instead, in the wisdom of the Creator, individual things were created at the appropriate moment in time, in a manner consistent with their logoi, and thus they received in themselves actual existence as beings.<sup>74</sup> For God is eternally an active creator, but creatures exist first in potential, and only later in actuality, [1081B] since it is not possible for the infinite and the finite to exist

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 1.5: “All things long for the transcendent goodness: the intelligent and rational long for it by way of knowledge, the things beneath them by way of perception, and the remainder by way of their vital or essential movement, or according to what is habitually fitting for them” (117-18; 593D); *ibid.*, 4.4 (148, lines 15-18; 700B); and *ibid.*, 5.5 (183, lines 12-22; 820AB).

<sup>73</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah* 1.30 (PG 30:177CD). Traditionally attributed to Basil, this work may have been written by one of his disciples. See also CT 1.36-39, 44, 47 (PG 90:1097BC, 1100AB, C).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. below, Amb 42.14.



simultaneously on the same level of being. Indeed no argument will ever be able to demonstrate the simultaneous interdependence of being and what transcends being, or of the measureless and what is subject to measurement, or that the absolute can be ranked with the relative, or that something of which no specific category can positively be predicated can be placed in the same class as what is constituted by all the categories. For in their substance and formation all created things are positively defined by their own logoi, and by the logoi that exist around them and which constitute their defining limits.<sup>75</sup>

{7.20} When, however, we exclude the highest form of negative theology concerning the Logos—according to which the Logos is neither called, nor considered, nor is, in His entirety, anything that can be attributed to anything else,<sup>76</sup> since He is beyond all being, and is not participated in by any being whatsoever—when, I say, we set this way of thinking aside, the one Logos is many logoi and the [1081C] many are One. According to the creative and sustaining procession of the One to individual beings, which is befitting of divine goodness, the One is many.<sup>77</sup> According to the reverteive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One—as if to an all-powerful point of origin, or to the center of a circle pre-containing the beginnings of the radii originating from it<sup>78</sup>—insofar as the One gathers everything together, the many are One. We are, then, and are called “portions of God” because of the logoi of our being that exist eternally in God. Moreover, we are said to have “flowed down from above” because we have failed to move in a manner consistent with the logos according to which we were created and which pre-exists in God.

{7.21} There is another way to apprehend this principle, which will be familiar to those who have been taught to approach the logoi in accord with right faith and practice. The essence in every virtue is the one Logos of God—and this can hardly be doubted [1081D] since the essence of all the virtues is our Lord, Jesus Christ, as it is written: *God made Him our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption*. These things are of course said about Him in an absolute sense, for He is Wisdom and Righteousness and Sanctification itself, and not in some limited sense, as is the case with human beings, as for example in the expression a “wise man” or a “just man.” Which is to say that anyone who through fixed habit participates in virtue, unquestionably participates in God, who is the substance of the virtues. For such a person freely and unfeignedly chooses to cultivate the natural [1084A] seed of the Good, and has shown the end to be the same as the beginning, and the beginning to be the same as the end, or rather that the beginning and the end are one and the same. In this he is a genuine advocate of God, since the goal of each thing is believed to be its beginning and end, for it is from the beginning that he received being and participation in what is naturally good, and it is by conforming to this beginning through the inclination of his will and by free choice, that he hastens to the end, diligently adhering to the praiseworthy course that conducts him unerringly to his point of origin. Having completed his course, such a person becomes God, receiving from God to be God, for to the beautiful nature inherent in the fact that he is *God’s*

<sup>75</sup> Several predicates from Aristotle’s *Categories* are in play here: the “simultaneous” (14b24); “substance” (2a11, 2b7) (rendered here as “being”); “relation” (6a36); and “measure” (or “quantity”) (4b20); cf. below, Amb 7.40, n. 98 and 99.

<sup>76</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.3 (229, lines 11-12; 981A); id., MT 5 (150, line 1; 1048A).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. QD 173 (CCSG 10:120, lines 3-7); Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 2.5 (128-29; 644A); and Plato, *Rep* 476a: “Each Form is itself one, but as they appear everywhere by communion of actions and bodies and each other, each appears as many.”

<sup>78</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 5.6 (185, lines 4-11; 821A).

*image*, he freely chooses to add the *likeness* to God by means of the virtues, in a natural movement of ascent through which he grows in conformity to his own beginning.

{7.22} In such a person the apostolic word is fulfilled, [1084B] which says: *In Him we live and move and have our being*, for he comes to be “in” God through attentiveness, since he has not falsified the logos of being that pre-exists in God; and he “moves” in God in accordance with the logos of well-being that pre-exists in God, since he is moved to action by the virtues; and he “lives” in God in accordance with the logos of eternal being that also pre-exists in God. In this life he has already become one with himself and immovable, owing to his state of supreme impassibility, and in the age to come, through the divinization which will be given to him, he will love and cleave affectionately to the aforementioned logoi that pre-exist in God, or rather he will love and cleave affectionately to God Himself, in whom the logoi of beautiful things are steadfastly fixed. He is a “portion of God,” then, insofar as he exists, for he owes his existence to the logos of being that is in God; and he is a “portion of God” insofar as he is good, for he owes his goodness to the logos of well-being that is in God; and he is a “portion of God” insofar as he is God, owing to the [1084C] logos of his eternal being that is in God. In honoring these logoi and acting in accordance with them, he places himself wholly in God alone, forming and configuring God alone throughout his entire being, so that he himself by grace is and is called God, just as God by His condescension is and is called man for the sake of man, and also so that the power of this reciprocal disposition might be shown forth herein, a power that divinizes man through his love for God, and humanizes God through His love for man.<sup>79</sup> And by this beautiful exchange, it renders God man by reason of the divinization of man, and man God by reason of the Incarnation of God. For the Logos of God (who is God) [1084D] wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.

{7.23} But anyone who is a “portion of God,” on account of the logos of virtue that exists in God, as was explained above, and who abandons his own origin, is irrationally swept away toward non-being, and thus is rightly said to have “flowed down from above,” since he did not move toward his own origin and cause, according to which, by which, and for which, he came to be. “Flowing down from above” in this manner, he enters a condition of unstable deviations, suffering fearful disorders of soul and body, failing to reach his inerrant and unchanging end, [1085A] by freely choosing to turn in the direction of what is inferior. Here the sense of “flowing down” can be understood literally, for though such a person had it well within his power to direct the footsteps of his soul to God, he freely chose to exchange what is better and real for what is inferior and non-existent.

#### **The doctrine of the logoi defended**

{7.24} Saint Dionysios the Areopagite teaches us that Scripture calls these logoi “predeterminations” and “divine wills.”<sup>80</sup> The disciples of Pantainos (the teacher of the great Clement, who wrote the *Stromateis*) also say that it is the habit of Scripture

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. below, Amb 10.9.

<sup>80</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 5.8 (188, lines 8-9; 824C); cf. John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on DN 5.8 (PG 4:329AC); and QThal 13: “The logoi of beings, having been established before the ages in God . . . are called ‘good wills’ (*agatha thelemata*) by the divine theologians” (CCSG 7:95, lines 6-9). Biblical references to the divine “wills” include Pss 15(16):3, 102(103):7; Is 44:28; and Act 13:22. Blowers and Wilken, *Cosmic Mystery*, 61, translate *theia thelemata* as “products of the divine will,” but as Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 205 n. 4, correctly points out, “this would make the divine wills creatures, whereas in fact they are the *principles* of creation, preexisting in the Logos.”

to call them “divine wills.”<sup>81</sup> For when they were approached by some of those who boast in their secular learning, and were asked what Christians believed about the manner in which God knows beings (for they themselves believed that God knows intelligible things by [1085B] intellection, and sensory things by sensation), they answered that God neither knows sensory things by sensation, nor intelligible things by intellection<sup>82</sup> (for it is not possible, as has been demonstrated, that He who is beyond all beings should know beings in a manner derived from beings, but we say that He knows beings as His own wills), after which they added the following logical proof: If God created all things by His will—which no one denies—and if it is always pious and correct to say that God knows His own will, and that He willingly made each of the things that He made, it follows that God knows beings as His own wills, for he willingly brought them into being. Based on these considerations, I think that Scripture, consistent with these same principles, says to Moses: *I know you above all*; and concerning some others: *The Lord knows those who are* [1085C] *His own*. To still others it says: *I know you not*. In each case, the voluntary decision to move either in accord with the will and logos of God or against it prepared each person to hear the divine voice.

{7.25} Such things, I believe, are what Saint Gregory means when he speaks of a time “when this Godlike, divine thing, I mean our intellect and reason, will mingle with its kin, when the image ascends to the archetype it now longs after.”<sup>83</sup> With these same few words, he masterfully dissuades those who thought that any being has at any time reached its final goal, [1085D] and explains in what sense we are a “portion” of God. He also speaks indirectly of what this blessed state will be like in the future, and urges on those who in hope are purifying themselves for and hastening to this unyielding enjoyment, which will never cease or change. For he knew that if we were to progress [1088A] simply and in a straight course, in accord with reason and nature, toward that which is reflected in our substance and intellect, without any kind of searching whatsoever (for only in searching is there the possibility of stumbling and going astray), we too, as much as is possible for us, would know all things in a Godlike way, no longer being held back in ignorance by the motion that envelops them, because our intellect, reason (*logos*), and spirit will have drawn near to that great Intellect, Logos, and Spirit, indeed our whole self will have returned to the whole God as an image to its archetype.

#### **Description of the final state**

{7.26} He teaches the same thing in his oration “On the Plague of Hail,” when he says: “They will be received by the ineffable light and vision of the holy and majestic Trinity, shining upon them with greater brilliance and purity, and which will be wholly mingled with the whole of the intellect, and this alone I take to be the kingdom of heaven,”<sup>84</sup> at which point—if I may dare to add my own words to his—the [1088B] whole of rational creation, both of angels and human beings, will be filled with spiritual pleasure and joy. I mean those creatures that did not, out of negligence, violate any of the divine logoi, who by their natural motion were inclined to the end established by the Creator, but kept themselves wholly chaste and faithful to their end, knowing that they are and will become instruments *of the divine nature*. For God in His fullness entirely permeates them, as a soul permeates the body, since they are

<sup>81</sup> Pantainos was a Stoic philosopher who converted to Christianity and became the director of the catechetical school at Alexandria toward the end of the second century; cf. Stählin, “Fragmente,” lxxv.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 7.2 (196, lines 17-20; 869AB).

<sup>83</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.17 (SC 250:134-36, lines 4-7), cf. above, Amb 7.13, n. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Id., Or. 16.9 (PG 35:945C).

to serve as His own members, well suited and useful to the Master, who shall use them as He thinks best, filling them with His own glory and blessedness, graciously giving them eternal, inexpressible life, completely free from the constituent properties of this present life, which is marred by corruption. [1088C] The life that God will give does not consist in the breathing of air, or in the flow of blood from the liver, but in the fact that God will be wholly participated by whole human beings, so that He will be to the soul, as it were, what the soul is to the body,<sup>85</sup> and through the soul He will likewise be present in the body (in a manner that He knows), so that the soul will receive immutability and the body immortality. In this way, man as a whole will be divinized, being made god by the grace of God who became man. Man will remain wholly man in soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become wholly God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendor of the blessed glory of God, which is wholly appropriate to him, and beyond which nothing more splendid or sublime can be imagined.

{7.27} What could be more desirable to those who are worthy of it than divinization? For through it God is united with those who have become Gods, and by His goodness makes all things His own. This state, which is brought about by the contemplation of God and the enjoyment of the gladness that follows it, has rightly been described as pleasure, passion, [1088D] and joy. It is called pleasure, insofar as it is the consummation of all natural strivings (for this is the meaning of pleasure). It is called passion, insofar as it is an ecstatic power, elevating the passive recipient to the state of an active agent,<sup>86</sup> as in the examples given above of air permeated by light, and iron suffused with fire. These examples, drawn from nature, demonstrate persuasively that there is no [1089A] higher summit of transformation for created beings apart from that in which their natural elements remain inviolate. It is, finally, called joy, for it encounters nothing opposed to it, for they say that joy neither remembers former sorrows, nor fears the possibility of any future satiety, in the way that pleasure fears the inevitable consequence of pain. Thus the whole of inspired Scripture, as well as our holy fathers who from it learned divine mysteries, affirm that joy is the most appropriate name for the truth that is to come.

#### **Conclusion and final argument on satiety**

{7.28} This then, is a summary account—for my limited abilities enable me to offer you nothing else—in which arguments from nature, Scripture, and the fathers have demonstrated that no created being has ever yet ceased from its motion, or attained to the end ordained for it by God. In addition to this, we have also shown that there are absolutely no grounds for thinking that the steadfast foundation in God of those deemed worthy of it can be shaken even slightly. For [1089B] it is simply not possible that those who once come to be in God should reach satiety and be drawn away by wanton desire. As a minor proof of this, we can add the following argument: satiety by definition is the quenching of appetite, and this happens either because appetite desired things that were trivial, or because it was repulsed and nauseated by things that were base and repugnant. In these two ways appetite is ordinarily quenched. It is obvious that neither of these can apply to God, who by nature is infinite and infinitely attractive, and who rather increases the appetites of those who enjoy Him owing to their participation in that which has no limit.

{7.29} If this is so—as it surely is—then there never existed this so-called “unity of rational beings,” which [1089C] fell to pieces after it grew bored from remaining in

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 2.17 (SC 247:112, lines 14-16).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *An* 425b26-426a26; and Gersh 1978, 37.

God, and which, by means of its self-inflicted collapse, brought about the creation of the world. For our part, we do not conceive of the Good as something so narrowly circumscribed and ignoble, as if it could induce a kind of satiety and provoke a rebellion among those whose desire it could not satisfy. In vain, then, as it seems to me, do certain individuals assert such doctrines, concocting beings that have never existed, and, what is more grievous, falsely claiming that our blessed father Gregory subscribed to the same theories. In so doing, they aim, not only to support their own notion—that souls fell from a higher form of life and were punished by being placed in bodies for the evils they had previously committed—but also to try to seduce others into believing that these are reasonable arguments owing to the trustworthiness of the authorities being invoked. Their behavior is unethical and irreligious. [1089D] But let us leave them in their delusions and, in addition to what has already been said, let us now aim reverently to examine the mind of the teacher from yet another point of view.

### Exegesis of Gregory

{7.30} I do not believe that, in the passage under discussion, Gregory’s aim is to describe the creation of human beings, [1092A] but rather to explain why human life is beset by so much misery. For he laments the wretchedness we experience in our bodies, saying: “O what coupling and estrangement! I treat that which I fear with the utmost care, and that which I love, I have come to fear,” and so on.<sup>87</sup> Having said this, he seems to ask himself the reasons for the evils into which we have fallen, along with the role that divine providence plays in this, and so he says: “What is this wisdom that I embody? And what is this great mystery?” To this he offers a clear solution with the words: “Is it God’s will that we, who are a portion of God that has flowed down from above, not become exalted and lifted up on account of this dignity, and so despise our Creator? Or is it not rather that, in our struggle and battle with the body, we should always look to Him, so that this very weakness that has been yoked to us might be an education [1092B] concerning our dignity?”<sup>88</sup>

{7.31} It is as if Gregory were saying that God in His goodness made man as a union of soul and body, so that the soul which was given to him, being rational and intellectual—because it is the very *image of* its Creator—should, on the one hand, by means of its desire and the whole power of its total love, cling closely to God through knowledge, and, growing in *likeness to God*, be divinized; and, on the other hand, through its mindful care for what is lower, in accordance with the commandment to *love one’s neighbor as oneself*, it should make prudent use of the body, with a view to ordering it to the mind through the virtues, and acquaint it with God as its fellow servant, itself mediating to the body the indwelling presence of its Creator, making God Himself—who bound together the body and the soul—the body’s own unbreakable bond of immortality. The aim is that “what [1092C] God is to the soul, the soul might become to the body,”<sup>89</sup> and that the Creator of all might be proven to be One, and through humanity might come to reside in all beings in a manner appropriate to each, so that the many, though separated from each other in nature, might be drawn together into a unity as they converge around the one human nature. When this happens, *God will be all things in everything*, encompassing all things and making them subsist in Himself, for beings will no longer possess independent motion or fail to share in God’s presence, and it is with respect to this sharing that we are, and are called, *Gods, children of God, the body, and members of God*, and, it follows,

<sup>87</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 14.7 (PG 35:865B).

<sup>88</sup> Id., Or. 14.7, cited above, at Amb 7.1.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. id., Or. 2.17 (PG 35:428A).

“portions of God,” and other such things, in the progressive ascent of the divine plan to its final end.

{7.32} Since man was created for and to this end—but because our forefather Adam misused his freedom and [1092D] turned instead to what was inferior, redirecting his desire from what was permissible to what had been forbidden (for it was in his power of self-determination to *be united to the Lord and become one spirit with Him, or to join himself to a prostitute and become one body with her*; but being deceived he chose to estrange himself from the divine and blessed goal, preferring by his own choice to be *a pile of dust* rather than god by grace)—God, who does whatever is necessary for our salvation, in His wisdom and love for mankind, [1093A] and with the goodness that befits Him, affixed the appropriate punishment alongside the irrational movement of our intellectual faculty, where it would not fail to do what was required.<sup>90</sup> And so God punished with death precisely that element within us by means of which we destroyed our power *to love with our whole mind*, which we owed to Him alone. The aim was that, by experiencing pain we might learn that we have fallen in love with what is not real, and so be taught to redirect our power to what really exists.

{7.33} Gregory makes this quite clear, when subsequently he says: “It seems to me that there is a further reason why none of the good things of this earthly life are either trustworthy or of any great duration for man—and this, like everything else, has been well devised by the Artisan Word and Wisdom who surpasses every intellect, namely, that we should be toyed with and mocked by visible things, which are always shifting about and throwing things off course, now one way and [1093B] now another, and no sooner are they carried up than they are swept back down, wrong side up, and before one can lay hold of them, they flee and escape our grasp—so that when we contemplate the instability and transience of earthly things, we may seek refuge in the things that are to come. For what should we have done if our prosperity were permanent, given that now, though it is not, we are so completely attached to it, so utterly enslaved by its pleasure and deception that we cannot imagine anything better or higher than our present circumstances, despite the fact that we are taught and believe that we have been created *according to the image of God*, an image which exists in a realm above us, and draws us to itself?”<sup>91</sup>

{7.34} He says very much the same thing in his oration “To the Citizens of Nazianzus”: “So that we may realize that we are nothing in comparison to the true and principal Wisdom, and incline toward Him alone, and always seek [1093C] to be illumined by the rays of light issuing from Him; and if we cannot do this, then through our experience of the irregularity of visible things, which shift back and forth, He leads us to realities that are stable and enduring.”<sup>92</sup>

{7.35} It seems to me that, in these passages, the teacher is not, as has already been stated, explaining the reason why human beings were created, but the reason for the misery which transgression brought into our life after we were created. This is quite obvious to anyone who studies Gregory’s inspired writings with the proper diligence

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. QThal 61, where Maximus argues that God did not create Adam with a capacity for sensible pleasure and pain, but solely with the potential for spiritual delight. This latter was lost during the fall, when sensual pleasure was awakened, at which point “God, in His providence . . . affixed pain alongside sensual pleasure, as a kind of punitive force, whereby the law of death was wisely rooted in the nature of the body, curbing the fevered mind in its unnatural desire to rush toward sensible things” (CCSG 22:85, lines 16-21).

<sup>91</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 14.20 (PG 35:884AB).

<sup>92</sup> Id., Or. 17.4 (PG 35:969C).

and attention.<sup>93</sup> In these passages, then, he is describing whence this misery came to be, and for what reason, and by whom, and for whose sake, setting before our eyes the wisdom with which God has arranged for our salvation. When, on the other hand, Gregory wants to describe the reason why human beings were created, he uses different words and expressions, and states quite [1093D] clearly the sacred purpose of this mystery, as can be seen in his oration “On the Nativity”: “Intellect and sensation, having been distinguished from one another, remained within their own proper limits, and bore the magnificence of the Creator Word in themselves. Yet these piercing heralds could praise God’s work only silently, for the two had not yet been fused together; the contraries had not yet been mingled. Such mingling would be the mark of greater wisdom and of God’s lavishness in the creation of living things, but the abundance of God’s goodness was not yet made known. Hence the Artisan Word, wishing to display this mixture in a single living creature formed from [1096A] both—I mean from both invisible and visible nature—created man. Fashioning a body from already existing matter and *placing within it His own breath*, that is, a soul endowed with intellect—the *image of God*, according to Scripture—He made it a kind of second cosmos, a great creature in a small frame, and placed it on the earth, another angel, a worshiper formed of diverse elements,” and so on.<sup>94</sup> In his oration “On Theophany,” he says: “Since this is the way things are with the Three, or rather with the One, the worship of God should not be limited to the praises of heavenly beings, but should include worshipers here below, so that all things may be filled with the glory of God. For everything is of God. This is why man was created by the *hand of God* and was honored by being made in the image of God.”<sup>95</sup>

#### **“Portions of God” are members of the body of Christ**

{7.36} I think these brief passages are sufficient to indicate the mind of the teacher on the matter at hand. Sufficient, that is, for someone who is not wholly given over to quarreling, or who seeks empty glory in battles of words. [1096B] If, however, someone still wants to argue about what the teacher meant when he called us a “portion of God,” the foregoing has already explained this from many different points of view. Nonetheless, the basic argument will be more persuasive when supported by the inspired words of Scripture, in particular those of the holy blessed Apostle Paul, who received the *wisdom hidden in God before the ages*, and so illumined all the darkness of human life, dispersing the gloomy clouds of ignorance that had covered the soul. It will be enough to cite the following words, which he addressed to the Ephesians: *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which [1096C] He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might, which he accomplished in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule*

<sup>93</sup> Maximos’ method of “expounding Gregory by means of Gregory” (cf. Amb 40.3), is paralleled in the methodology of Neoplatonist commentaries on Aristotle, e.g., Elias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*: “The commentator must know the whole of Aristotle in order that, having first proved that Aristotle is consistent with himself, he may expound Aristotle’s works by means of Aristotle’s works. He must know the whole of Plato, in order to prove that Plato is consistent with himself, and make the works of Aristotle an introduction to those of Plato” (CAG 18.1/123, lines 7-11).

<sup>94</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.11 (SC 358:124-26, lines 1-14).

<sup>95</sup> Id., Or. 39.13 (SC 358:176, lines 1-5). The translation “. . . with the Three, or rather with the One,” takes account of the verse immediately preceding it in Gregory’s oration, which says: “There is thus One God in Three, and the Three are One.”

*and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the head over all things for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all things in every way. [1096D] And further down he says: And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, [1097A] by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.*

**{7.37}** I do not think that further testimony is required for someone who lives a devout life. For such a person these words will suffice for the manifestation of the truth believed by Christians, and from which he has clearly learned that we are the *members* and the *body of Christ*, and that we constitute *the fullness of Christ God*, who *fills all things in every way* according to the plan *hidden in God the Father before the ages*, with the result that we are being *recapitulated to Him* through His Son and our Lord and God Jesus Christ. For the [1097B] *mystery hidden from the ages* and from all generations has now been revealed through the true and perfect Incarnation of God the Son, who united our nature to Himself according to hypostasis, without division and without confusion. In and through His holy flesh—which He took from us, and which is endowed with intellect and reason—He has conjoined us to Himself, as a kind of *first fruits*, making us worthy to be one and the same with Him, according to His humanity, since we were *predestined before the ages* to be in Him as the members of His body. Just as the soul unifies the body, He joined us to Himself and knitted us together in the Spirit, and He leads us to the *stature of the spiritual maturity according to His own fullness*. He showed us that this was why we were created, and that this was God’s good purpose concerning us from before the ages, [1097C] a purpose which underwent no innovation in its essential principle, but rather was realized through the introduction of another, newer mode.

**{7.38}** For God created us in such a way that we are similar to Him (for through participation we are imbued with the exact characteristics of His goodness), and from before the ages He determined that we should exist in Him. In order for us to attain this most blessed end, He gave us a mode by which we could make proper use of our natural powers. However, man voluntarily chose to reject this mode by misusing his natural powers, and in order to prevent man from becoming completely estranged from God, He introduced another mode in its place, more marvelous and befitting of God than the first, and as different from the former as what is above nature is different from what is according to nature.<sup>96</sup> [1097D] According to the faith held by all, this was the mystery of the supremely mystical sojourn of God among human beings. *For if*, as the holy apostle says, *the first covenant had remained blameless, there would have been no need for a second*, and it is perfectly clear to all that the mystery accomplished in Christ *at the end of the age* is nothing other than the proof and fulfillment of the mystery which our forefather failed to attain at the beginning of the age.

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. below, Amb 36, Amb 41.13, and Amb 42.5-6.



{7.39} It follows, then, that the teacher used the word “portion” properly and indeed beneficially (in accordance with the various meanings explained above), and anyone of noble soul and conduct will not hesitate to use it in the sense given here, [1100A] having no need to engage in empty cleverness, for such a person understands that in the passage under discussion the word “portion” and the word “member” are the same. For if a “member” is a part of the body, and a “part” is the same as a “portion,” then “member” and “portion” are one and the same thing. And if “portion” is the same as “member,” and if the aggregation and composition of its members constitutes a body equipped with organs, and if a body equipped with organs united to a soul with intellect constitutes a complete human being, then whoever says that the soul or the body is a member or part of the human being does not sin against the truth. Moreover, if the body is the instrument of a soul endowed with intellect (since it is the soul of a human being), and if the whole soul permeates the whole body, giving it life and motion (since the soul by nature is simple and incorporeal), without however being divided or enclosed by the body, then the soul is present to the whole body and to each of its members [1100B] (for each member by nature is able to receive it, consistent with its innate potential to receive the soul’s energy). Being present to the body in this way, the soul binds together the members that variously receive it, in proportion to each member’s way of maintaining the unity of the body. Let whoever is still of an indecisive and wavering mind on these matters be led by these things to direct his thoughts to the great and ineffable mystery that is the blessed hope of Christians, for from what are small and human things, he will derive no mean images of what is great and beyond us. Having abandoned the logically incoherent notion that souls exist before bodies, he will, together with us, believe the Lord when He says that those who rise in the resurrection *will never die again*, owing to the definitive manifestation of, and our direct participation in, the ultimate object of desire. Again, He says: *Whoever lives and believes in me shall never* [1100C] *die*. But if the soul had pre-existed, how could it die? For as we have already argued, it would be impossible for such a soul to die simply by undergoing a certain kind of change.

**Body and soul are a single form**<sup>97</sup>

{7.40} And as for anyone who idly asserts this non-existing “pre-existence” of souls, let him confine himself to rational arguments. For if the body and the soul are parts of man, as has already been explained, then as parts they necessarily admit of reciprocal relation<sup>98</sup> (for they assuredly have the whole predicated of them), and things that are related in this manner are among those that are altogether and absolutely simultaneous<sup>99</sup> in respect of their coming into being, for they are the constitutive parts of a single form, and it is only in thought that they can be separated from each other for the purpose of distinguishing what each one is in its own substance. Therefore,

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<sup>97</sup> See below, Amb 42.9-25.

<sup>98</sup> The “relative” or “reciprocal relation” is one of the ten predicates defined by Aristotle, *Cat* 6a36-8b26; cf. Ammonios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 4/4:77-78); and Elias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 18/1:212-13). As Maximus correctly states, Aristotelian “relatives” are things that stand in relation to each other, in such a way that the relation is constitutive of their identity; such correlatives are “reciprocal” and “simultaneous,” so that the loss of either one will lead to the destruction of the other, consequently “there are relatives for which being is the same as being somehow related to something.”

<sup>99</sup> The “simultaneous” is another predicate drawn from Aristotle, *Cat* 13 14b24-15a12: “Those things are called ‘simultaneous’ without qualification and most strictly which come into being at the same time; for neither is prior or posterior. These are called simultaneous in respect of time. But those things are called ‘simultaneous by nature’ which reciprocate as to implication of existence, provided that neither is in any way the cause of the other’s existence” (14b24-29).

insofar as soul and body are parts of man, it is not possible for either the soul or the body to exist before the other, [1100D] or indeed to exist after the other in time, otherwise what is known as the principal of reciprocal relation would be destroyed. {7.41} Further, if the soul is a form in itself before it is joined to the body, and the body is a form before it is joined to the soul, and if the conjunction of the two results in a form that is different from what each is in itself, then this can only be attributed to one of two causes: either they have undergone a change or what they are in their union is what they are by nature. If the former, the change they undergo involves the destruction of their original form, transforming them into something they were not. But if what they become is what they are by nature, then this will happen always because it is their nature, and thus the soul would never cease changing bodies, nor the body cease changing souls. In my view, [1101A] however, this is not what happens, for the constitution of the whole as a form is neither the result of corruption nor the natural power of the parts coming together, but rather the simultaneous coming to be of the whole form with its parts.

{7.42} It is impossible, then, for one form to change into another without suffering destruction. But if they should say that, because the soul is able to exist and subsist after the death and dissolution of the body, there is nothing to prevent it from existing and subsisting before the creation of the body, it would seem to me that their argument falls rather wide of the mark, and this for the simple reason that the principle of origin and the principle of being are not the same. The former concerns the “when” and the “where” of a thing, along with its reciprocal relation to something else. The latter concerns the “what” and the “how” of a thing, along with the basic fact of its existence. If this is so, then the soul, after it has come to be, remains eternally in existence on account of its essence, and this is not simply because it came to be, but because it did so in relation [1101B] to a particular time and place, and standing in a reciprocal relation to something else. For after the death of the body, the soul is not called “soul” in an unqualified way, but the soul of a man, indeed the soul of a particular human being, for even after the body, it possesses, as its own form, the whole human being, which is predicated of it by virtue of its relation as a part to the whole. The same holds in the case of the body, which is corruptible by nature, but has a particular relation on account of its origin. For the body, after its separation from the soul, is not simply called “body,” even though it will decompose and be dissolved into the elements from which it was constituted, but the body of a man, indeed of a particular man. For like the soul it possesses the form of the whole human being predicated of it, by virtue of its relation as a part to the whole.

{7.43} Thus the relation of the two, by which I mean soul and body, as the whole human form whose parts [1101C] can be separated only in thought, reveals that both come into being simultaneously, and demonstrates their essential difference from each other, without violating in any way whatsoever the principles of their respective substances. For this reason it is inconceivable to speak of (and impossible to find) the soul and body except in relation to each other, since each one introduces together with itself the idea of the other to which it belongs. Thus, if either were to exist before the other, it would have to be understood as the soul or the body of the other to which it belongs, for the relation between them is immutable.

{7.44} These things, then, in response to your questions. If my remarks have not fallen outside the truth, thanks be to God, who through your prayers has led me to think rightly about these matters. If, however, the truth has escaped me in a particular instance, you will have no difficulty in discerning the finer points of the matter, for God has inspired you with the knowledge of these things.

## Ambiguum 8

[1101D] {8.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Love for the Poor:

For as long as matter carries within itself disorder, as if in a flowing stream.<sup>100</sup>  
{8.2} I think that the meaning of these words closely follows the sense of what was said in the previous chapter.<sup>101</sup> Having devoted a considerable part of his oration to those infatuated with matter and the body, Gregory now adds these words, on the basis of which anyone considering the [1104A] holy man's meaning with proper piety will be able to apprehend the following. After man had been brought into being by God, resplendent with the beauty of incorruptibility and immortality, he chose, instead of intelligible beauty, the relative deformity of the material nature surrounding him, and consequently lost the memory of his soul's exalted dignity—or rather he became wholly oblivious of God, who had beautified the soul with divine form. It was thus that man *plucked fruit*, which, according to the divine decree that wisely directs our salvation, was commensurate with the inclination of his mind, and so drew down on himself not simply the corruption and death of his body, but also the capacity and indeed propensity for all the passions, and, not least, the instability and disorder of the material substance that surrounded him, along with its facility and susceptibility to suffer change. This happened either because God, on account of the transgression, mixed the soul together with our [1104B] body,<sup>102</sup> and placed within it the capacity to undergo change, just as He gave the body the inherent capacity to suffer, undergo corruption, and be totally dissolved, which is made clear by the *girding with dead skins*, according to Scripture, which says that *creation itself was made subject to corruption, not willingly, but for the sake of Him who subjected it in hope*—or because God created matter in this way from the beginning,<sup>103</sup> according to His foreknowledge, in view of the transgression He had already seen in advance. His aim was that man, through the suffering and hardships inflicted on him by matter, might come to an awareness of himself and his proper dignity, and gladly detach himself not simply from the body but from matter as well. For the infinitely-wise God, who providentially directs the course of our lives, often allows us to use things naturally according to our own impulses in a way that leads to our correction. We [1104C] see this at times among those who become frenzied in their abuse of material things, for by means of the very confusion and turmoil which both surrounds and is generated by these things, God redirects irrational lust for the things of this life to a natural object of desire.

{8.3} For there exist, they say, three general ways by which our passions are educated and healed, and in each God wisely uses the disorder of matter as a healing treatment for the evil vexation of the passions, guiding it in an orderly manner in accord with a higher principle to the good end ordained by God. First, we are made to undergo punishment for *our former sins*, of which, perhaps, we may through ignorance have not even the slightest recollection, or even if perchance we were to remember them, we would not endure to accept making the appropriate correction for our

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## Ambiguum 8

<sup>100</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 14.30 (PG 35:897B).

<sup>101</sup> I.e., Amb 7.30-34.

<sup>102</sup> This is not a reference to the confinement of a pre-existing soul in the body (refuted in Amb 7), but the transference of spiritual qualities to an inferior biological plane, which Maximos elsewhere describes as a debasement of the human person to an irrational, animal-like state, cf. QThal Intro. (CCSG 7:31, lines 227-39); and QThal 1 (CCSG 7:47, lines 5-17). See also QThal 42 (CCSG 7:285-89).

<sup>103</sup> I.e., having elements of disorder.

transgression, [1104D] either because we are unwilling or unable to do so, owing to our deeply-rooted bad habits. Second, we are either purged of our sickness, or expel from ourselves the evil which at present is lodged within us, and learn in advance how to resist the evil we will encounter in the future. Finally, God provides the conditions for particular individuals to become marvelous examples of faithful perseverance and courage, if of course they are of noble mind, have a reputation for [1105A] virtue, and are able, in their steady struggle against adversity, to reveal within themselves the truth which till then had been concealed.

**{8.4}** In this manner Saint Gregory counsels those who are incapable of turning their minds to anything beyond this present life, and who take confidence in their bodily health, and in the fact that their affairs unfold according to their plans, not to exalt themselves over those who lack these things; because for as long as the present life lasts, and they, too, are encircled by corruption, turning in the wheel of mutability and change, they do not know what will happen to them owing to disturbances of the body and disruptions of their external affairs. Thus I think that when he says, “for as long as matter carries within itself disorder, as if in a flowing stream,” he means nothing other than, “for as long as the world is subjected to corruption and mutability,” and we are clothed *in this* [1005B] *body of our humiliation*, and thus subjected to a myriad of troubles that arise from it on account of its inherent weakness. “For as long as this lasts,” then, we should not be puffed up with pride on account of the inequality that is all around us, but instead we should in wisdom try to smooth out the irregularities of nature, which knows no differences of distinctions or honor, meeting the needs of others from out of our own abundance. Perhaps, then, this present condition of inequality was allowed to prevail in order to manifest the capacity of human reason to prefer virtue above everything else. For the alteration and mutability of the body and of external circumstances are for all human beings one and the same thing—a carrying and a being carried along—and the only thing it has that can be called permanent and stable is its impermanence and instability.

### Ambiguum 9

**{9.1}** From Saint Gregory the Theologian’s oration on Saint Athanasios: [1105C]

For it has nothing higher, nor will it ever have.<sup>104</sup>

**{9.2}** It seems to me that with these words our godly-minded teacher releases his student from predicating of God any relation of comparison or differentiation (or whatever else one wishes to call it). For the experts in these matters say that this particular form of speech is independent of relation and is no different from saying that God is “incomparably beyond all things,” since it has the “force of a transcendent negation.”<sup>105</sup>

### Ambiguum 10

**{10.1}** From Saint Gregory’s same oration on Saint Athanasios:

To whomsoever it has been granted to pass, by means of reason and contemplation, through matter and this fleshly “cloud” or “veil” (whichever it should be called), [1105D] and attain kinship with God, and be mingled with

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### Ambiguum 9

<sup>104</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 21.1 (SC 270:112, line 23). Gregory is comparing the eye’s vision of the sun to the intellect’s contemplation of God, so that, in context, the meaning of the excerpt is: “For beyond God, the intellect has nothing higher to ascend to, nor will it ever have.”

<sup>105</sup> Citing Dionysios, Letter 4: “For every affirmation regarding Jesus . . . has the force of a transcendent negation” (161, line 5; 1072B); cf. above, Amb 5.15.

the purest light (to the extent that this is possible for human nature)—that person is blessed owing to his ascent from here and his divinization there, which is given by true philosophy and by passing beyond the material dyad on account of the unity perceived in the Trinity.<sup>106</sup>

## 1. Introduction

{10.2} I do not think that Gregory’s teaching [1108A] concerning the virtue of the saints, which we discussed when we were together, is at all deficient, even if, as you wrote, there are some who think this, based on the fact that here he speaks of those who pursue divine philosophy solely through “reason and contemplation,” saying nothing about the practice of asceticism. On the contrary, I take it that, when the teacher affirms that divine philosophy is achieved through reason and contemplation, he in actuality is quite clearly implying that the saints’ true judgment and action concerning beings (which alone I would be so bold as to define as philosophy in the fullest sense of the word) is twofold. This is because practice is absolutely conjoined with reason, and the judgment it presupposes is contained in contemplation—if it is true, as it certainly is, that while the aim of reason is to order the body’s movements, skillfully using the bridle of right thinking to restrain it from irrational impulses, the task of contemplation is the [1108B] prudent adoption of what has been properly understood and judged, revealing, like a most radiant light, the truth itself by true knowledge. To be sure, it is by means of reason and contemplation that every philosophical virtue is created and sustained, and it is also by them that such virtue is manifested in and through the body, though not wholly, for the body cannot contain virtue, which is a *form imprinted* within it by divine *power*—but it does have certain traces of it, imparted, not for the benefit of virtue, but so that those who are naked of its grace might come to imitate the divine form of life of those who love God, inasmuch as they have cast off the deformity of vice through participation in the Beautiful, and so come to be ranked with those who are worthy of God; or so that those who are in need of some help might obtain it from those who are able to provide it. And when they acquire the disposition of the virtuous—which [1108C] is hidden in the depths of the soul but manifested through bodily practice—they praise the providence of God, which has become *all things in everyone*, and through *all things is present to all*. So that, if there were no one who needed to be helped by an act of virtue, or who stood in need of an example to show him what virtue is, it would not be out of place to say that each one of those who are adorned with the graces of the soul is absolutely sufficient for himself even without the manifestation of these virtues through the body.

{10.3} Therefore anyone who through contemplation has piously understood the manner in which beings exist, and who through deduction and logical deliberation has correctly discerned their inner rationality, and who keeps this judgment to himself, or rather who keeps himself steadfast in this judgment, comprehends within himself the sum of all virtue, [1108D] and is no longer moved toward anything beyond the truth that he has already come to know. In his zeal he hastens past all things, taking no thought for the world or the flesh, for he has already, and without resistance, subjected the practical life to reason, since his capacity for discursive reasoning (which is within our control) has endowed him with rational principles at once powerful and dispassionate, according to which all virtue and knowledge exist and subsist, for they are powers of the rational soul, and depend in no way on the body for

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Ambiguum 10

<sup>106</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 21.2 (SC 270:112-14, lines 1-8).

their existence, though they do not refrain from using the body [1109A] at the appropriate time in order to manifest themselves, for the reasons we stated above. For they say that what is particular to the mind is the understanding of intelligible things, the virtues, the sciences, the principles of the arts, the power of choice, and deliberation, whereas what is general to it are judgments, the power of assent, dissent, and impulses—some of which belong solely to intellectual contemplation, and others to the capacity for rational thinking.<sup>107</sup>

**{10.4}** If, then, it was by means of these that the saints preserved their proper mode of life, then the blessed Gregory, in mentioning only “reason” and “contemplation,” is in fact recommending to the saints *all* of the principles of virtue and knowledge in summary fashion, for it was through these that the saints devoted themselves to reflection on God cognitively in contemplation, and it was by making prudent use of reason that they imprinted the divine form within themselves by the stamp of the virtues. [1109B] It seems clear, then, that the blessed teacher did not consider it necessary to mention the bodily practice of asceticism, for he knew that by itself it does not create virtue, but merely manifests it, and that it is but the servant of divine thoughts and ideas.

**{10.5}** To make this clear in a different manner, those who have made a careful study of human nature say that the faculty of reason has two aspects: the “contemplative and the practical.” The “contemplative aspect is the power of the intellect to understand what pertains to beings, whereas the practical is the deliberative power that determines the right use of reason for those engaged in practice. The former they call the contemplative intellect, the latter practical reason—but also wisdom, and prudence respectively.”<sup>108</sup> If this is correct, then the teacher called practice “reason” in light of its cause, which was a very natural thing to do, and consequently said nothing about its material basis. [1109C] In so doing, he identified practice as a state of mind that has nothing contrary to it, for the contemplative man remains firmly fixed among true things, not polemically and agonistically but rationally and cognitively, and he will not endure to look upon anything else but these truths, owing to the pleasure he takes in them.

**{10.6}** If it is necessary to make this even clearer, we may turn to those who have exercised themselves in the principles of perfection in virtue. They say that those who have not yet attained purity in their relation to matter continue to be occupied with ascetic practices, because their judgment of beings is still confused, and they themselves are subject to change, since they have not yet relinquished their attachments to changeable things. But those, on the other hand, who through the extremity<sup>109</sup> of virtue establish a close relation to God, and who by coming to understand Him bear the [1109D] fruit of blessedness, are turned solely to themselves and God, for they have truly severed the attachment that bound them to material things, and have advanced beyond questions of practice, and indeed have become total strangers to matter itself, while growing in friendship with God through contemplation. Therefore it is said that such people are no longer subject to change,

<sup>107</sup> Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 12 (ed. Morani 1987, 68, lines 6-9).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 41 (ed. Morani 1987, 117, lines 17-20).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Proklos, *Elements of Theology* 146 (ed. Dodds 1963, 129), where “extremity” refers to the principle from which the orders of reality proceed and upon which they revert. According to John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on DN 1.3: “An ‘extremity’ refers to the purest part of each essence, on which the essence closely and continuously depends, as the ‘extremity’ of the soul is the purest intellect; and the ‘extremity’ of love is the burning love of those who have been raised up and divinized” (PG 4:36A); see below, Amb 10.6, 42, 56, 63; 31.5, 32.6, 37.8, 48.3, 50.3.

since they no longer have any attachment to matter, for one who is dominated by matter necessarily changes in a way contrary to nature along with matter, which is itself naturally changeable. And knowing that [1112A] whoever wishes to break free from his attachment to matter requires the greatest power, the teacher says, “To whomsoever it has been granted to pass, by means of reason and contemplation, through matter and this fleshly ‘cloud’ or ‘veil’ (whichever it should be called), and attain kinship with God,” and the rest.

## **2. In what sense the flesh is a cloud and a veil**

{10.7} Why does the teacher say that the flesh is a “cloud” and a “veil”? Because he knows that every human intellect has digressed and deviated from its natural motion, and that it now moves amidst passions, sensations, and sense-perceptible things, having nowhere else to be moved, [1112B] for it has utterly gone astray from the motion that naturally carries it along to God. Knowing this, he divided the flesh into passion and sensation, describing both parts of the ensouled flesh as a “cloud” and a “veil.” For the fleshly passion that hangs darkly over the governing faculty of the soul is indeed a kind of cloud, and what is the deception of the senses if not a veil, confining the soul to surface appearances and impeding its passage to intelligible reality? Such a soul consequently becomes oblivious of things that are naturally good and turns and invests all of its energy solely into what can be perceived by the senses, and so discovers angry passions, desires, and unseemly pleasures.

### **[1112C] 2b. On the manner in which pleasure originates**

{10.8} Every pleasure taken in forbidden things arises from passion and through sensation is directed toward a particular sensible object. For pleasure is nothing other than a kind of sensation that has been formed within the sensing subject by some sensible object, or a mode of sensory energy that has been built up and solidified around some irrational desire.<sup>110</sup> For when desire is combined with sensation it produces pleasure, to which it gives a specific shape, and sensation moved by desire produces pleasure when it becomes attached to a sensible object. Upon seeing that the soul is *clothed in an earthly form* when, contrary to nature, it moves toward material things by means of the flesh, the saints redirected this movement so that the flesh, moved by the soul in accordance with nature, was fittingly assimilated to God, [1112D] and, through the practice of the virtues, they adorned it, as far as possible, with the beauty of divine manifestations.

## **3. On the manner and number of the soul’s movements**

{10.9} For being illumined by grace, the saints realized that the soul has three general movements that converge into one: movement according to intellect, according to reason, and according to sensation.<sup>111</sup> Of these the first is simple and inexplicable, since it is the movement of the soul circling around God in a manner beyond knowledge, for the soul does not [1113A] know God after the manner of beings, owing to God’s absolute transcendence of beings.<sup>112</sup> The second is aligned with the cause that gives definition to what is unknown, and when the soul moves naturally in accord with it, it acquires—through intelligent activity—all the natural principles of whatever can be known solely in light of this cause, and these principles give shape to the soul. The third motion is composite, and through it the soul touches what is

<sup>110</sup> “Desire” renders the Greek word *epithymia*, which in this context has the primary meaning of “appetite.”

<sup>111</sup> An allusion to Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.9, cf. above, Amb 7.6.

<sup>112</sup> See John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on CH 7.4, for an extended gloss on the intellect’s “circular motion,” described as a natural movement of “return” to, “participaton” in, and a “dance” around God (PG 4:73A-76A)

outside of itself, and, as if from certain symbols, obtains impressions of the principles of visible things. It was the genius of the saints to have ordered their souls in light of these principles, according to the true and infallible mode of movement conforming to nature, and in this manner they passed through the present age of tribulations.

Through the medium of reason, they raised up to the level of intellect their power of sensation, possessing the simple spiritual principles of sensible things; by means of a single, simple, and undivided intention of mind, they uniquely united to intellect [1113B] their reason, possessing the principles of beings; and, finally, they offered to God their intellect, purified and freed from its movement around the totality of beings, and refraining even from its own natural activity. Wholly gathered into God in this way, they were deemed worthy to be totally intermingled through the Spirit with the whole of God, and thus were *clothed* (so far as humanly possible) in the whole *image of the heavenly man*, and to the extent that they drew to themselves the manifestation of God, to that very same degree, if it be permitted to speak thus, they were drawn to God and united to Him. For they say that God and man are paradigms of each other, so that as much as man, enabled by love, has divinized himself for God, to that same extent God is humanized for man by His love for mankind; and as much as man has manifested God who is invisible by nature through the virtues, [1113C] to that same extent man is rapt by God in mind to the unknowable.<sup>113</sup>

{10.10} It was, then, by means of this philosophy, which is constituted by reason and contemplation, and by which even the nature of the body is necessarily ennobled, that the saints, wounded with longing for God, unerringly drew near to Him through the natural manifestations of the divine present within them and in a dignified manner they entered into His presence. Passing with vigorous effort beyond the surface of the body and the world, they observed that the one was contained in the other: the world by virtue of nature, the body by virtue of sensation—and that each is subject to the other through a determinate property alternating between them, so that, consistent with their respective principles, neither the body nor the world is free from circumscription—seeing this, I say, the saints considered it disgraceful to allow the soul, which is immortal and ever-moving, to be circumscribed and perish within things that are circumscribed and [1113D] mortal, and so they bound themselves indissolubly to God, who alone is immortal and beyond every infinity,<sup>114</sup> without in any way surrendering to the countervailing pressures of the world and the flesh, a feat which is nothing other than the fulfillment of all virtue and knowledge, indeed I would say their ultimate end.

{10.11} And even if the saints were moved by the sight of beings, they were not primarily moved, as we are, in a material way, to see and know created things in and of themselves, but so that they might more richly praise God, who exists and is made manifest in [1116A] *all things and through all things*, and to obtain further occasions for marveling at and glorifying Him. For they have received a soul from God endowed with intellect, reason, and the power of sensation, fashioned in such a way that external sensation has an inward aspect related to intellect, just as reason has in addition to its inward aspect an outward aspect in speech, and intellect too has both an active and a passive aspect. (This latter is what they call “imagination” in animals, by means of which they recognize other animals, human beings, and the places through which they have passed. Those who are wise in these matters say that this constitutes sense perception for them, being the organ that apprehends the images presented to

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. below, Amb 33.2; Amb 60.4; and David, *Prolegomenon to Philosophy* 12 (CAG 18/2:35, lines 8-30).

<sup>114</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 5.10 (189, lines 8-9; 825AB).



it.<sup>115</sup>) Having received such a soul, the saints deemed it only right that its activities should be offered, not to themselves, but to God who gave them, because *from Him and to Him are due all things*.

**{10.12}** From their exact [1116B] understanding of beings, the saints learned that there exist three general modes accessible to human beings, modes by which God created all things, for He endowed us with substance and existence so that we might have being, well-being, and eternal-being. The two extremes (i.e., being and eternal-being) belong solely to God, who is their author, but the intermediate mode depends on our inclination and motion, and through it the extremes are properly said to be what they are, for if the middle term were absent, their designation would be meaningless, for the good (i.e., well-being) would not be present in their midst, and thus the saints realized that apart from their eternal movement toward God, there was no other way for them to possess and preserve the truth of the extremes, which is assured only when well-being is mixed in the middle of them. [1116C] Having therefore intensified the visual power of the soul by means of reason in accord with nature, and having heard, as it were, reason itself crying out that one must not use natural energies in a manner contrary to nature—since the misuse of natural powers necessarily leads to their destruction—they were taught by the corresponding principle of nature to be carried directly to the cause of nature, so that, whence they received being as such, they might also receive the addition of true being itself.<sup>116</sup> For having reckoned up the costs, the saints may have asked themselves what it profits a man who is not the author of his own being to remain in motion around himself, or around anything else but God, if neither from himself, nor from anyone else apart from God, can he add even the slightest interest to his principle of being?

**{10.13}** [1116D] This is why the saints have taught us that the intellect should think only of God and His virtues, and should cast itself in a manner beyond knowledge into the unutterable glory of God's blessedness; that reason should become the interpreter and singer of the things understood by the intellect, and should speak rightly about the modes that unify them; that sensation should be ennobled by reason, so that when imagination perceives the various potentials and actualities that exist in the universe, it can proclaim (as much as possible) the principles of beings to the soul, and thus it was that, through intellect and reason, they succeeded in wisely guiding the ship of the soul across the fluid and unstable sea of life, and though its chaotic seething easily overwhelms the senses, they nonetheless passed dry-shod over to the other side.

#### **4. Contemplation of Moses' passage through the sea**

**{10.14}** [1117A] Thus the great Moses broke apart the deception of sensible things, or, to speak more precisely, he stripped away their surface—just like the sea—with a blow of omnipotent reason (symbolized perhaps by the rod), and provided the people, who were hastening toward the divine promises, with a firm and unshakeable ground beneath their feet, by which I mean the foundation of nature that is concealed below the level of superficial sensation. This foundation is visible to and may be clearly defined by right reason, and Moses showed them that it is accessible and easily crossed by a life adorned with virtues, for such a life has nothing to fear from the onrush of the seething waters that formerly concealed the foundation, and which now have been divided. And there is nothing to fear because, according to the

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *Sentences* 23 (ed. Lamberz 1975, 14).

<sup>116</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.10, 22.

anagogical<sup>117</sup> meaning of Scripture, the division of the waters of the intelligible sea expresses the [1117B] continuous distance of the vices in opposition to the virtues—either by the ebb of deficiency or the flow of excess—a distance which reason is naturally able to establish and control, promptly laying hold of them and in no way permitting them to converge in those who are hastening to God with headlong speed.

#### **5. Contemplation of Moses' ascent on the mountain**

{10.15} Thus, again, Moses followed God who called him, and passing beyond everything here below he *entered into the dark cloud, where God was*, that is, into the formless, invisible and incorporeal state, his intellect free from any relationship to anything other than God. Having entered this state (to the extent that this is granted to human nature), he received, as a prize worthy of that blessed ascent, knowledge encompassing the genesis of time and nature.<sup>118</sup> [1117C] Taking God Himself as the type and exemplar of the virtues, he modeled himself on Him, like a picture expertly capturing the likeness of the archetype, and as such he came down from the mountain. Shining with glory, he showed his face to those below as a sign of the grace he received, freely giving and presenting himself to them as one who had become an image of the divine archetype. And he made this clear by explaining to the people what he had seen and heard, and by handing down the mysteries of God in written form for those who were to come after him, as a kind of God-given inheritance.

#### **6. Contemplation of the unmoistened dough of the unleavened loaves**

{10.16} Thus the people, when they were led out of Egypt by Moses, carried into the desert *dough bound up in their garments*. This binding, I think, signifies the need to keep the power of reason within us pure and unharmed from entanglement with sensible objects. Therefore Moses taught them to flee the sensible world and journey spiritually to the intelligible world, so that through virtue and knowledge they might henceforth become in inclination what we believe the worthy, through hope, shall become in the age of incorruption.

#### **7. Contemplation of Joshua's leadership, his passage across the Jordan, and the second circumcision performed by him with knives of stone**

{10.17} [1117D] Thus it was that Moses' successor, Joshua—here I must leave aside most of the things that are written about him, since they are far too numerous to mention—assumed the leadership of a people who in the desert had in different ways already been trained in piety. After *Moses' death on the mountain*, Joshua purified the people by a strange form of *circumcision with knives of stone*, and led them all *dry-shod across the Jordan, which had dried up at the approach of the divine ark*.

[1120A] Through these activities he prefigures the Savior Word,<sup>119</sup> who, after the death of the letter of the law, assumed from the summit of intelligible reality the leadership of the true *Israel* that *sees God*. And He *circumcised them* by the much *sharper word of faith* in Him, purifying them *from every defilement of soul and body*, and freeing them from the reproaches of whatever provokes one to sin. And he caused the flowing nature of time, and all that is in motion, to pass over to the state of

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<sup>117</sup> Literally, “elevative” or “ascending” and thus the spiritual, mystical, or allegorical interpretation of Scripture; cf. below, Amb 20.4; Amb 46.2; Amb 61.2; and Amb 62.2. For Dionysios the Areopagite, CH 2.5 (16, lines 8-13; 145B), *anagogia* denotes a movement from sensory images to divine realities, which fittingly describes the “anagogical” mode of biblical interpretation. The ascent of spirit through matter (closely related to biblical *mystagogia* and *theoria*) is central to this entire Ambiguum.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.7 (SC 358:114-16).

<sup>119</sup> “Joshua” and “Jesus” are the Hebrew and Greek forms of the same name, which means “savior,” cf. Mt 1:21: “you shall call his name ‘Jesus,’ for he will save his people from their sins.”

bodiless beings,<sup>120</sup> bearing on the shoulders of the virtues knowledge that is capable of pointing to the mysteries of God.

#### **8. Contemplation of the fall of Jericho and the seven circumambulations, and of the ark, the trumpets, and the dedicated offering**

{10.18} [1120B] Thus, again, by the seven circumambulations and the same number of trumpets, along with the mystical shout that shook the city of Jericho—which had seemed difficult and indeed impossible to capture—Joshua, through intellect and reason, that is, by means of knowledge and virtue, mysteriously prefigured the Word of God Himself as conqueror of the world and perfecter of the age. Knowledge and virtue are typified by the ark and the trumpets, which showed to those who followed him that the present age of the senses is easily conquered and overcome, and contains nothing of the good things suitable for the delight of those who enjoy what is divine, since it is bound up with death and corruption and is the cause of divine indignation. And this is made clear by Achan the son of Carmi, who signifies troubling thoughts infatuated with matter that encourage us to take as our own something from the world of sense, and which [1120C] in conformity with the divine decree calls down the most lamentable of deaths, which reason itself produces in the depths of an evil conscience, suffocating the man who is deserving of such punishment.<sup>121</sup>

#### **9. Contemplation of Tyre and its king, and of its capture**

{10.19} Thus, again, when we read that, *at that time Joshua took Hazor and smote its king with the sword, destroying all that breathed in it, though in former times it was the chief of all the kingdoms*, it becomes clear what sort of typological mysteries are being put forward by these words. Our true Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, destroyer of the evil powers and the inheritor of those worthy of grace, during the time of His [1120D] Incarnation, *took* sin through the cross and *smote its king* the devil by *His word of power* (for at that time sin was ruling over all), and He *destroyed all that breathed in it*, that is, the passions that are in us, along with the shameful and evil thoughts that they create, so that in those who belong to Christ and live according to Him, sin would no longer be able to live and move about, like something alive and with breath.

[1121A] **10. Contemplation of the words: *The heavens declare the glory of God***

{10.20} Thus, to pass over the lives of the Judges, which contain many mysteries, I shall turn now to David, who, though coming after them in time, corresponds to them in spirit. He heard the *heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaim the work of His hands*, and this is wondrous indeed, since the creator did not endow these things with a soul. Yet with the ears of his intellect he heard inanimate beings proclaim the principles of theology, from which he learned about the modes of providence and judgment<sup>122</sup> from their effects, to the extent that this is humanly possible, even if he did not attain to an understanding of those principles according to which the administration of the universe is variously worked out and embellished in its specific parts.

#### **11. Contemplation of the words: *My father and my mother* [1121B] *abandoned Me***

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<sup>120</sup> I.e., to the condition of angels, not however in the sense of discarding the body, but in the elevation of human knowledge through the practice of the virtues, which, as Maximus has explained, is a practice that necessarily involves the body.

<sup>121</sup> Joshua had directed that the gold and silver spoils of Jericho be dedicated to God (Jos 6:19), but Achan had taken some for himself, for which he was stoned (Jos 7:25). Maximus comments on the spiritual symbolism of the story of Achan in greater detail in QD 82 (CCSG 10:65).

<sup>122</sup> Cf. below, Amb 10.37, n. 135.

{10.21} Thus, again, when David said, *My father and my mother abandoned me, but the Lord took me to Himself*, I think he was speaking obscurely about the abandonment and flight from the natural law of the flesh, which governs the process of birth and corruption, and into which, on account of the transgression, we are born and exist. This includes abandonment and flight from sensation, which feeds us like a mother, a parting that is necessary for those who desire incorruptible things. In this way, the visible world is abandoned by us and abandons us, *but the Lord takes us to Himself*, and according to the spiritual law adopts those who are worthy, becoming their adopted father through virtue and knowledge, and in His goodness He gives the whole of Himself to the whole of them, *according to the likeness*. Or perhaps with the words “father” and [1121C] “mother” David is alluding to the written law and its system of corporeal worship, the waning of which allows the light of the spiritual law to dawn in the hearts of the worthy, granting them freedom from slavery to the flesh.

## **12. Contemplation of the vision of Elijah in the cave of Choreb**

{10.22} Thus Elijah acquired great fame after the *fire*, and after the *earthquake*, and after the *great and mighty wind that rent the mountains*, which I take to be zeal, discernment, and an eager faith filled with assurance. For discernment, like an earthquake, strikes at longstanding habits hardened by evil, and through virtue shifts the foundations established by vice; and zeal, [1121D] like a burning fire, enkindles the zealous with the ardor of the Spirit, and exhorts them to discipline the ungodly; and faith, like a *mighty wind*, empowers the dispassionate—for the glory of God—to *destroy strongholds* through the working of miracles, so that the true man of faith might become a provider of the *water* of knowledge and the *fire* of divinization. By means of the one, faith *ends the famine* of [1124A] ignorance, and by the other it propitiates God on behalf of those who in true friendship offer Him sacrifices. Such faith puts to death every thought that teaches us to do evil; it destroys all the demons of sophistry and sets free all those in the grip of slavery to the passions. It was after all these things that Elijah *perceived the still, small voice in which was God*, by which he was secretly taught that state of being which, as manifested through reason and by forms of life and conduct, is divine, imperturbable, peaceful, and entirely immaterial, simple, and free from every shape or form, and thus can neither be captured in words nor demonstrated with the help of arguments.

{10.23} Struck by its glory and wounded by its beauty, Elijah longed to be with it rather than simply be zealous for it, that is, to exist wholly with the truth rather than merely to fight in its defense, judging it to be a more honorable thing by far, not to see and know what is contrary, but to know that God alone exists [1124B] “wholly in and through”<sup>123</sup> all things, and this is why, though still in the flesh, he kept himself close to that state, and, *mounted on a divine chariot* of virtues, he passed through matter as if it were but a veil of the intellect’s pure passage into the realm of the intelligible, and he rose above the cloud of the flesh, whose passions darken the governing faculty of the soul—and he did all this so that he might partake of the ineffable good things which he longed for (as far as was possible for one still in flesh subject to corruption), and to be for us a firm assurance of what has been promised. For this is what God enjoined to him, crying out silently, throughout all these secretly unfolding events, that to be alone with God in peace is more profitable than any other good.

## **[1124C] 13. Contemplation of Elisha, the disciple of Elijah**

{10.24} Thus Elisha, who was Elijah’s disciple and the inheritor of his spirit, no longer possessed senses that were activated by material images, for they had already

<sup>123</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.1 (226, line 10; 977B).

passed beyond these things through the graces of the Spirit bestowed on the intellect, and by means of another activity of the eyes he saw all around him the divine powers in opposition to wicked ones. In this way he was able to see, and to grant his disciple to see, power greater than weakness, by which latter I mean the flesh, around which the spirits of wickedness gather to assault the visionary mind. He learned, moreover, and taught others that the soul has the advantage here, for it is encompassed by ranks of angels, standing guard, as it were, around the image of the king.

**[1124D] 14. Contemplation of Anna and Samuel**

**{10.25}** Thus the blessed Anna, the mother of the great Samuel, being barren and childless, asked God to make her womb fruitful, ardently promising in the course of her visitations to the Temple that she would return the gift to God the giver and donor. In this way she secretly taught that every soul barren of carnal desires, by negating its relation to material things, asks God for the seeds of the virtues, so that it can conceive in its mind and give birth to reason that is obedient to God and able to see the future cognitively, and offer it to God. [1125A] And it is virtue again which through faithful contemplation enables the soul subsequently to make an offering of reason, judging it a great and honorable debt to have nothing of its own, and thereby to show that God alone gives and receives, just as the law says: *My gifts, my presents, my offerings, you shall take heed to offer to Me*, since every good thing originates from Him and reaches its end in Him. For to those in whom it is born, godly reason naturally nullifies the movements of the flesh, and restrains the soul from inclining toward them, filling it with the whole power of true discernment.

**15. Contemplation of the priest who set apart the unclean house**

**{10.26}** And when I hear about the priest who, according to the requirement of the law, [1125B] enters a house that is in any way unclean, and sets it apart, isolating whatever is in need of purification for the sake of the occupants, I understand him to signify reason, the high priest, who enters the soul like the purest light, exposing its impure desires, thoughts, and reprehensible deeds, and at the same time wisely proposes means of conversion and purification. This, I think, is more clearly signified by the woman who received the great Elijah as a prophet, saying, *Man of God, you have come to lead me to remembrance of my sins*.

**16. Contemplation of the holy Elijah and the widow from Zarephath**

**{10.27}** [1125C] For whenever any soul, widowed of good things and bereft of virtue and knowledge of God, welcomes into its home divine and discerning reason, it remembers its sins and in a certain way is taught to nourish the nourishing reason with the bread of the virtues, and to give drink to the fountain of life with true teachings, preferring to serve this source over its own nature, through which service it will offer, like a pitcher of clay, its own flesh for the concise and efficient practice of the virtues. The intellect, like *a flask of oil*, will continually flow with contemplation and so maintain the light of knowledge. Inborn thinking, like the widow's son in the story, will leave its former life of passions, and will be deemed worthy to be a partaker of the divine and true life that is given to it through reason.

**[1125D] 17. Contemplation of the Transfiguration of the Lord**

**{10.28}** Thus, in addition to those mentioned above, it happened that certain of Christ's disciples, through diligence in virtue, ascended and were raised aloft with Him on the mountain of His manifestation, where they beheld Him transfigured, *unapproachable* by reason of the *light* of His face, and astonishing in the brightness of His garments; and having observed His appearance made more august by the honor of Moses and Elijah standing at either side of Him, they crossed over from the [1128A] flesh to the spirit, prior to having cast off carnal life, through the substitution

of their powers of sense perception by the activity of the Spirit, who removed the veils of the passions that had covered the intellectual capacity within them. With the sensory organs of their souls and bodies purified through the Spirit, they were initiated into the spiritual principles of the mysteries that had been disclosed to them. **{10.29}** They were taught, in a hidden way, that the wholly blessed radiance that shone with dazzling rays of light from the Lord's face, completely overwhelming the power of their eyes, was a symbol of His divinity, which transcends intellect, sensation, being, and knowledge.<sup>124</sup> From the observation that *He had neither form nor beauty*, and from the knowledge that *the Word had become flesh*, they were led to the understanding of Him as one *more beautiful than the sons of men*, who *was in the beginning, and was with God*, [1128B] *and was God*, and, by means of the theological negation that extols Him as being beyond all human comprehension,<sup>125</sup> they were raised up cognitively to the *glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth*. They were also taught that the garments, which became *dazzling white*, convey a symbol: first, of the words of Holy Scripture, which at that moment became bright, clear, and transparent to them, grasped by the intellect without any dark riddles or symbolic shadows, and pointing to the meaning (*logos*) that lay concealed within them (at which point the disciples received the perfect and correct knowledge of God, and were set free from every attachment to the world and the flesh); and, second, of creation itself—stripped of the soiled preconceptions of those who till then believed they saw it clearly, but who in fact were deceived and bound to sense perception [1128C] alone—now appearing in the variety of the different forms that constitute it, all declaring the power of the Creator Word, in the same way that a garment makes known the dignity of the one who wears it.<sup>126</sup> **{10.30}** For both of these interpretations are appropriate for the Word, because in both cases He has been rightly covered with obscurity for our sake, so that we should not dare to approach unworthily what is beyond our comprehension, namely, the words of Holy Scripture, for He is the Word; or creation, for He is the creator, fashioner, and artisan. From this it follows that whoever wishes blamelessly to walk the straight road to God, stands in need of both the inherent spiritual knowledge of Scripture, and the natural contemplation of beings according to the spirit. In this way, anyone who desires to become a perfect lover of perfect wisdom will be able to show what is only reasonable, namely, that the two laws—the natural and the written—are of equal value and equal dignity, that both of them reciprocally teach the same things, [1128D] and that neither is superior or inferior to the other.

### **18. Contemplation of the natural and written laws and the concurrence of the one in the other through their reciprocal interchange**

**{10.31}** The natural law, on the one hand, is to the highest possible degree evenly directed by reason through the marvelous physical phenomena that we see, which are naturally interconnected, so that the harmonious web of the universe is contained within it like the various elements in a book.<sup>127</sup> [1129A] For letters and syllables it

<sup>124</sup> This statement, which describes the divine light as a “symbol,” provoked considerable discussion during the Hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century; cf. Gregory Palamas, *Triads* 2.3.21-22; 3.1.13-14 (ed. Meyendorff 1959, 2:431-33; 583-87); John VI Kantakouzenos, *Refutation of Prochoros Kydones* 1.5 (CCSG 16:8); and Theophanes of Nicaea, *On the Light of Thabor* 3.8, 4.21 (ed. Zacharopoulos 2003, 224-25, 276-77).

<sup>125</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.1 (226-27, lines 7-1; 977B); QD 190 (CCSG 10:132, lines 21-26).

<sup>126</sup> QD 191 (CCSG 10:134, lines 55-63).

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* 1.9 (LCL 1:158-60); Evagrius, *On Psalm* 136 (PG 12:1661C); id., *Gnostic Chapters* 3.57 (ed. Guillaumont 1958, 121); and below, Amb 21.7; and Amb 33.2.

has physical bodies, these being the first things that come to our attention, since they are proximate and particular, having acquired density through the conjunction of various qualities. It also has words,<sup>128</sup> which are more universal than these, and are further removed from us and much more subtle, and it is from these that the Word, who has wisely inscribed them and is Himself ineffably inscribed within them, is rendered legible when He is read by us, communicating to us solely the concept that He exists, and not what He is, for through the reverent combination of multiple impressions gathered from nature, He leads us to a unitary idea of the truth, allowing Himself to be seen *by analogy* through visible things as their *Creator*. The written law, on the other hand, the knowledge of which is acquired through study, is itself like another world, constituted by all that has been wisely uttered within it, having its own heaven, earth, and what comes between them, by which I mean ethical, natural, and theological philosophy, [1129B] proclaiming the ineffable power of the One who has spoken through it, showing that, by virtue of their reciprocal interchange, the one law is identical to the other, so that the written law is potentially identical to the natural law, and the natural law is by its permanent condition identical to the written law. Both laws simultaneously reveal and conceal the same Word: the one through written words and whatever is visible, and the other through ideas and whatever is hidden. For when we say that the words of Holy Scripture are “garments,” we understand from this that their inner meanings are the “fleshes” of the Word,<sup>129</sup> and thus by means of the former we conceal, and by means of the latter we reveal. In the same way, we can say that the forms and shapes of created things that appear within our vision are also “garments,” the “fleshes” of which are the principles according to which they were created, and likewise by the former we conceal and by the latter we reveal. For the Word, who created the universe and [1129C] established the law, is concealed in His manifestation, being invisible according to nature; and He is manifested through concealment,<sup>130</sup> assuring those who are wise that by nature He cannot be apprehended.

{10.32} Let us, then, make manifest what is hidden by means of an apophatic negation—leaving aside every capacity to picture the truth by means of figures and signs, being lifted up in silence by the power of the Spirit from written words and visible things to the Word Himself—or let us conceal what has been manifested by giving it positive names and attributes. Otherwise we, like the Greeks, will be murderers of the Word, *worshipping creation rather than the creator*, believing that there exists nothing beyond what can be seen, or nothing more magnificent than sensible objects. Or, again, in looking no further than the letter, we will, in a Jewish manner, become overly concerned with bodily matters, [1129D] *making a god of the stomach and regarding what is shameful as glorious*, and so receive the same inheritance as those who kill God. For like Greeks and Jews we will have failed to discern the Word, who for our sake became like us and came to us through the body, and likewise grew thick in syllables and letters,<sup>131</sup> in both cases because of the senses, which had all but absorbed our capacity for higher intellection. This is why the divine apostle says: *The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*, for when the letter is desired only for itself, it tends to kill the indwelling Word in those who are subject to such

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<sup>128</sup> Or, “verbs.”

<sup>129</sup> The plural “fleshes,” which is unusual in English, indicates that, on this level of being and manifestation, the Word continues to be differentiated into a multiplicity of forms and expressions.

<sup>130</sup> An allusion to Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 3 (159, lines 3-10; 1069B); cf. above, Amb 5.5.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.2 (SC 358:106, lines 16-17); id., Letter 101.49 (SC 208:56, lines 15-18); and below, Amb 33.

desire, just as the beauty of creatures, when not beheld for the glory of their Creator, [1132A] inevitably deprives the beholders of their rational devotion to the Word. And again the Gospel says: *If those days had not been shortened*, that is, the days of evil, *then no flesh would be saved*, that is, no pious thought about God. For the days of evil are shortened when erring judgment (which creates such days when it is deluded by sensation) is circumscribed by reason, and becomes a follower of reason's pious commands. For the law of the flesh in no way differs from the Antichrist, always struggling against the spirit and resisting the law of God, and this shall go on for as long as the present life is attractive and desirable to those who are overcome by it. It shall go on, in other words, until the Word shall appear and abolish it by *the word of power*, separating the immortal from the mortal, delivering freedom from the scourge of [1132B] slavery, manifesting the truth itself free from all falsehood, and setting apart the divine and the eternal from whatever is material and transitory, for the intellect is of a nature to be inclined to the latter things, and is deceived by them through the easy familiarity created by sensation, and out of irrational affection for them rushes to its death. And so it is above all for the sake of the intellect that the divinely befitting descent of the Word takes place, raising it up from the death of ignorance, restraining it from its impassioned inclination to material things, and restoring its longing for what is naturally desirable.

{10.33} Therefore it seems to me that, as rational beings, we must necessarily take thought for the "body" of Holy Scripture, which is far superior to its "garments," by which I mean its inner meanings, which are divine and exalted, as well as for the inward aspects of creation, and so hasten by means of reason to the Divine Reason, for [1132C] He Himself says that *the soul is more than food, and the body is more than clothing*. Otherwise there may come a time when we are caught having nothing, since in our urge to possess these things we failed to take hold of the Word, who exists and brings all things into existence, and so find ourselves like that Egyptian woman, who grasped only the garments of Joseph, completely failing to attain intercourse with the object of her desire.

{10.34} So we too, then, having ascended the mountain of the divine Transfiguration, can behold the garments of the Word, by which I mean the words of Scripture and the visible elements of creation, shining and glorious in their reciprocal teachings about Him, and which through sublime contemplation are suitable for the divine Word, in no way being forcefully barred from blessed contact with the Lord, as happened to Mary Magdalene, who thought [1132D] that the Lord Jesus was a gardener, and only the creator of things coming into being subject to corruption, since she was still under the impression that nothing exists beyond the senses, but we shall see Him and worship Him *as one living and risen from the dead*, coming to us *through closed doors*—since the activity of the senses within us will be completely sealed—and we shall know Him, who is Himself the Word and God, who is *all things in everything*; and we shall know that in His goodness He has made all things His own, so that all intelligible things are one body, and all sensible things are garments, about which latter it may not be inappropriate to say: [1133A] *They shall all grow old like a garment*, because of the corruption of visible things that holds sway over the intellect, *and like a garment you will roll them up and they shall be changed*, because of the grace of incorruption that we await.

#### **19. A concise exposition of the five modes of natural contemplation**

{10.35} In addition to these, we shall also know the ultimate principles that are accessible to us, which their teacher, creation, has set before us, along with the five modes of contemplation which are connected to them. By means of these the saints



made distinctions within the created order, and reverently gathered together its hidden principles, dividing them into being,<sup>132</sup> motion, difference, mixture, and position. [1133B] They affirmed, moreover, that three of these have priority in leading us to the knowledge of God, and therefore have a kind of preliminary status, namely, the modes according to being, motion, and difference. Through these, God becomes known to us, insofar as we gather from created beings the implicit traces of God as creator, provider, and judge. They said, finally, that the two remaining modes lead to virtue and affinity with God, since through mixture and position, man is molded and shaped into God, and from being a creature passively submits to becoming God, for the eye, as it were, of his intellect beholds the whole implicit trace of God's goodness, and through reason he gives this image a clear and distinct form within himself.<sup>133</sup> For they say that what the pure intellect sees naturally through reverent knowledge it can also passively experience, becoming, through its habit of virtue, the very thing it sees. [1133C]

**{10.36}** In this way, the fact of being teaches us theology, for it is through being that we seek the cause of beings and learn from them that such a cause exists, without however attempting to know what this cause is in its own essence, for its reflection is not projected outward into beings, on the basis of which we might have been able (if even only minimally) to refer back to it, in the way one infers a cause from its effects. Motion, on the other hand, manifests the providence for beings, and through it we contemplate the unvarying essential identity of beings in their particular species. In seeing these integral modes of distinct existence, we acquire the concept of Him who holds together and preserves them all in an ineffable union, in such a way that each is clearly distinct and marked off from the other, consistent with the principles according to which they were created. Difference, moreover, signifies judgment,<sup>134</sup> which is evident in the just distribution to all things of a natural potential commensurate with the [1133D] substrate of their being (in accordance with the principle of each), by which we are instructed that the wise distributor is God.

**{10.37}** Now by providence I do not mean "convertive" providence, which is the special ordering of things within the care of providence, returning whatever has gone astray to its proper course, but rather that power which holds the universe together, keeping it aligned with the inner principles according to which it was originally created. And by judgment I do not mean retributive action, which seeks to inflict punishment on sinners, but rather the salutary and differentiated distribution of beings, which assures that all beings, consistent with the principles according to which they were created, possess [1136A] an inviolable and unchanging equilibrium in their natural identity, for from the beginning the Creator judged precisely what each thing would be, and how, and how much it would be, and so brought all things into being.<sup>135</sup> To be sure, providence and judgment are also closely connected with

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<sup>132</sup> Or "substance."

<sup>133</sup> "Mixture" was an important category among the later Neoplatonists, for whom it was associated with the return or reversion (*epistrophe*) of created effects to their causes, mirrored here in Maximos's remarks about the return and assimilation of the self to God; cf. Gersh 1973, 19-20.

<sup>134</sup> In Greek, the word "judgment" (*krisis*) means to distinguish, differentiate, and separate.

<sup>135</sup> "Providence" and "judgment" were signature Evagrian categories (defined in *Gnostikos* 48 [SC 356:186]) that Maximos has taken over and radically transformed. For Evagrius, they designated key moments in the fall of rational beings from (and their restoration to) the divine *henad* (cf. above, Amb 7.2), with "judgment" referring to the creation of the material world and the banishment of the fallen minds in bodies, and "providence" to the reversal of this sentence and the restitution of the fallen minds to their original unity. As Amb 10.37 makes clear, the terms are redefined as embracing both the

our voluntary impulses, and in various ways prevent us from doing evil. At the same time, they wisely convert us back to what is good, and by directing the course of things that are beyond our control in a manner contrary to what is within our control, they cut off at the root not merely the present evil, but past and future evils as well. Thus I am not saying that there are two kinds of providence and judgment, for they are potentially one and the same, but insofar as they relate to us, they assume different and varied activities.

**{10.38}** As for the mixture of beings, by which is meant their combination and synthesis, this is a [1136B] symbol of our mind's inclination. For when it has been mixed with the virtues, and combined itself in a mixture with them, it also constitutes an intelligible cosmos most suitable for God. Position, finally, trains character consistent with the inclination of the mind, which is obliged to remain fixed in its notion of the good, owing to the ordering power of reason, and thus will hardly accept any change in the relations it has established with things on the basis of reason.<sup>136</sup>

**{10.39}** Therefore, insofar as they united motion with position, and mixture with difference, the saints distinguished without division the subsistence of all things in terms of being, difference, and motion. And having seen, by means of a methodical, higher use of reason, how the one cause is variously contemplated in its effects, they piously understood that the cause exists, is wise, and is something living. From this they learned the divinizing and salvific principle of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, [1136C] by which they were mystically enlightened, not simply concerning the principle of causality, but were piously initiated with respect to the mode of God's existence.

**{10.40}** Moreover, having closely considered the whole of creation from the point of view of position alone, they reduced the five aforementioned modes of contemplation to three, and they understood from heaven, earth, and what is between them, that creation is the teacher of ethical, natural, and theological philosophy, in accordance with its own inner principle. And again, having contemplated creation solely from the point of view of difference, that is, from the distinction between the containing and the contained—by which I mean heaven and all that is contained beneath it—they reduced the three modes to two, namely, to wisdom and philosophy: to wisdom, for it contains and receives in a God-befitting manner all the reverent [1136D] modes that pertain to it, enclosing within itself all the natural and hidden principles of the other modes; and to philosophy, for it unifies character and choice, practice and contemplation, and virtue and knowledge, and through affinity of relation refers them to wisdom as their cause.

**{10.41}** And again, having understood creation solely in light of mixture, that is, seeing the harmonious synthesis of everything ineffably interconnected in the unfolding of a single, harmonious cosmos, their intellect was drawn exclusively to the

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differentiation of beings in accordance with their inner principles, and the activity that maintains this differentiation in the process of drawing beings to God; cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 66-72.

<sup>136</sup> "Position" renders the Greek word *thesis*, which means "placement" (including that of a quality in a substance), structure, institution, arrangement (including rank and order, and thus hierarchy), and "positive affirmation," all with the sense of *permanence*. "Position" is thus a mark of God's care for creation, manifested in the fixity of created substances and forms, as well as the willed fixity of the mind in a "position" relative to the Good, since virtue requires both the free acceptance of the Good and perseverance in that position; cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 63. The philosophical antecedents for this notion are found in the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, but Maximus has transposed them into a new key, since they are not simply tropes for ordering objects in the material world but modes of contemplation, structures within creation by which the human person can ascend to God.

Creator [1137A] Word, who binds and secures all the various parts into a whole, and so they further reduced the two modes of contemplation to one mode, according to which, by means of a simple movement, they transported their intellect through the principles of beings to their cause, and bound it to that cause alone, which gathers and unifies all that comes forth from it, and, in this way, they were no longer scattered in multiplicity, but had risen above the particular principles of individual beings, being clearly persuaded by their careful attention to beings that God alone is properly the being and motion of beings, the judicious distinction of things that are different, the irreducible coherence of things that are mixed,<sup>137</sup> the immovable foundation of whatever is placed in position, and in general the cause of every being however understood, and of motion, difference, mixture, and position. Having reached this stage, they wisely transferred, through a close likeness, the hidden contemplation of the sensible world [1137B] to that higher world of the mind in the spirit, a world that comes to its fulfillment through the practice of the virtues. Through this act of contemplation the saints gathered up the aforementioned modes into one, and they shaped within themselves, as much as was possible, the absolutely unique principle, which, with the different forms of virtues, totally fills the substance of the world of the willing mind, having passed beyond not simply the principles of being, but also the principles of the virtues themselves, or rather with these principles they arrived at the One who is beyond them, for they hastened upwards in a manner beyond ordinary knowledge to the Word who transcends all being and goodness, for He is both the source and final perfection of their being. Having been wholly united with the whole Word, within the limits of what their own inherent natural potency allows, as much as may be, they were imbued with His own qualities, so that, like the clearest of mirrors,<sup>138</sup> they are now visible only as reflections [1137C] of the undiminished form of God the Word, who gazes out from within them, for they possess the fullness of His divine characteristics, yet none of the original attributes that naturally define human beings have been lost, for all things have simply yielded to what is better, like air—which in itself is not luminous—completely mixed with light.

## **20. Contemplation of Melchizedek**

### **20a**

{10.42} This, I think, is what that wondrous and great man, Melchizedek, whose great and wondrous deeds are described in Holy Scripture, learned through experience, for he was deemed worthy to transcend time and nature and [1137D] to become like the Son of God. Having acquired the divine likeness (as far as is possible), he became by grace what the Giver of grace is by nature. For it is said of him that he was *without father or mother or genealogy*, which I understand to mean the complete setting aside of natural characteristics through the highest gift of grace in accordance with virtue. That *he has*, moreover, *neither beginning of days nor end of life*, points both to knowledge that is not limited by the properties of time and the present age, [1140A] and to contemplation that transcends all material and immaterial being. When it says, finally, that *being likened to the Son of God he remains a priest forever*, we are probably to understand that, owing to his permanent acquisition of the most divinely-formative virtue and his unwavering divine attention to God, he was able to keep the eye of his intellect unblinking to the end. For virtue is accustomed to fight against nature, and true contemplation against time and the age; the former so that it might not be enslaved to or subdued by all those things considered after God (for it

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, CH 7.4 (32, lines 11-12; 212D); id., DN 11.2 (219, lines 3-5; 949C).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. id., CH 3.2 (18, line 3; 165A); and Myst 23 (CCSG 69:54, line 878).

acknowledges only God as the Creator), the latter so that it might remain unbounded, for it cannot abide to linger among things that have a beginning and an end, since it is an image of God, who is the boundary of every beginning and end, and who draws to Himself, by means of an unspeakable ecstasy, every intellection of intelligible beings. **{10.43}** [1140B] From these things—I mean from knowledge and virtue—the divine likeness is manifested, and by means of them the steadfast love of God alone is maintained among the worthy. In accordance with this love, the dignity of adoption is bestowed in a manner befitting God, and grants those who receive it the privilege to *stand in God’s presence* and *petition Him* continually. At the same time, it endows them with the divine likeness so that God might be moved by their requests.

Therefore I reasonably assume that the Divine Word gave him the right to be called “Melchizedek,”<sup>139</sup> not in accordance with time and nature (to which this great man was naturally subject, but which were already transcended and entirely left behind by means of his life and reason), but to be named from the things by which he voluntarily transformed himself, I mean virtue and knowledge. For to those in whom inclination, by means of the virtues, has prevailed nobly against the unconquerable law of nature, and in whom the motion of the intellect, by means of knowledge, soars inviolate over the property of time [1140C] and the age—to such as these, I say, it is not right to characterize by the property of the things they have abandoned, but rather to name them from the magnificence of what they have assumed, for which and in which alone, henceforth, they exist and are known. For we too, when naturally apprehending visible things, both recognize and give names to them based on the color of their bodies, as when we call air that has been suffused with light by the name of light, or anything material that is burning by the name of fire, or a brightly whitened body by the name of white, and so on.

**{10.44}** If, then, he deliberately chose virtue over nature (and everything that comes with nature) through the noble acquisition of the dignity that lies within our reach, and by knowledge vaulted over every time and [1140D] age, and cognitively through contemplation left behind all that comes after God, hurrying past whatever was marked by any kind of limit or boundary, the divine Melchizedek unfolded his intellect to the divine, beginningless, and immortal rays of God the Father, and was begotten of God through the Word in the Spirit by grace, so that he now bears within himself, unblemished and fully realized, the likeness of God the begetter, for birth creates identity between the begetter and the begotten, which is why Scripture says that *what is begotten of flesh is flesh, and what is begotten from the Spirit is spirit*, [1141A] from which it follows that he was not named from any natural or temporal properties—such as “father” and “mother,” or “genealogy,” or “beginning” and “end of days”—for he left these things behind and was completely released from them, and instead was named from those divine and blessed characteristics in the image of which he remade himself, and these cannot be touched by time, nature, reason, intellect, or by any being enclosed in a finite frame. Therefore the great Melchizedek is said to be *without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, just as our God-bearing fathers have truly said, that is, not on account of his human nature, which was created out of nothing, and by virtue of which he had both a beginning and an end, but on account of divine and uncreated grace, which exists eternally and is beyond all nature [1141B] and time, for it is the grace of the

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<sup>139</sup> The phrase “gave him the right” (*edikaiose*) puns on the name “Melchizedek,” which means “king of righteousness” (Hbr 7:2).

eternal God, and it was solely by this that he was begotten—wholly and willingly—and solely from this that he can now be known.<sup>140</sup>

{10.45} He alone in this respect is mentioned by Scripture, probably because he was the first who through virtue passed beyond both matter and form<sup>141</sup> (which may be understood as his being *without father or mother or genealogy*), and by knowledge he surpassed all things subject to time and the age, things whose temporal existence began with their creation (for creation did not deny them their being in time), without stumbling over them in his mind as he followed his divine course, which is perhaps what *having neither beginning of days nor end of life* means. And so transcendently, secretly, silently, and, to put it briefly, in a manner beyond knowledge, following the total negation of all beings from thought, he entered into God Himself, and was wholly transformed, receiving all the qualities of God, [1141C] which we may take as the meaning of *being likened to the Son of God he remains a priest forever*. For every saint who has made exemplary progress in beauty is thereby said to be a type of God the giver. Consistent with this principle, the great Melchizedek, having been imbued with divine virtue, was deemed worthy to become an image of Christ God and His unutterable mysteries, for in Him all the saints converge as to an archetype, to the very cause of the manifestation of the Beautiful that is realized in each of them, and this is especially true of this saint, since he bears within himself more prefigurations of Christ than all the rest.

#### 20b

[1141D] **Application to the Lord of what was said regarding Melchizedek**

{10.46} For alone, and in a way without any parallel whatsoever, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, is by nature and in truth *without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*. He is *without mother* according to His immaterial, bodiless, and utterly unknowable birth on high from the Father before the ages. He is *without father* according to His temporal and bodily birth on earth from His mother, in whose conception the seed of man did not take precedence. He is *without genealogy* because [1144A] the manner of both of His births is wholly inaccessible and incomprehensible to all. And He has *neither beginning of days nor end of life* insofar as He is without beginning or end, being absolutely infinite, for He is God by nature. *He remains a priest forever*, for His being is immune to death by vice or nature, for He is God and the source of all natural and virtuous life. And you must not think that no one else can have a share in this grace simply because Scripture speaks of it solely with respect to the great Melchizedek, for in all human beings God has placed the same power that leads naturally to salvation, so that anyone who wishes is able to lay claim to divine grace, and is not prevented, if he so desires, from becoming a Melchizedek, an Abraham, or a Moses, and from simply transferring all the saints to himself, [1144B] not by exchanging names or places, but by imitating their manner and way of life.

#### 20c

**Another contemplation of Melchizedek**

{10.47} Everyone therefore who has *put to death his members that are on the earth*, and who has *extinguished* completely his *carnal way of thinking* and wholly swept away his relationship to the flesh—which divides the love that we owe to God

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<sup>140</sup> Here Maximus plainly affirms that divine grace is uncreated, a view commonly associated with the fourteenth-century Hesychasts, but obviously much older.

<sup>141</sup> Not in the sense that he ceased being embodied or corporeal, but that his mind no longer served as receptive “matter” to be shaped and formed by sensory impressions, cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* (CAG suppl. 2/1:81, lines 22-25); and Aristotle, *An* 429a13-17.

alone—and who has rejected all the characteristics of the flesh and the world for the sake of divine grace, so that he can say with the blessed Apostle Paul: *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?* along with the words that follow, has become like the great Melchizedek, *without father, mother, or genealogy*, since he is no longer subject to the flesh or nature, having been intimately joined to the Spirit.

**20d**

[1144C] **Contemplation on the words: *Having neither beginning of days nor end of life***

{10.48} If, in addition to these things, he should also *deny himself, having lost his own life*, according to the divine voice, which says: *He who loses his own life for my sake, will find it*—that is, whoever casts aside this present life and its desires for the sake of the better life—will acquire the *living, and active*, and absolutely unique *Word of God*, who through virtue and knowledge *penetrates to the division between soul and spirit*, so that absolutely no part of his existence will remain without a share in His presence, and thus he becomes without beginning or end, no longer bearing within himself the movement of life subject to time, which has a beginning and an end, and which is agitated by many passions, but possesses only the divine and eternal life of the Word dwelling within him, which is in no way bounded by death.<sup>142</sup>

**20e**

[1144D] **Contemplation of the words: *He remains a priest forever***

{10.49} And if he knows how, with much attention, to maintain careful watch over the gift he has received, and if through ascetic practice and contemplation he cultivates the good things that exist beyond nature and time, then he has become [1145A] a lasting and eternal priest, ceaselessly enjoying company with God in his intellect. With his unchanging inclination for devotion to the Beautiful, he imitates that which is immutable by nature, and no death caused by sin can prevent him, in a Jewish manner, from *ceaselessly offering sacrifices of praise and confession*, or speaking gloriously of God as creator of all, or gratefully offering Him thanks as the provider and just judge of all, at the divine altar table of the mind, *from which those who worship in the tent have no authority to eat*. For it is not possible for those who adhere solely to the letter of Scripture, and who think that salvation is secured by the sacrifices of their irrational passions, to partake of the mystical loaves of divine knowledge or *drink from the cup of life-giving wisdom*. For even though such men, in having ceased from sin, *proclaim the death of Jesus*, [1145B] they do not confess His resurrection, which was the reason for His death, for they lack intellectual contemplation illumined by good works done in righteousness, and whereas they were eager to be put to death in the flesh, they could not endure to be given life by the Spirit, for their tent is bound to one place, because the way of the saints, which is the way of reason and knowledge—by which I mean the Word of God, who said, *I am the way*—has not yet been revealed to them. Thus, even though through the practice of the virtues they have acquired the knowledge that the Lord is the Word made flesh, they have no desire to come by means of contemplation to the *glory of the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*.

[1145C] **21. Contemplation of Abraham**

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<sup>142</sup> In what is one of Maximos' most original formulations, divinized human beings do not simply share in life without end, but equally in life without beginning, insofar as they share in life that is not simply eternal but uncreated. Following Maximos, Gregory Palamas, *Triads* 3.1.31, argues that by grace the divinized saints "become uncreated, unoriginate, and uncircumscribable, even though in their nature they are derived from nothing" (ed. Meyendorff 1959, 2:617, lines 10-12).

**{10.50}** And, moreover, such a person becomes a spiritual Abraham, departing from his *land* and his *kindred* and *the house of his father*, and entering the land shown to him by God. For he has broken himself away from a fleshly disposition, and comes to be outside the flesh by separation from the passions; and having abandoned the senses (and no longer succumbing to any sinful deception arising from them), and passing beyond all sensory things (which through the senses are accustomed to deceive the soul and cause it to err), it happens that solely through his intellect, free from any material bond, he enters the divine and blessed land of knowledge, mystically journeying throughout its *length and breadth*, in which he will find our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the good *inheritance of those who fear him*. [1145D] In “length” He is in Himself beyond all imagining, according to those who have been deemed worthy to speak of Him as God (to the extent that such speech is possible among human beings). In “breadth” He is glorified by us for His providence, which holds the universe together in wisdom, and especially for the wondrous and ineffable manner by which He accomplished our salvation. And thus he comes to share in the ways by which one learns to honor the Lord, precisely through ascetic practice and contemplation, for it is by means of these that friendship with and likeness to God are securely established. To speak about these things briefly, the person who through ascetic practice has overthrown the flesh, the senses, and the world—which destroy the intellect’s [1148A] relation to intelligible reality—and through his mind alone has drawn near to God cognitively through love, has become another Abraham, since by means of the same grace he possesses the same marks of virtue and knowledge as the patriarch.

## **22. Contemplation of Moses**

### **22a**

**{10.51}** Again, such a person appears as another Moses, born during the reign of the passions, that is, when the devil, the Pharaoh of the intelligible world, rules as a tyrant, with the better subjected to the worse, flesh revolting against the spirit, and every pious thought being crushed—it is then, I say, that he is born according to God through the power of his own inclination. Placed in the ark of true asceticism, he is made secure inside and out: outwardly through [1148B] the moral conduct of his body, and inwardly by the divine thoughts in his soul. And he consents to be subject to sensation, that is, to the daughter of the intelligible Pharaoh, only until the moment when he receives natural contemplations. Being moved by true zeal for the good things of God, he puts to death the Egyptian *mind of the flesh*, and *buries it in the sand*. By “sand” I mean that state of soul in which evil cannot grow, even if *the enemy should plant his seeds* of evil there, for it is deeply imbued with *poverty of spirit*, which gives birth to and keeps watch over dispassion. By divine command, such poverty becomes a boundary against the bitter, briny sea of evil, which is whipped into a frenzy by the spirits of wickedness, rising up like a tree borne aloft on successive waves of temptation, [1148C] just as it is written: *He placed sand as a boundary for the sea*, saying to it: *This far shall you go, and no further, and your waves shall be confined within you*. Moreover, he must shepherd those thoughts which incline toward the earth, and which seek pleasure from it, for the sake of which the irascible part of the soul habitually struggles to dominate and expel reason’s power of discernment. Thus he leads his thoughts like so many *sheep through the desert*, which is a state of mind barren of passions, material things, and pleasures, and from there he arrives at the mountain of the knowledge of God, which can be seen from the summit of the mind.

{10.52} On that summit he reflects with great diligence on the contemplations that arise naturally in the spirit, and having broken all ties between his intellect and sensible objects (for I think this is the meaning of the forty-year sojourn in the desert), [1148D] he will be made worthy to see and hear in his intellect the ineffable and supernatural divine fire that exists, as if in a burning bush, within the essence of things, that is, God the Word, who shone forth in these latter days from the holy Virgin and spoke to us through the flesh.<sup>143</sup> And such a seer draws near to this great mystery on the bare sole of his intellect's foot, being completely free from the dead coverings of human thoughts. He does not probe into it, but *turns away* from it the visual power of his mind, as if it were a *face*; and with faith alone he opens up the obedient part of his soul, as if it were an organ of hearing, to receive the mystery, through which he acquires mighty and invincible strength against the wicked powers. [1149A] And so with great authority he separates what is natural from what is opposed to nature, the things of the soul from the flesh, and the intelligible and immaterial from the material and the sensory, greatly surpassing that power which endeavors to subject freedom to slavery.

**22b**

### **A concise contemplation of Moses**

{10.53} To speak concisely, the person I am describing is one who has not come under the yoke of sin, nor drowned himself through evil desire in the murky stream of the passions, nor consented to quench his thirst at the fountain of pleasure, by which I mean bodily sensation, but rather has put to death *the mind of the flesh* (which tyrannizes the nobility of the soul), and has risen above all corruptible things—fleeing from this deceptive world as if it were another Egypt, which through bodily cares occludes even the most clear-sighted intellect—and who has turned to himself in tranquility, [1149B] and who, after diligent reflection, through the scientific contemplation of beings, has been ineffably taught the wise economy of divine providence that divinely directs the universe, and has advanced from there through mystical theology, which the pure intellect alone in wordless ecstasy faithfully accepts through prayer (inasmuch as he has entered into the dark cloud and through unknowing converses with God in a manner beyond words), and, in accordance with his intellect, has inscribed himself inside with the teachings of piety, and outside with the graces of the virtues, just as Moses inscribed the *tablets by the finger of God*, which is the Holy Spirit. To state this in the language of Scripture, he has *chosen to share ill-treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, and considers abuse suffered for Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt*, that is, rather than wealth and glory, which are fleeting and [1149C] corruptible, he freely chooses arduous labors for the sake of virtue. Whoever has done these things, I say, has become a spiritual Moses, and he speaks, not with any visible Pharaoh, but ranges himself spiritually against the invisible tyrant, the murderer of souls, and the originator of evil, that is, the devil and the wicked powers that flank him, armed with the rod that he holds in his hand, by which I mean the power of reason turned to the life of ascetic practice.<sup>144</sup>

**23. Contemplation of how one can imitate the saints who lived both before and after the law, and on what is the identity of the natural and written law when each is passing reciprocally into the other**

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* 2.21 (GNO 7/1:39, lines 17-20).

<sup>144</sup> Maximos has taken the language and themes of this contemplation from Basil, *Hexaemeron* 1.1 (SC 26bis: 88-90).



**{10.54}** In the same way, any one of us who so wishes can transfer all the saints to himself, [1149D] spiritually forming himself after the example of each, based on what has been figuratively written about each one, for the divine apostle says that *these things happened to them figuratively, and they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come*. Forming oneself according to the saints who lived before the law, one may piously acquire knowledge of God beginning from the creation of the world, and from the providence that wisely governs the universe, one is taught how to live virtuously, following the example of those same saints, who, prior to the law, in all that they did, naturally inscribed within themselves by the spirit the written law, [1152A] and so quite rightly have been put forward to those under the law as an example of piety and virtue, for *look*, it says, *to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you*.<sup>145</sup> Forming oneself in accordance with the saints who lived under the law, one is raised up by pious thought to know God as He had spoken through the commandments; is adorned with the proper modes of the virtues through noble action; and is taught that the natural law is identical to the written law, when it is wisely diversified by symbols in the course of actual practice, and again that the written law is identical with the natural law, when among the worthy in virtue and knowledge it becomes a single form, simple and free of symbols through reason and contemplation in accordance with the saints themselves who lived under the law, who by stripping away the letter that covered the spirit like a veil, found themselves in [1152B] spiritual possession of the natural law.

**24. That by receiving the law spiritually, the Old Testament saints had anticipated the grace signified through the law**

**{10.55}** For all of them, clearly foreseeing that there would come another form of worship besides that established by the law, preached beforehand the perfection that would be made manifest through this new life so greatly befitting God, and yet so appropriate and most properly related to nature, for they themselves needed nothing external for their own perfection, which is obvious to anyone familiar with the divine predictions in the law and the prophets. This is precisely what is being hinted at by David and Hezekiah—not to mention all the others, each one of them with his own particular story—the one unable by means of the law to propitiate God on account of his sin, and the other boasting of the addition of years to his life, [1152C] which he received from God by another ordinance outside the law.

**25. The one who through the virtues and by disposition genuinely follows Christ transcends the natural and written law**

**{10.56}** There is nothing, it seems to me, to hinder a person who has received preparation in these, I mean to say the natural and written laws, from living in a manner pleasing and appropriate to God, indeed beyond these and even without these, through pure faith, from genuinely following reason alone as it leads him to the highest Good, in such a way that his mind touches absolutely no object, thought, or concept—to which every nature and [1152D] all knowledge (in things either real or conceptual) are subject and manifested. And this is wholly fitting for the one who has proposed genuinely to follow *Jesus, who passed through the heavens*, so that he might be able to receive comprehensively,<sup>146</sup> to the extent that this is humanly possible, the true knowledge of beings through the manifestation of the divine light.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* 1.1 (GNO 7/1:5, lines 5-16); and Philo, *On Abraham* 5-6 (LCL 6:6).

<sup>146</sup> Literally, “synecdochically,” or “in the manner of a synecdoche,” i.e., a figure of speech in which a part is named inclusively for the whole; cf. below, Amb 14.4.

[1153A] **26. Contemplation of the mode according to which the natural and written laws are transcended by the person who in all things is obedient to God {10.57}** For if every nature of whatever exists is divided into things that are either intelligible or sensible, and if the former are said to be and are eternal (insofar as they received the beginning of their being in the age<sup>147</sup> beyond time), whereas the latter are temporal (insofar as they were created in time), and if the former are subject to intellection, whereas the latter to sensation, this is due to the indissoluble power of their natural property of relation which has bound them all tightly together, for mighty indeed is the relationship of intelligible beings to the objects of intellection, as is that of sensible beings to the objects of sense, and thus man, fashioned of soul and sensible body, through his proper, natural relation of reciprocity to each of these parts of creation, is both contained within these divisions and [1153B] contains them: the former by virtue of his substance, and the latter by his potential, for being himself extended into these two divided realms, he is able by virtue of his own double nature to draw them together into a unity, for he is contained within the intelligible and sensible, insofar as he is himself a soul and a body, yet he has the potential to contain both of these realms within himself, insofar as he possesses both intellect and sensation.

**{10.58}** God, on the other hand, is absolutely and infinitely beyond all beings, including those that contain others and those that are themselves contained, and He is beyond their nature, apart from which they could not exist, by which I mean to say apart from time and the age beyond time, as well as place, by which the universe is limited, for God is absolutely unconditioned by any relation to anything whatsoever. It follows, then, that the one who has wisely understood how he ought to love God, seeing that God is beyond all reason, knowledge, and any kind of relation whatsoever, (because He is beyond nature), will pass by all sensible and intelligible objects, as well as all [1153C] time, age, and place without establishing any relation to them; and finally, after having, in a manner beyond nature, stripped himself of every activity conforming to sensation, reason, and intellect, he will attain, ineffably and unknowably, the divine delight, which is beyond reason and intellect, and he shall attain this in a mode and principle known to God who gives such grace, and to those who are worthy to receive it. Thus he no longer bears about with him anything natural or written, since all that he could possibly say or know has been completely transcended and wrapped in silence.

**27. Contemplation of the passage in the Gospel concerning the man who fell among thieves**

**{10.59}** And perhaps this is the *additional expense* beyond the *two denarii* given by the Lord at the *inn* for [1153D] the care of *the man who had fallen among thieves*, which He generously *promised to repay upon His return*, that is, the complete negation of beings by those who have attained perfection through faith in the Lord, for He says: *Whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*. By negating all things from himself, or to put it more precisely, by negating himself from all things, the man who has [1156A] made himself a lover of wisdom becomes worthy to be with God alone, receiving the gift of adoption exemplified in the Gospels by the holy and blessed apostles, who stripped away all things from themselves, and held fast wholly and solely to God the Word—*Behold*, they said, *we have left all things and followed You*, who created nature and helped us by means of the law—and possessing the Lord as the absolutely unique light of truth, they rightly received, not

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. below, Amb 10.58; and Amb 10.73, n. 157.

the law or nature, but the unerring knowledge of all that exists after God. For it is fitting that the knowledge of whatever has been brought into being by God should appear together with Him. For just as when the sense-perceptible sun rises on the world, all physical objects clearly appear along with it, so too when God, the intelligible *sun of righteousness*, rises within the intellect [1156B] (for He knows how to be contained by creation), He wills that all the true principles of intelligible and sensible things appear together with Himself. And this is made clear by the bright radiance of the garments shining in the light of the Lord's face during His Transfiguration on the mountain, indicating, I think, that gathered up in God is the knowledge of all that is after God and around Him. For the eye is not able to perceive physical objects without light, nor can the intellect receive spiritual contemplation apart from the knowledge of God. For just as there the light gives vision the apprehension of visible things, here the science of God grants the mind the gift of knowledge of things intelligible.<sup>148</sup>

**28. [1156C] Contemplation of the mode according to which Adam's transgression took place**

{10.60} To be sure, it was because our forefather Adam failed to focus the eye of his soul on the divine light, that he found himself lost like a blind man in the darkness of ignorance, and, groping willfully with both hands through the confusion of matter, surrendered his whole being to the power of sensation, through which, by absorbing the deadly venom of that most vindictive beast, he was unable, by means of sense perception, to make his own (as one must not) the things of God without God, and before God, and not according to God, which is, in any case, impossible. For when, instead of God, he accepted the evidence of his senses, which had already come under the influence of the serpent, sensation began to desire the fruit of the forbidden tree (even though he had been told that it was bound up with death), [1156D] and by partaking of its fruit he set in motion the whole cycle of bodily nourishment, thereby exchanging life for death, and giving life to his own death for the whole temporal duration of the present age. For if death is the corruption of growth, and if the body, which is nourished by the constant ingestion of food, naturally suffers corruption because of such ingestion, it follows that, in the very activity of eating, which Adam believed would support life, death found opportunity to flourish, both in him and for us. If instead of his wife he had trusted God, and been nourished from the tree of life, he would not have lost the gift of immortality, which is maintained perpetually through participation in life, [1157A] for all living things are naturally sustained by the type of food that is appropriate to them. But the food of that blessed life was the *bread that came down from heaven and gave life to the world*, just as the Word says about Himself in the Gospels (and He does not lie); and so, by not wishing to be nourished by the Word, the first man fell away from divine life, and embarked upon a different life which engenders death, a life in which he acquired for himself an irrational<sup>149</sup> form, obscuring the inconceivable divine beauty, and he handed over all creation as food for death. It is by means of this food that death has remained alive down through the present day, gnawing away at us, whereas we ourselves never really know life, being ceaselessly devoured by death through corruption.

[1157B] **29. That from the unstable whirling about of this present life, the saints were taught that true and divine life is something different, and always remains the same**

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.12.

<sup>149</sup> I.e., *alagon*, which also has the sense of "brute" or "animal-like."

{10.61} Having wisely reflected on the futility and transience of this present life subject to the sway of the senses,<sup>150</sup> the saints realized that it could not possibly be the same life that had originally been given by God to man, and thus they were secretly taught that there is another life, divine and unchanging, which God created in the beginning, consistent with His goodness. With the wisdom granted to them by the grace of the Spirit, they turned the eye of the soul to that life, as much as was possible for men subject to death, and, filled with divine longing for it, they rightly understood that in order to lay hold of it purely and properly, it would first be necessary to set the present [1157C] life aside. And since there is no setting aside of life without death, they arranged for its demise by rejecting affection for the flesh, through which death gained entry into life; and by discovering a death for death they ceased to live under the power of death, and when they do die *their death is precious to the Lord*, and the death that they die is the death of real death, able to corrupt corruption itself and to grant those who are worthy entry to blessed life and incorruption.

{10.62} For I do not think that the end of this present life is rightly called death, but is rather a deliverance from death, a separation from corruption, liberation from slavery, the cessation of turmoil, the [1157D] banishment of wars, the passing away of confusion, the receding of darkness, rest from labors, the silencing of meaningless noise, the quiescence of agitation, the covering of shame, flight from the passions, the wiping away of sins, and, to speak briefly, the end of every evil, all of which the saints attained by means of their voluntary death, making themselves *strangers and exiles* from this life. For fighting nobly against the world and the body and the rebellions which they provoke, and destroying the treachery that comes from them through the entanglement of the senses with objects of sense, they preserved within themselves the dignity of their soul unenslaved. And, quite naturally, they judged it to be lawful and just for the worse to be led [1160A] by the better, rather than for the better to be bound hand and foot by the worse. This is a divine law, innate within those who choose to embrace above all a life that is fitting for rational beings, which, by being content only with what is necessary, imitates the self-sufficiency and repose of the angels.

### **30. That it is not like us that the saints engage in either natural contemplation or Scriptural mystagogy**

{10.63} But let us now turn back and in sequence apply what we have been saying to those aspects of the Transfiguration that await our consideration, looking into them as best we can, so that the excellence<sup>151</sup> of the saints in everything and their genuine renunciation of the flesh and the material world might be shown forth. For the saints do not [1160B] contemplate either creation or Holy Scripture in a lowly, material way, as we do, since they do not acquire the blessed knowledge of God solely by means of the senses, or by attending solely to surface appearances and external forms, or by confining themselves to syllables and letters, over which men trip and stumble and err in their judgment of the truth, but solely by means of the intellect, purified to the highest degree and free from all the mist and obscurity of matter. If, then, we wish to judge piously those who examine intelligently the principles of objects perceived by sense, we will ascertain that they travel along a straight path leading to the true knowledge of God and of divine realities.

### **31. Extended contemplation of the Transfiguration**

#### **31a**

<sup>150</sup> Here the translation incorporates an explanatory scribal gloss that entered the tradition of the text at a very early stage; cf. the note to the text.

<sup>151</sup> Or, “extremity” (*akrotes*), cf. above, Amb 10.6, n. 109.

**{10.64}** As stated above, it was through the [1160C] luminous brightness that shone from the face of the Lord on the mountain that the thrice-blessed apostles, in a manner beyond words and knowledge, were mystically guided to the power and glory of God, which is completely incomprehensible to all beings, and learned that the light that had appeared to their senses was a symbol of the unseen hiddenness of God.<sup>152</sup> For in the same way that a ray of light emanating here overwhelms the activity of the eyes, to which it remains uncontainable, so too there does God transcend all the power and activity of the intellect, leaving absolutely no trace of any kind in the intellect of those who endeavor to know Him. By the bright garments, they were taught, in a divinely fitting way, in an undifferentiated, simultaneous moment, both the magnificence that lies within created things consistent with the principles whereby they were brought into being, and the deeper meaning hidden in the words of Holy Scripture, into which only the [1160D] intellect may be initiated, and this happens because together with the knowledge of God comes the spiritual power of Scripture and the spiritual wisdom and knowledge of creation, through which God is manifested in ways that are proper to each. Moreover, through Moses and Elijah, who were standing on either side of Him (and this is what remains for us to consider), they received, through true contemplation, multiple ways of understanding the mysteries of which these two figures are types.

[1161A] **Contemplation of Moses and Elijah**

**{10.65}** [1] In the first place, it was through Moses and Elijah that the disciples received the most pious notion that the teaching of both the law and the prophets must always be present together with God the Word, for they are from Him and speak of Him, and have been established and built up around Him.

[Additional contemplations of Moses and Elijah]<sup>153</sup>

**{10.66}** [2] Through these same two figures the disciples were taught that the company of the Word includes wisdom and kindness, for it is with wisdom that the Word decrees what things are to be performed and what things are prohibited, a wisdom of which Moses was the type (for we believe that the ability to legislate properly comes from wisdom); and it is with kindness that the Word exhorts and leads back to divine life those who have slipped away from it, for which Elijah is [1161B] the type, and signifies the fullness of the prophetic gift, for the ability to call back with compassion those who have gone astray is characteristic of divine kindness, of which we know the prophets to be heralds.

**{10.67}** [3] Or they are types of knowledge and instruction. Knowledge, on the one hand, insofar as it enables us to discern good from evil, for *I have set before your face*, Moses says, *life and death*, so that you might choose the one and reject the other, and not out of ignorance fall into evil mistaking it for the good—a choice which Moses is said correctly to have made, thereby prefiguring in himself the symbols of the truth. Instruction, on the other hand, is prefigured by the great Elijah, for he instructed all those who had shamelessly moved against Israel, and who indiscriminately mixed what should be kept separate; [1161C] and he punished those who were indifferent as well as those who had given themselves wholly to evil, rationally guiding them from mindlessness to proper thinking, and from dullness to sense.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 9.5 (211, lines 5-6; 913B).

<sup>153</sup> Both Eriugena and *Angelicus graecus* 120 begin this paragraph with the subheading: “A second (contemplation) of the same (two individuals),” and so on in sequence for the following seven paragraphs. These subheadings seem redundant, since each paragraph is also given a corresponding number, and thus have not been translated.

{10.68} [4] Or ascetic practice and contemplation. The former destroys evil, and by the demonstration of its wondrous virtues it cuts off desire for the world in those whom it leads—just as Moses led Israel out of Egypt—and by means of the Spirit’s divine laws teaches them to obey its leadership. The latter, insofar as it catches them up from form and matter, like the *chariot of fire* that took Elijah, leading them through knowledge to union with God, without the weight of the flesh (the laws of which have been cast aside), or without being burnt by the fire of their accomplishments, owing to their *poverty of spirit*, which like a cooling dew is mixed with true virtues.

{10.69} [1161D] [5] Or, again, the disciples learned that the mysteries of marriage and celibacy stand equally next to the Word, insofar as marriage did not impede Moses from becoming a lover of the divine glory, whereas Elijah remained completely free of any marital bond, for the Word of God proclaims that he mystically adopts as His sons those who live in either of these ways through reason and in accordance with the divinely established laws concerning them.

{10.70} [6] Or the presence of these same two figures faithfully assured the disciples that the Word is Lord of life and death.<sup>154</sup>

{10.71} [1164A] [7] Or, through the same two they learned that all are alive in God and that absolutely no one who is next to Him is dead, except those who have deadened themselves through sin, and who by their voluntary embrace of the passions have cut themselves off from the Word.

{10.72} [8] Or, again, they were enlightened to understand that the types of these mysteries exist for and refer to the Lord, inasmuch as He is *the truth*, and that, whether they be legal ordinances or prophetic utterances, they all converge in Him, for He is their *beginning and end*.

{10.73} [9] Or they learned that when God truly appears within vision (to the extent that this is possible), everything that comes after God and has been created by Him, that is, the nature of beings and time, is seen together with Him, for He is their cause and their maker.<sup>155</sup> Of these, Moses would be the figure of time, not only [1164B] because he is the teacher of time and its reckoning (for he was the first to count time from the creation of the world), but also as the leader of temporal worship, and because he did not enter bodily into the divinely promised place of rest together with those who were under his leadership. For such is the nature of time: by its movement it neither goes before nor marches in step with those whom it sends into the divine life of the age to come, for it has Jesus,<sup>156</sup> who is the successor of all time and every age, even if the principles of time should abide differently in God, as is indicated by the entrance of the law (which had been given in the wilderness through Moses) together with those who entered the land promised to them.<sup>157</sup> For when its motion is stilled,

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<sup>154</sup> I.e., because Moses died a natural death (Dt 34:5-8) and Elijah never died, having been caught up to heaven before death (4 Kings 2:11).

<sup>155</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.12; and Amb 10.59.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.17, n. 120.

<sup>157</sup> The age (*aion*) is the “eternity” of created beings, a transcendent dimension that is distinguished from the eternity that is proper to God alone. It is an intermediate state between divine eternity and ordinary time, being a kind of synthesis of the two, enabling the divinized creature to exist in divine infinity without obliterating the limits proper to created being; cf. CT 1.5-7, 68-70 (PG 90:1085AC, 1108C-1109A); and Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.8 (SC 358:118, lines 1-11). As Maximos suggests, the *logoi* of time persist differently in God, indicated by the entry of Moses’s law into the promised land: time itself cannot enter the final rest, but its principles do enter in a new mode. In contrast to the Origenists (cf. above, Amb 7.2), Maximos argues that temporal movement is not the result of a fall from God, but the very means of creaturely return to God; cf. Plass, “Moving Rest.”

time is the age, and the age is time, as carried along and [1164C] measured by motion, so that the age—in order to give it a definition—is time deprived of motion, whereas time is the age measured by motion.<sup>158</sup>

{10.74} As for Elijah, he is the image of nature, not simply because he preserved inviolate the principles of his own nature (along with the deliberative frame of mind appropriate to these principles) free from any change due to passion, but because he taught by judging, like a kind of natural law, those who twist nature to unnatural ends. For such is nature, punishing those who undertake to violate it to the degree that they actually live in unnatural opposition to it, by not allowing them to acquire naturally all of nature's power, for they have been partially deprived of its very integrity and for this they are punished, since it is they themselves who pointlessly and foolishly [1164D] have procured this lack of existence by inclining toward non-being.<sup>159</sup>

{10.75} [10] Equally, if someone should say that Moses and Elijah represent the intelligible and sensible creation, held together by the Creator Word, he would not miss the mark of truth. Of these, Moses corresponds to the sensible creation, since it is clear that his life was subject to change and corruption, for in Scripture we read of his birth and death. For such is the sensible creation: it has a recognizable beginning (which is the beginning of change), [1165A] and awaits a definitive end (which is the end of the corruption that causes it to change). Elijah, on the other hand, corresponds to the intelligible creation, for Scripture says nothing about his coming into being, or even if he was born at all, or if he was subject to the corruption of death, or whether or not he died. For such is the intelligible creation: it has no beginning discernable to man, neither is it obvious to us that it was brought into being from out of nothing, or that it awaits a definitive end determined by a process of decay and corruption. For it is by nature imperishable, having received this quality from God, who willed in such fashion to create it.

### **31b**

#### **An additional, concise contemplation of the Transfiguration**

{10.76} [1165B] At the risk of appearing overly inquisitive about these matters, there is, as it seems to me, another mystery revealed to us in the divine Transfiguration, great and divine and more luminous than what has so far been mentioned. I think that the dramatic events, so befitting of God, which took place on the mountain during the Transfiguration, secretly indicate the two general modes of theology. The first is simple and uncaused, and verily affirms the Divine solely through a complete denial, properly honoring divine transcendence by absolute silence. The second is composite, and magnificently describes the Divine by means of positive affirmations based on its effects. With these, and within the limits of human understanding, the exalted knowledge of God and divine realities leads us, through symbols appropriate for us, [1165C] to these two ways of theology. Through reverent understanding of created beings, this knowledge places before us the inner principles of both, teaching us that everything that transcends the senses is a symbol of the first way, whereas the symbol of the second is the sum of all the magnificent objects of sense perception. For it is only through the symbols that are beyond the senses that we believe in the truth that exists beyond reason and intellect, yet what this truth is in itself, and how, and of what kind, and when and whence it might be, we do not dare to probe into, nor do we even so much as tolerate the formation of an intellectual conception concerning it, declining to involve ourselves in any such act of irreverence. Instead, from the

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Plato, *Tim* 38ac; Aristotle, *Phys* 218b21-222a9; Plotinos *En* 3.7.2 (LCL 3:298); Dionysios, DN 10.3 (214-16; 937C-940A); and Maximos, QThal 65 (CCSG 22:285, lines 532-41).

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 3.11 (91, lines 4-8; 441A).

symbols which fall within the range of our senses, our mind takes, to the extent possible for us, and only roughly at that, the likenesses of the knowledge of God, and we say that He is all things insofar as we have come to know Him, from His creations, as their cause. [1165D]

### **31c**

#### **That the Lord became a type of Himself through His dispensation in the flesh**

**{10.77}** Let us now consider how appropriately and wisely the symbol of each of these two modes of theology is present in the divine Transfiguration of the Lord. For in His measureless love for mankind, there was need for Him to be created in human form (without undergoing any change), and to become a type and symbol of Himself, presenting Himself symbolically by means of His own self,<sup>160</sup> and, through the manifestation of Himself, to lead all creation to Himself (though He is hidden and totally beyond all manifestation), and to provide human beings, in a human-loving fashion, with the visible divine actions of His flesh as signs of His invisible infinity, [1168A] which is totally transcendent, and secretly hidden, which no being, in absolutely any way whatsoever, can capture in thought or language.<sup>161</sup>

### **31d**

#### **Contemplation of the light flashing from the face of the Lord**

**{10.78}** Thus the light of the Lord's face, which overcame the activity of human sense perception, formed within the blessed apostles the negative mode of mystical theology, according to which the blessed and holy Godhead, according to its essence, is beyond ineffability and unknowability, for it infinitely transcends all infinity. To the beings which exist after it, the Godhead does not leave behind even the slightest trace of itself that can be apprehended by them, giving up to none of them anything of itself that could be used to form a concept about how, or to what extent, [1168B] it is at once a Monad and a Trinity, since by its nature the uncreated cannot be contained by any created thing, nor can the unlimited be circumscribed as an object of thought by things that are limited.

### **31e**

#### **Contemplation of the Lord's luminous garments**

**{10.79}** The same light also formed within the apostles the affirmative mode of theology, which is divided into modes concerned with activity, providence, and judgment. The mode concerned with activity is grounded in the *beauty and magnificence of creation*, and indicates that God is the Creator of everything, which is evident in the brightly shining garments of the Lord, which our discourse has already established as signifying the visible objects of creation.

### **31f**

#### **[1168C] Another contemplation of Moses**

**{10.80}** The mode concerned with providence is signified through Moses, since providence lovingly rescues from deception those who have been apprehended by evil, and in its wisdom provides them with diverse ways for their passage from what is material, corrupt, and bodily, to what is divine, immaterial, and bodiless, supporting them wisely by means of the divine laws.

### **31g**

#### **Another contemplation of Elijah**

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<sup>160</sup> In taking on human nature, the incarnate Word becomes, like all human beings, an image of God, but by virtue of His divine nature, He is the archetype of that image, and so becomes an image of Himself.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, MT 1.1 (141-42; 997B).



{10.81} The mode of judgment is disclosed through Elijah, since it punishes by word and deed those who deserve punishment, and deals with others by means of [1168D] adapting itself in accordance with the underlying matter and quality of their virtues and vices, applying its judgment suitably to each. For all these things that we have considered in our examination of this passage of Holy Scripture were accomplished by Moses and Elijah, each one in his own time, as a series of historical events that—to the extent that they were accomplished by those who in a symbolic fashion sketch out by themselves the divine realities—lead us to what has been said in the previous contemplations.

**31h**

### **Contemplation of the words addressed to the Lord by Moses and Elijah at the time of the Transfiguration**

{10.82} From having conversed with the Lord, and having spoken about His [1169A] *departure which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem*, Moses and Elijah not only learned of the fulfillment of the mysteries concerning His departure, which were proclaimed in advance through the law and the prophets, but equally that the fulfillment of God's ineffable plan for the universe, contained within His divine dispensations, was completely beyond the comprehension of beings. All that could be known was His great providence and judgment, through which the universe is led in an orderly manner to an end known in advance only to God. No one else knew what it would be, or how it would take place, or what form it would take, or when it would occur; the only ones who in truth knew simply that it *would* take place were the saints, who purified their souls by means of the virtues, and who tilted the whole balance of their intellective power to divine things, and thus they heard, if I may put it this way, the universal nature of visible beings, through [1169B] the modes by which they are naturally constituted, all but explicitly proclaiming the end of this present harmonious order.

### **32. A natural contemplation that the world must necessarily come to an end**

{10.83} For to the best of their ability, and with their higher science, the saints carefully observed the present world, and the bodies within it, which in various ways are interconnected, and when with their mind they had wisely unfolded the principles implicit within these bodies, they discovered that some of these bodies are sensible, apprehensible, and universal, while others sense, apprehend, and are particular, and that all of them are contained in the others, and all of them mutate into the others by the interchange of their individual properties. For beings possessing the power to sense are by nature contained among objects of sensation, while the objects are contained in sensory beings through sense perception, [1169C] inasmuch as they are sensible. And, again, universals are contained by particulars through alteration, whereas particulars mutate into universals when they are destroyed by dissolution. And the coming into being of the former is inaugurated by the destruction of the latter, while the destruction of the latter comes about through the generation of the former, for the combination of one universal with another, which brings more particulars into being, is a process of alteration that results in the destruction of the universal, whereas the reduction of particulars to universals, through the dissolution of their composition, is at once the cause of their destruction and the ongoing existence and creation of universals.<sup>162</sup> The saints, having realized that this is the constitution of the sensible world, namely, that the bodies from which and in which

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Theophrastus, *On the Teachings of the Physicists* 2 (citing Simplicios) (ed. Diels 1879, 476, lines 3-13).

the world subsists are caught in a process of mutual destruction and alteration from one into the other, from which it follows that [1169D] the primary property of bodies is a natural condition of instability and alteration, so that today they are carried along and mutated in one way, and tomorrow in another—having realized this, the saints learned that the world in due sequence will necessarily come to an end, for they rightly gathered that it is not possible, nor rationally coherent, to consider as eternal that which is not always the same, nor immune from change and alteration, but instead is scattered and changed in a myriad of ways.

### **33. A concise contemplation of the future age, of the chasm between God and man, and of Lazarus and the bosom of the patriarch Abraham**

{10.84} In passing from visible things to what is beyond them, [1172A] the saints brilliantly foresaw the end of all things, which is bound to come at some point in the future, ushering in a condition in which no beings will move or be moved, for there will be no movement at all, but rather an ineffable stillness that will contain the flow and motion of whatever is carried along and moved. Desiring in their intellect to attain this condition, even though they were still clothed in corruptible flesh, the saints prudently crossed over the *chasm* that exists between God and man, voluntarily abandoning their relation to the flesh and the world, because affection and proclivity for the body and this present world are truly a *great* and fearsome *chasm between* God and man. And it was precisely of these that Lazarus was deprived, owing to his sickness and poverty, since the former estranges us from the body, and the latter from the world. Enduring this deprivation nobly and with joy, [1172B] he was granted rest *in the bosoms of Abraham*.<sup>163</sup> The rich man, on the other hand, who was engrossed in material things, found himself outside of this repose, receiving no benefit from his life in the flesh other than to be eternally punished for it. For whereas his sole desire was to lay hold of the present life, he failed to take possession of it, since by nature it flows on relentlessly and cannot be grasped. Neither was he able to acquire a share in the future life, which he wholly neglected and for which he had not the slightest desire, for by its very nature that life joins itself only to those who love it with their whole being, and who in their desire for it have eagerly and with pleasure endured every manner of pain and discomfort.

{10.85} When we hear of the *bosoms of Abraham*, we should think of God who appeared to us in flesh derived *from the seed of Abraham*, and who is truly able to contain all things, and who, to all who are worthy of His grace, [1172C] in proportion to the quality and quantity of each one's virtue, divides Himself indivisibly in the form, as it were, of different distributions, without in any way being separated into parts among those who share in Him, for the essence of His unity is by nature indivisible. And this is true even if, owing to the different degrees of worthiness among those who share in Him, He paradoxically appears in a separate manner within the many shares, according to the ineffable union (which the Word knows). No one who enjoys indulging the flesh will be able to pass over to Him, or who takes greater pleasure in the deceptions of the world than in His blessed glory; neither will such a person be able to stand next to Him *who conquered the world*, since he himself has been defeated by the world and wrongly rejoicing in his defeat. For divine justice has judged that those who reduce human existence to this present life, [1172D] and who take pride in wealth, bodily health, and various honors, and who believe that these things alone constitute blessedness, reckoning the good things of the soul as having

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<sup>163</sup> The plural form, unusual in English, expresses the varied nature of participation in the Word, mentioned in the next paragraph.

no value, will not be deemed worthy of receiving a share in the divine and eternal good things, to which they gave absolutely no thought, owing to their overwhelming interest in material things, for they were completely ignorant of the extent to which the virtues transcend wealth, health, and other transient goods.

#### **34. Contemplation concerning the virtues**

{10.86} For “the virtues by themselves and together with other things make man blessed. In conjunction with other things, they create a [1173A] general sense of blessedness,” as one of those who are wise in divine things has said,<sup>164</sup> “whereas by themselves and in themselves, they create blessedness in a more restricted sense. For among beings, some are understood in a restricted sense, as in the case of *two cubits*, but others more generally, as in the case of a *heap*. Now if you were to remove two measures from a heap, what remains would still be a heap. So too, if you were to remove bodily things and other external goods from a general condition of blessedness, leaving only the virtues, the general condition of blessedness would remain undiminished. For to whomsoever possesses it, virtue alone is sufficient in itself for happiness. But every vicious man is wretched, even if he possesses all the so-called good things of the earth, for he is deprived of the virtues.”<sup>165</sup> And every good man is blessed, even if he should be deprived of all the good things of the earth, for he has the shining light of the virtues, with which Lazarus now rejoices, being at rest in the bosom of Abraham. [1173B]

#### **[1176B] 35. A natural contemplation, through which the saints learned about God from created things**

{10.87} Having thus understood creation, including its harmonious arrangement, relations of analogy, and the benefit each part gives to the whole; and seeing that all things are perfect, having been wisely and providentially created in accordance with the principle of their creation, and that all that has come into being could not be better ordered than it is now (since it has no need of any addition or subtraction), the saints learned of the Creator’s existence from the things created by Him. So too, [1176C] when they saw the permanence of things, each abiding in a particular order and position, and their form of existence, whereby all things, each according to its own kind, remain distinct and free from all confusion; and when they considered the undeviating movement of the stars, and the cycle of the year, which proceeds in an orderly manner according to the periodic departure and return of the stars from and to their original place; and the yearly balance of nights and days, with their mutual increase and decrease, with neither being in excess or deficiency of the proper measure, they believed that the one whom they had come to know as God and Creator of all beings is also their Provider.

#### **[1176D] 36. A natural contemplation demonstrating that the world has an origin and a coming into being, as do all things after God**

{10.88} For who, in contemplating the beauty and the magnificence of creation, does not immediately understand that God is the one who has brought all creatures into existence, since He is the Origin and Cause and Creator of all beings? And would not such a person’s thoughts subsequently ascend to God alone, leaving all these things below (since nothing is by nature capable of containing the full extent of the intellect’s passage) in his desire to grasp immediately the One whom he has come to know through the medium of His works? And thus without hesitation he disabuses himself of the deception that the world is without beginning, [1177A] correctly

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<sup>164</sup> Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 43 (ed. Morani 1987, 129, lines 6-8), from whom this entire paragraph is taken mostly word for word.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. (ed. Morani 1987, 129, lines 8-15).

deducing that whatever is in motion began to move at a particular point in time. And no motion is without beginning, since it is not without a cause. For its beginning is that which set it in motion, and its cause is the end that calls it and attracts it, and toward which it is also moved. But if the mover is the beginning of every motion of every thing that is moved, and if the cause toward which whatever is moved is carried along is the end (for nothing moves without a cause), then no being is unmoved, except the Prime Mover (for the Prime Mover is absolutely unmoved, since it is without beginning), from which it follows that no beings are without a beginning, since none of them are unmoved.<sup>166</sup> Everything that in any way exists is in motion, except the sole, unmoved Cause that transcends all things. Intelligible and rational beings are moved cognitively and scientifically, for they are not cognition or science itself, neither is their substance composed of [1177B] their cognitive or scientific knowledge, but these are the habitual conditions characteristic of their substances, which are derived from correct judgment in accordance with their faculties of intellection and reason (by which I mean their constitutive powers).

### **37. Contemplation of contraction and expansion of substance, quality, and quantity, showing that they cannot be without a beginning**

**{10.89}** But even what is called “substance” in a simple sense—not just the substance of things subject to generation and corruption, which moves according to generation and corruption, but the substance of all beings—has been set in motion and continues to move according to the principle and mode of expansion and [1177C] contraction.<sup>167</sup> For it is moved from the most generic genus through the more generic genera to particular species,<sup>168</sup> through which and in which it is naturally divided, proceeding down to the most specific species, where its expansion comes to a limit, which circumscribes its being on the lower end of the scale; and once again it is gathered back from the most specific kinds of species, moving back through more and more general categories, until it is gathered up into the most generic genus, and there its contraction comes to an end, limiting its being on the uppermost end of the scale.<sup>169</sup> Circumscribed thus from two directions, I mean from above and below, it plainly has a beginning and an end, and cannot possibly receive the definition of infinity.

**{10.90}** The same pattern is true for the category of quantity, not only the quantity of things which, in every conceivable way, are subject to generation and corruption, [1177D] since they are naturally moved according to increase or decrease, but of every quantity relative to beings in general, which is moved according to diminution and augmentation, taking on specific form through the expansion of particular differences and thus limited from expanding *ad infinitum*—and again, through a process of reversion, it is gathered up, letting go of what it has acquired, without abandoning its natural form. The same holds true with respect to quality: not just the

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<sup>166</sup> The terminology is taken from Aristotle (*Phys* 258a27-259a9; *Met* 1012b30-31, 1071b3-1075a38), but whereas Aristotle’s “Prime Mover” is the cause solely of the *motion* of the world, for Maximos it is also the cause of the *being* of the world. This profound modification of Aristotelian doctrine enables Maximos to identify motion with being, a unity which had been fragmented by the Origenists, for whom motion was inherently evil, and brought about the creation of beings; cf. above, Amb 7.

<sup>167</sup> Here Maximos describes the movement of created being by a system of classification (at once logical, predicative, and ontological), in which items (or entities) move in the direction either of “differentiation” (*diastole*) or “simplification” (*systole*), understood as movements between species and genera, particulars and universals. The system itself is derived from Porphyry’s introductory study on logic known as the *Isagoge*, on which see Barnes, *Porphyry*, 108-28.

<sup>168</sup> “Genus” (plural: genera) designates a class of things containing a number of subordinate classes (called “species”) with certain common attributes.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomios* 1 [353-54] (GNO 1:131-32).

quality of beings subject to generation and corruption, which is moved according to alteration, but every quality of beings in general, for such qualities are moved by the effect of change and dispersion inherent within their specific differences, which admit of both expansion and contraction. Obviously, no [1180A] intelligent person would say that something which by nature is alternately dispersed and gathered together—either in principle or actuality—can in any sense be without motion. And if it is not without motion, neither is it without beginning; and if it has a beginning, it is clear that it has been created at a moment in time, and just as such a person knows that whatever is moved had a beginning of its motion, so too does he also understand that whatever has come to be began coming into being, receiving both its being and being moved from that which alone is uncreated and unmoved. Thus, that which owes its existence to an act of coming into being cannot in any way be without a beginning.

**38. Demonstration that all things except God exist completely [1180B] in a particular place, and thus by necessity they exist in time, and that whatever is in a place has the beginning of its existence completely in time**

{10.91} I will not address the fact that the very being of beings itself does not exist simply or without qualities, but in a particular way, which constitutes its first form of delimitation<sup>170</sup>—as well as a powerful demonstration that there is a beginning of beings and of their coming to be. Yet who does not know that every kind of being whatsoever, with the sole exception of the Divine (which strictly speaking is beyond being), presupposes the concept of a “where,” which in absolutely every instance necessarily requires the related concept of a “when”?<sup>171</sup> For it is not possible for a “where” to be thought of separately from a “when” (for they belong to those things that are simultaneous,<sup>172</sup> and do not exist apart from their mutual conditioning). [1180C] If, however, a “when” cannot in any way be separated from a “where” (together with which it is of a nature to be contemplated), then all things are subject to the category of “where,” since all things exist in a particular place. And we may take it as a given that the totality of the universe does not transcend itself spatially (which is a somewhat irrational idea, and, in any case, it would be impossible to establish that the universe itself is somehow above and beyond the universe). Instead, it possesses from itself and within itself its own proper circumscription, sequent to the infinite

<sup>170</sup> A point argued by Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (ed. Diehl 1904, 2:123, lines 21-22).

<sup>171</sup> The Greek terms “when” and “where” are not equivalent to “time” and “space” in the modern sense, but denote qualities of relation to time and (more correctly) place that fundamentally determine the nature of beings. In this way, “when” and “where” are the qualitative determinations of beings in a universe animated by natural movements bearing things to their natural places (e.g., earth is at the center of the cosmos, fire rises upwards, etc.). The terms were established by Aristotle, who did not use nouns to designate time and place, but adverbs, which became standard among later Neoplatonist commentators, who took Aristotle to be disclosing the ontological relationship of beings, and not just the meanings of the terms used to describe them; cf. Sorabji, *Philosophy of the Commentators*, 2:196-220, 226-43; 3:95-97. That created being is essentially characterized by “spatial and temporal intervals” (*diastemata*), is also central to the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, *On Ecclesiastes* 6; 7 (GNO 5:377; and pp. 412-14); id., *Apologia in Hexaemeron* (PG 44:84D); id., *On the Song of Songs* 15 (GNO 6:458-59); id., *Against Eunomios* 1 [361] (GNO 1:133-34); ibid., 2 [70, 459, 578] (GNO 1:246-47; 360-61; 395); and ibid., 3.6 [67] (GNO 2:209-10).

<sup>172</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.40, n. 99.

power of the universal cause, which circumscribes all things, and which constitutes the universe's outermost limit. And this is the "place" of the universe, as some have defined it, saying that in this sense "the word 'place' designates the outer circumference of the universe, or the setting that is outside the universe, or the limit of that which contains, and in which are contained, the contents of the universe."<sup>173</sup>

{10.92} This will also demonstrate that beings are subject to the category of "when," as completely existing in time, since no being after [1180D] God exists simply, but in a certain way, and for this reason beings are not without a beginning. For anything that in any way admits of the principle of a "how,"<sup>174</sup> at one point did not exist, even if now it does. Thus when we say the Divine "exists," we do not say it exists in a certain way. And for this reason we say of God that He "is" and "was" in a simple, infinite, and absolute sense. For the Divine is beyond closure in language or thought, which is why when we say that the Divine "exists," we do not predicate of it the category of being, for though being is derived from God, God Himself is not "being" as such. For God is beyond being, whether one speaks or thinks in terms of the "how" of a being, or of "being" in a simple, unqualified sense. And if beings have existence, not simply, but in a way qualified by a "how," then it has to be granted that, just as they exist subject to a "where," on account of the position and definiteness [1181A] of their natural principles, so they are completely subject to a "when" on account of their having a beginning.

**39. Demonstration that it is not possible for anything whose existence is determined by numerical quantity to be infinite or, consequently, without beginning**

{10.93} And, again, if the substance of all beings—and by "all" I mean the vast multitude of beings—cannot be infinite (for it has as a limit the numerical quantity of the many beings that circumscribes both its principle and mode of being, since the substance of all beings is not limitless), then neither can the subsistence of particular things be without [1181B] circumscription, for each is limited by all the others, owing to the laws of number and substance. If, then, no being exists without limitations, clearly all beings, in a way corresponding to their nature, have received "being when" and "being where." For without these absolutely nothing could exist, neither substance, nor quantity, nor quality, nor relation, nor creation, nor passivity, nor movement, nor state, nor any of the things by which the experts in these matters delimit the universe. Therefore no being is without a beginning if its existence presupposes even a single qualitative distinction; neither is it without limits if its existence is conditioned by relation to something else. If, then, no being is without beginning or limitation (as the argument has demonstrated, consistent with the nature of beings), then there was certainly a time when each being did not exist, from which it follows that, if it did not always exist, it was brought into being at a particular time, [1181C] because there was certainly a time when it was not.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, nothing

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<sup>173</sup> Freely derived from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 3 (ed. Morani 1987, 41-42, lines 22-1); cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 212a11-35. Neoplatonic philosophers established an ontological role for place, and not an extraneous one, as posited by Aristotle, for whom place is something peripheral to bodies. As early as Plotinos (*En* 5.9.5, 44-49), place becomes an essential aspect of what it is to be a body, and therefore intimately involved with the life and existence of bodies. Place is not a mere boundary, but an ontologically constitutive power that supports, gathers, and delimits physical forms, including the relative position of parts in the whole, position being closely tied to the nature of the whole, cf. O'Meara 1989, 66-67.

<sup>174</sup> I.e., which admits of certain qualities and determinations.

<sup>175</sup> This phrase would seem to pun on the Arian slogan that "there was a time when He (i.e., the Son of God) was not" (cf. Athanasios, *On the Synod of Nicaea* 15.4; Gregory the Theologian, *Or.* 31.4), but

is susceptible both of being and becoming without also being subject to change and alteration, for whether it was and came to be, it changed, crossing over into what it was not through a process of becoming, or it was altered, receiving an addition of beauty which it lacked. For whatever is changed and altered or is lacking in form cannot be self-perfect. And whatever is not self-perfect obviously has need of something else from which it receives perfection—but not self-perfection—for it does not have this perfection from its own nature, but through participation, and that which needs something else for the perfection of its form will stand in even greater need with respect to existence itself.

{10.94} For if, as some assert, substance is superior to form, and there is an “existent” (as they want to [1181D] call it) that is able to endow itself with substance or simply possesses it on its own, why is it not able to endow itself with, or simply to possess, the inferior of the two, that is, a specific form? And if producing or possessing the inferior is beyond the capacity of this “existent,” by which they designate either substance or matter, being so rash as to deny a beginning to things that are after God and from God (although this is not the present point of dispute), how has it been able to endow itself with what is superior (by which I mean existence itself), or simply to possess or even produce it, when it is unable to have what is inferior? But if matter can in no way possess or produce that which is inferior, still [1184A] less can it possess or produce existence itself. It follows, then, that whatever is not capable of possessing the inferior, I mean form, will never be able to possess what is superior, by which I mean existence itself. If this is so, then all things must have received existence and form from God, for they indeed exist. And if every substance, and all matter, and all forms are from God, then no one, unless he has been deprived of his ability to think rationally, would say that matter is without beginning and uncreated, since he knows that God has created and given form to everything.

[1184B] **40. Demonstration that whatever is subject to motion, or which from eternity is seen together with something different according to substance, cannot be infinite, and that the dyad is neither a beginning nor beginningless, and that strictly speaking the Monad alone is both a beginning and beginningless**

{10.95} And, again, if matter has existed <eternally>, as some people say, it is obvious that it was not brought into being, and if it was not brought into being, then neither can it be subject to motion, and if it is not subject to motion, then it did not begin to exist, and if it did not begin to exist, then it must be completely without a beginning, and if it is without a beginning, it must be infinite and immobile (for the infinite is necessarily immobile, since that which is boundless has nowhere to which it might move). If this is true, however, then there would be two realities that are infinite, without beginning, and unmoved, namely, God and matter, but for such a situation to come about is impossible. For the dyad<sup>176</sup> is neither infinite, nor without

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the phrase occurs frequently in discussions on the nature of time, place, and motion in the writings of John Philoponos, e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (CAG 16:456-8; 17:747); and *Against Proklos's On the Eternity of the World* (ed. Rabe 1963, 103-5).

<sup>176</sup> The “monad” and the “dyad” are both quantifiable units and metaphysical principles of potentiality from which all existing things are derived. The monad, as the principle of unity, rest, and identity, is an all-embracing unity pre-containing the possibility of multiplicity. The dyad is the principle of plurality, procession, and difference, generating all the pairs of opposites of which the world is composed. (According to some Neoplatonists, the monad and dyad derive from the henad, which is the supra-identical origin of identity and non-identity.) The identity and diversity by which they generate “forms” are echoed at each succeeding level of being, more and more faintly, down to the organization of nature, each level of “unfolding” from a monad-dyad pair correlative to that level, but deriving ultimately from the first and highest pair; cf. Rist, “Indefinite Dyad”; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 120-

beginning, nor unmoved, and is totally incapable of being the origin [1184C] of anything else, and is circumscribed according to the principle of its unity and division. It is circumscribed in the principle of its unity since its very existence is a compound of two monads, which it contains as parts, and by which it can be divided. (But nothing that is divisible or which is divided, or composite or compounded, whether according to nature, convention, or in any other way that one can think of, including so-called pure division itself or composition, could possibly be infinite, for it is neither simple nor single, nor numerable, nor numbered, nor numbered together with anything else, nor free as such from all kinds of relation, for all of these things are understood to exist in relation, whereas the infinite is absolutely beyond relation, for there is absolutely nothing that is conjoined to it by any kind of relation.) And it is circumscribed in the principle of its division, since it moves by number, from which it has its beginning and by which it is contained, [1184D] and thus it does not possess a being that by nature is free from relation.

**41. That every dyad is said to be a dyad in terms of numbers, and every monad that constitutes a part of a numerical dyad is said to be a monad, but not an absolute monad.**

**{10.96}** For every dyad, and every monad that constitutes one of its parts, are constituted by number, so that the individual monads, which constitute the dyad, mutually impose limitation on it. Now no one with any intelligence would call “infinite” something that from eternity is seen to have or be marked by some essential difference, for if he thought about it he would recognize that this falls completely outside the definition of the infinite. For the infinite is infinite in every way and in all respects: according to substance, power, and activity, and in relation to the upper and lower limits of things, that is, the beginning and the end. For the infinite is incomprehensible in respect of its substance, inconceivable in respect of its power, and unlimited in respect of its [1185A] activity, having no beginning on the upper end of the scale, and no end on the lower, and, to put it simply and more accurately, it is in every way unbounded, since absolutely none of the limiting factors that we have mentioned can be thought of in conjunction with it. For if we were to say, in any way whatsoever, that anything essentially different could be placed alongside it, we would in the same breath negate the principle of its infinity. And if the definition of infinity excludes the presence of something else essentially different existing together with it from eternity, then the dyad cannot be infinite. For its constitutive monads, which exist one next to the other, are mutually limiting, and neither permits the other to appear as indefinite, for the juxtaposition of the one prevents the transcendence of the other, with the logical result that the presence of the one [1185B] negates the principle of infinity in the other.

**{10.97}** Now if, as we have demonstrated, the dyad is not infinite, it is obvious that it is not without a beginning, for the beginning of every dyad is the monad. And if it is not without a beginning, neither can it lack motion, for it moves, in fact, by means of numeration, beginning with the addition of individual monads, and then back to these again, through a process of division, and so receives its being. And if it is not unmoved, neither is it the beginning of something else. For that which is moved is not a beginning, but *from* a beginning, that is, from whatever set it in motion. Only *the* Monad is, properly speaking, without movement, because it is neither number, nor numerable, nor numbered (for the Monad is neither part, nor whole, nor relation), and

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28, 163-64, 204-6; Sheppard, “Monad and Dyad”; and Verrycken, “Metaphysics of Ammonius,” 205-7.



thus by definition it is without beginning, since there is nothing prior to it that could have set it in motion and given it its being as Monad. And properly speaking the Monad is infinite, for there is nothing that coexists or is co-numbered with it; and properly speaking it is a beginning,<sup>177</sup> for it is the cause of every number, and of all things numbered and numerable, [1185C] since it is beyond all relation, part, and whole; and so properly, and truly, and primarily, and uniquely, and simply—not in some particular way—the Monad exists as something primary and unique.<sup>178</sup> Yet in saying this we do not thereby signify the blessed Godhead in itself, which is infinitely unapproachable and absolutely inaccessible to every principle, mode, intellect, and to all language and every name—but based on our faith in the Godhead, we furnish ourselves with a definition of it, which is accessible to us and within our reach.<sup>179</sup>

**{10.98}** For sacred discourse does not in any way speak of this—I mean the name of “monad”—as representative of the divine and blessed essence, but rather as indicative of its utter simplicity, which is beyond every quantity, quality, and relation, lest [1185D] we think that it is some whole composed of certain parts, or a part of some whole. For the Godhead is above and beyond all division, addition, and every part and whole (since it is devoid of quantity), and all existence according to place, and every concept that defines it in terms of how it exists (since it is devoid of qualities), and it is free and independent of all conjunction and proximity to anything else, for it transcends relatedness, and has nothing anterior, or present with, or subsequent to itself, for it is beyond everything, and is not ranked together with any being [1188A] according to any principle or mode whatsoever.

**{10.99}** And this is perhaps what the great and divine Dionysios was thinking of when he said: “For this reason, even though the Godhead that transcends all things is hymned as Monad and Trinity, it is neither Monad nor Trinity, as understood by us or any other thing. But so that we might truly hymn its transcendent unity and divine fecundity, we have given the divine name of Trinity and Unity to that which is beyond all names, and the names of beings to that which is beyond all being.”<sup>180</sup>

Thus, in no way can anyone who wishes to live piously in the truth say that a dyad is a multitude without beginning or the beginning of some thing in general. For it will be evident to him, by virtue of his intellectual contemplation and comprehension, that there is only one God, who is beyond all infinity, and who cannot be known in any way whatsoever by any beings, except through faith, [1188B] yet even this knowledge, which is derived from God’s creations, reveals to us the fact that God exists, but not what He is, and that He is the creator and fashioner of every age and

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<sup>177</sup> I.e., a principle of origin.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. QThal 55: “The myriad is known only by means of the monad, insofar as its substrate is identical to that of the monad, admitting of a difference only in thought, such as that of an end to its beginning—for the end of the monad is the myriad, and the beginning of the myriad is the monad, or to speak more precisely, a myriad is a monad in motion, and the monad is a motionless myriad—so too, each of the general virtues has for its beginning and end the divine and ineffable Monad, by which I mean God, from whom every virtue takes its origin and to whom each will attain rest, and each is identical to God, differing only according to its intelligible principle, for it is from Him, and in Him, and to Him that every virtue manifestly exists” (CCSG 7:489, lines 143-158).

<sup>179</sup> The monad’s capacity to generate other numbers without changing in itself; its possession in potentiality of all that appears in actuality in subsequent numbers (e.g., odd and even); and its unificatory property, are themes developed in the pseudo-Iamblichan *Theologoumena arithmeticae*, enabling its author to identify the monad with God, with intellect, and with the demiurge as an organizing productive principle. Maximus, while clearly dependent on this source (a standard text in the philosophical curriculum), redefines the basic terms in light of apophatic theology and Christian monotheism.

<sup>180</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.3 (229, lines 6-10; 980D-981A).

time along with everything that exists in them. Yet he will not conclude from this that any of these things has in any way existed together with God from eternity, for he knows that it is impossible for either of two eternally co-existing principles to be the cause of the other. Such a notion is logically invalid and inadmissible, and it would be rather ridiculous for anyone with intelligence in these matters to make one of two identically existing beings the cause of the other. It must be accepted that the eternally existing God has created all things out of nothing, not partially and incompletely, but completely and wholly, “for they have been brought” into being with great wisdom “by” an infinitely intelligent and infinitely powerful “Cause, in which all things are efficiently held together, [1188C] guarded and governed in an all-powerful foundation; and to which all things are turned, as to their own proper end,” as the great Dionysios the Areopagite has said somewhere.<sup>181</sup>

#### **42. Contemplation demonstrating that by nature all things come under divine providence<sup>182</sup>**

{10.100} And from the same beings from which he learned of God’s existence, [1188D] he will also be persuaded that God exercises providence over them, for he judges it right and reasonable that none but the Creator of beings should be their protector and overseer. For it is quite clear that the permanence of beings, and their order, position, and motion; the harmonious conjunction of extremes through intermediaries (which comes about without any damage to them resulting from their polarity); the agreement of the parts with wholes, and the comprehensive unity of wholes with parts; and the clear distinction of the parts from one another [1189A] in accordance with their individuating differences; as well as their unconfused union in accordance with the unchanging identity in the whole of each of them, and—so as to not speak of particulars—the combination and distinction of everything with everything else, and the succession of everything and each thing by specific kind, which is perpetually preserved in such a way that the principle of each nature remains inviolate, without being confused with or confusing any other nature—all of this, I say, clearly shows that all things are efficiently held together by the providence of God who created them. For it is hardly possible “that God, being good, should not also be beneficent, or that He should be beneficent without exercising providence,”<sup>183</sup> and thus in providing wisely for beings, in a matter befitting Him, God bestows on them existence and His care. “For providence,” according to our God-bearing fathers, “is [1189B] God’s attentive care for all things, and they also define it as follows: Providence is that purpose of God whereby all beings receive their most favorable assistance and direction. If, then, providence is God’s purpose,” to use the language of our teachers, “then it necessarily follows that whatever happens happens for the right reason, and could not have been better arranged.”<sup>184</sup> Thus whoever wishes to have the truth for his guide, will in every way be led to say that the provider is the same One whom he knows as the true creator of beings, for truly it belongs to no one else to provide for beings other than the creator of beings, who is God; or because beings reflect their Creator, for when we apply the power of our intellect even to animals, we find within them a reflection that does not unworthily image what is beyond reason.

<sup>181</sup> Id., DN 4.4 (148, lines 13-15; 700B).

<sup>182</sup> Amb 10.100-4 borrows extensively from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 42-43 (ed. Morani 1987, 120-36). The following references indicate some of the the more prominent borrowings, most of which Maximos has rather freely adapted.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 42 (ed. Morani 1987, 122, lines 22-24).

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 42 (ed. Morani 1987, 125, lines 4-9).

**{10.101}** For seeing them, each according to its kind, [1189C] naturally caring for their offspring, we are encouraged to affirm with reverence, and with a reverent boldness, that God alone exercises providence over all beings, and not simply over some beings but not others, as certain secular philosophers have taught,<sup>185</sup> but absolutely over all things, including universals and particulars, according to the single and unchanging purpose of His goodness. Knowing that without the care and protection of providence “all the particulars would be destroyed, and that together with them the universals would also be destroyed (since universals naturally consist of particulars),”<sup>186</sup> we propound for ourselves a logical demonstration of this by means of a reasonable correspondence leading to the truth. For if the universals subsist in the particulars, and do not [1189D] in any way possess their principle of being and existence by themselves, then it is quite clear that, if the particulars were to disappear, the corresponding universals would cease to exist. For the parts exist and subsist in the wholes, and the wholes in the parts, and no argument can refute this. As for the philosophers, they are unwillingly bound, as it were, by the truth, for they unwittingly affirm the very thing they seek to deny. For when they say that only universals are governed by providence, they are oblivious of the fact that in the same breath they affirm that particulars are likewise governed by providence, and thus by logical necessity they are led to the very truth they are so anxious to avoid.<sup>187</sup> For if they [1192A] deem that universals are worthy of providential care on account of the permanence they observe in nature, they admit that particulars are even more worthy of such care, for it is in them that the universals have their permanence and subsistence. Because universals and particulars, owing to the natural, indissoluble relation that unites them, make their appearance together, so that when one achieves permanence through the other, the other does not remain outside of this condition, and, again, if the one were to fall outside of the condition that maintains its permanence, it would be inconsistent to say that the other continues to remain within it.

**{10.102}** Apart from this there are three modes whereby God is said not to exercise providence over all beings. Some say that God is simply ignorant of the means and methods of providence, or that He does not wish to employ them, or has not the power to do so.<sup>188</sup> But consistent with the common views of all men, God is good and beyond goodness, and always wills what is good for all; and He is wise and beyond wisdom,<sup>189</sup> [1192B] or rather He is the source of all wisdom, and surely knows what is in the best interests of all; and insofar as He is powerful, or rather infinitely powerful, He works in a divinely fitting manner to actualize in all things the good and beneficial things that He has foreknown and determined—for He is good and wise and powerful, and penetrates through all things visible and invisible, both universals and particulars, both small and great, regardless of the form their being takes (without suffering any diminution in His infinite goodness, wisdom, or power), and He maintains all things in a manner consistent with each one’s principle of being, both in relation to themselves and to others, in an indissoluble harmony of mutual relation and individual permanence.

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 43, where Nemesios considers the opinion of “Aristotle and others who deny that there is a providence for particulars” (ed. Morani 1987, 127, lines 12-14).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* (ed. Morani 1987, 130, lines 13-14).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. *ibid.* (ed. Morani 1987, 130, lines 18-21).

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *ibid.* (ed. Morani 1987, 130, lines 7-9).

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *ibid.* (ed. Morani 1987, 135, line 8).

**{10.103}** What, then? Do we not [1192C] understand that nature itself clearly teaches that the providence of God encompasses everything? “For nature itself provides us with no small proof that the knowledge of providence has been naturally implanted within us,”<sup>190</sup> and it does this without any prior instruction, as if it were pushing us toward God, whenever it leads us to seek salvation through prayer when we are beset by sudden, unforeseen emergencies and crises. “For when we are suddenly overtaken by adversities, before thinking of anything else we involuntarily call upon God.”<sup>191</sup> It is as if providence itself, without any conscious thought on our part, were drawing us to itself, outstripping the speed of all our mental powers, and showing us in advance that divine assistance is stronger than anything else. To be sure, nature would not lead us purposelessly to something that did not naturally exist. [1192D] “Whatever follows naturally upon something else,” since it is obvious to all, “has the strong” and invincible “power for the demonstration” of the truth.<sup>192</sup> “But if the idea that providence extends to particulars is incomprehensible to us—as it certainly is, in accordance with the verse, *His judgments are unsearchable and His ways are inscrutable*—and if for this reason they say there is no providence,”<sup>193</sup> they do not speak properly, according to my view of the matter.

**{10.104}** For if the differences and variations among human beings are great and indeed incomprehensible, as are the differences between one man and another, and even between a man and himself,<sup>194</sup> in ways of life and customs, in opinions, choices, and desires, [1193A] in their needs, their skills, their knowledge, and pursuits, in the virtually infinite thoughts of their minds, and in all the changes they undergo in all that happens to them in each day and hour (for man is a capricious animal, and rapidly changes according to his needs or the circumstances), then it follows of necessity that providence, which by precognition has comprehended all particulars in their individuality, will appear to be different, manifold, and complex, and adapt itself to all the teeming details that exceed the comprehension of man’s mind, extending itself to fit each particular thing or thought, down to the most minute movements that occur in the soul and the body. If, then, the vast number of differences among particular things is inconceivable, then surely the resources of a providence that is able to adapt itself to them must be infinite, yet if [1193B] the resources of providence in relation to particulars happens to be boundless and beyond our knowledge, we should not make our own ignorance a cause for ruling out divine care for all things.<sup>195</sup> To the contrary, we should accept and praise all the works of providence simply and without prying into them, in a manner both befitting God and profitable to us, believing that whatever happens is for the best of reasons, even if these reasons are beyond our ability to comprehend. But note that when I say “all things” I mean the works of providence, and not the evil things we do by means of our free will, for these are completely alien to the principle of providence.

**{10.105}** Concerning the manner in which this great teacher speaks of the power and the grace manifested by the saints in their reason and contemplation, I have done what I could, in what I have written above, to follow the course of his argument, conjecturally rather than categorically (for my intellect falls considerably short of the

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. (ed. Morani 1987, 132, lines 13-15).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. (ed. Morani 1987, 132, lines 15-16).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. (ed. Morani 1987, 132, lines 20-21).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. (ed. Morani 1987, 133, line 5).

<sup>194</sup> E.g., over time.

<sup>195</sup> This paragraph closely follows Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 43 (ed. Morani 1987, 133, lines 11-22); cf. QD 120 (CCSG 10:88).

height [1193C] of his truth), and, like someone tracking footprints, all that I have said constitutes but a trail of surmises.

## **Part II: On the Material Dyad**

### **43. A different contemplation of the material dyad traversed by the saints, and on the unity perceived in the Trinity**

**{10.106}** In saying that the saints “passed beyond the material dyad on account of the unity perceived in the Trinity,” I take it that Gregory means that they “passed beyond matter and form, out of which bodies are made,”<sup>196</sup> or that they “passed through flesh and matter,” as he says, “and were united with God and mingled with that most pure light,” [1193D] by which he means that they set aside the soul’s relationship to the flesh, and through the flesh to matter—or to speak more generally, in setting aside the natural bond that sensation has with sensible objects, they nobly took hold of desire for the divine alone, “on account of the unity,” as I said, “perceived in the Trinity.” Knowing that the soul lies between God and matter, with the potentialities to be united to either—I mean the intellect’s potential for union with God, and sense perception’s potential to unite with matter—they completely swept aside sense perception along with what is perceived through it, by means of the relevant activity of their disposition, while by means of the intellect alone they [1196A] ineffably assimilated the soul to God, and seeing the whole soul wholly united to God in a manner beyond knowing, like an image to its archetype, and corresponding (to the extent that this is possible) to its likeness in mind, word, and spirit, they were secretly taught “the unity perceived in Trinity.”

**{10.107}** But perhaps by the “material dyad” the teacher was referring to anger and desire, since they both incline toward matter and are the powers of the passive part of the soul that rebel against reason, which they are able to divide and scatter into multiplicity, unless from the beginning one has yoked them with knowledge and placed them under his command. Indeed, if someone is able to prevail over these powers, and compel them, as one ought, to move in the proper direction, yoking them like slaves to the power of reason—or if someone is able to abandon them completely, and through reason and contemplation [1196B] surrender solely to that cognitive delight which remains unwavering in love, and from the many confine himself to one, sole, pure, simple, and indivisible movement of the most virile power of desire, by which he might philosophically ground his permanence in an unbroken relation to God through the identity of unfailing desire—such a person, I say, is truly blessed, since he has attained not only true and blessed union with the Holy Trinity, but also the “unity perceived in the Holy Trinity,” insofar as he has become simple, indivisible, and of a single form as much as is possible in relation to simple and indivisible being, imitating the simple and indivisible Goodness through his habitual exercise of the virtues, and laying aside the condition of his naturally divided faculties thanks to the grace of God, with whom he has become one. [1196C]

### **44. Exposition of the passionate part of the soul, and of its general divisions and subdivisions**

**{10.108}** The passionate part of the soul is divided, as they say, into two parts: that which is obedient to reason, and that which is not. The part that is not obedient to reason is further divided into the nutritive part (which they call the “natural” part), and the pulsative part (which they call the “vivifying” part), neither of which is said to

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<sup>196</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 21.2 (cited above, at Amb 10.1, n. 106); and id., Or. 23.8, cited above, at Amb 1.1, n. 2.

be obedient to reason, by which they are not naturally controlled, because to grow, and to be in health, and to live, are not things that fall under our control. The part that is obedient to reason is likewise divided into two: the desiring and the irascible. These are said to be obedient to reason, for among the diligent [1196D] they are of such a nature as to be directed and placed under control. The desiring part is further divided into pleasure and grief. Desire that attains its object produces pleasure, but when it fails in this it produces grief. And, again, from another point of view, they say that desire can be divided into four different kinds, inclusive of desire itself: desire, pleasure, fear, and grief. For seeing that all existing things are either good or bad, and that some of them are present, and others yet to come, they called the anticipation of good by the name of “desire,” but when present “pleasure,” and the anticipation of evil they call “fear,” but when present “grief,” so that pleasure and desire exist and are associated with good things [1197A] (either truly good or merely perceived as such), and grief and fear with evil things.<sup>197</sup>

{10.109} And again they divide grief into four: distress, dejection, envy, and sorrow. They say that distress is a form of grief that reduces a man to speechlessness, since it plunges the mind into an abyss. Dejection is a grief that weighs one down and troubles him owing to circumstances beyond his control. Envy is grief provoked by the prosperity of others, whereas sorrow is provoked by their misfortunes. They have said, too, that every form of grief, in and of itself, is evil. For even if a man who is diligent in virtue, should, from a sense of compassion, be moved to grief by the misfortunes of others, this was not his deliberate intention, but rather a reaction to a particular circumstance. The man of contemplation, however, remains dispassionate even when confronted with the same misfortunes, cleaving [1197B] to God and severing himself from this present life.<sup>198</sup>

{10.110} Fear, they say, is divided into six kinds: apprehensiveness, diffidence, shame, consternation, panic, and anxiety. Apprehensiveness, they say, is fear of taking action. Diffidence is fear of incurring criticism. Shame is fear that springs from having done some disgraceful deed. Consternation is fear generated by some strong foreboding, whereas panic is fear caused by ominous tidings that leave us feeling helpless, and anxiety, finally, is the fear of making a mistake, that is, the fear of failure. For fearing that we may fail in something, we find ourselves caught in the grip of anxiety, but some call this simply cowardice.<sup>199</sup>

{10.111} And again they say that anger is the seething of the blood around the heart caused by the desire for revenge, and they divide it into three forms: wrath (which some have called “bile” and “gall”), vindictiveness, and rancor. [1197C] As for wrath, they say it is anger stirred up into activity, having a beginning and movement; and bile is the aversion felt toward another who is causing grief, whereas gall is the revenge of the aggrieved on the one who caused him grief. Vindictiveness is anger that has become chronic (being so named from the *vinculum* or “bond” that holds injuries in the memory). Rancor, again, is anger that bides its time to execute vengeance (derived from the word “rancid,” for it is something that through lying

<sup>197</sup> This paragraph draws extensively from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 15-17, and 22 (ed. Morani 1987, 72-73, 75, 82).

<sup>198</sup> This paragraph is a nearly verbatim borrowing from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 19 (ed. Morani 1987, 80, lines 13-20).

<sup>199</sup> This paragraph is nearly verbatim borrowing from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 21 (ed. Morani 1987, 81, lines 15-21); cf. Aristotle, *An* 403a31.

around for a long time has grown vile).<sup>200</sup> And they divide each of these into many other aspects, and if anyone wanted to write them all down in detail, he would amass a great many words and expend a good deal of time, but on account of its excessive length the final product would be more than its readers could endure. But what would be truly great and wondrous, presupposing much attention and zeal—and above all the help of God—would [1197D] be for someone first to acquire mastery over the natural powers of the material dyad, by which I mean anger and desire, and their various manifestations; and blessed is the man who has acquired the facility to move them to whatever direction seems appropriate to reason, until he is purged of his former defilements by means of ascetic practices governed by ethical philosophy.

[II.3: Scriptural Figures of this Exposition]

[1200A] **45. Contemplation from Scripture to the effect that the man of knowledge must not join the principle of wisdom to the law of nature; and on the addition of the letter “a” to the name of Abraham**

{10.112} So that the great Abraham might set these things aside and rise above them, as he did with Hagar and Ishmael (for the rational part of his soul had already been exercised in divine visions, owing to the episode with Isaac), the divine voice, resounding in his mind, taught him that if the divine offspring of the intellect, which is born free by means of spiritual knowledge, is united with the enslaved seed of the flesh, it will not be able to inherit the blessed promise, which is the grace of divinization, set forth in hope to those who love the Lord. By way of prefiguration, [1200B] Abraham had already received this grace in advance, being secretly united through faith to the principle of the Monad, whereby he himself became simple and single, or rather out of many he became one. For he was wholly and magnificently gathered up alone to God alone, bearing with himself absolutely no trace of any type of knowledge relative to scattered, fragmented things, which makes clear, as I see it, the meaning of the letter “a” that was given in order to augment his name. Therefore he became the father of those who, deprived of all things after God, are led to God through faith, because the children are similarly able to possess in spirit the same features of faith as their father.<sup>201</sup>

**46. Contemplation of Moses, concerning the removal of his sandals**

{10.113} [1200C] Perhaps what the great Moses learned at the beginning of his journey on the road to knowledge, when he drew near to see the light appearing mystically in the bush, and was instructed by the divine voice, which said: *Loose the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy*, was this, namely, the awesome release—as I think—of his soul’s disposition from all bodily things, for through contemplation it was about to embark on the intelligible journey to the understanding of realities beyond the world and arrive at the complete estrangement of its previous life, which was tied to the flesh, signified by the setting aside of the sandals.<sup>202</sup>

**47. Contemplation of the parts of the sacrifice**

<sup>200</sup> Through this sentence, this paragraph is a nearly verbatim borrowing from Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 20 (ed. Morani 1987, 81, lines 8-9). Maximos of course works with the etymologies of Greek words, which I have matched with English equivalents and their corresponding Latin etymologies.

<sup>201</sup> In Greek, the letter “alpha” functions as a sign of negation, known as the “alpha privative,” which here is the shared symbolic feature of Abraham and those who in faith negate or subject to privation all things except God.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* 1.20 (GNO 7/1:9, lines 20-24); Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.19 (PG 36:649B); and Evagrius, *On Prayer* 4 (PG 79:1168D).

{10.114} And this, again, is perhaps what the most divine Moses [1200D] wished to indicate in his instructions for the sacrifices, which call for the removal of the fat, kidneys, breast, and the lobe of the liver, directing us to remove from ourselves the principal powers of the passions, by which I mean anger and desire, which is the truly “material dyad,” along with its activities, and to melt them in the divine fire of the hidden strength that resides in knowledge. Desire is signified by the kidneys, whereas its activity, which is pleasure, is signified by the fat. Anger [1201A] is signified by the breast, and its activity by the lobe of the liver, in which the most acrid and bitter bile has collected and hardened.

#### **48. Concise contemplation of the different forms of leprosy according to the law**

{10.115} And this, again, I think, is what is wisely adumbrated through obscure symbols in the passage concerning leprosy. The leprous infection is divided by color into four genera: white, green, yellow, and black, and these point to the irascible and desiring parts of the soul, along with their respective sub-species. Desire is indicated by the white and the green, which clearly is a division between pleasure and grief. Anger is indicated by the yellow and the black, divided between wrath and vindictiveness, on the one hand, and the malice of hypocrisy on the other, [1201B] which has no color since it is always hidden. These are the primary genera of the passions and their foremost offspring, they say, that are classified under anger and desire. As long as the ailing soul is spotted by any of these, it cannot be numbered among those who have been made worthy of the divine encampment.

#### **49. Contemplation of Phinehas and those slain by him**

{10.116} And this is what I think that amazing Phinehas is hinting at by means of his zeal. For in striking down both the Midianite woman and the Israelite man by means of a single blow from his spear, he showed in a figure that matter along with form, desire along with anger, and foreign pleasure along with impassioned thinking, must be [1201C] completely expelled from the soul by the force of reason, the high priest. To be sure, form stands in the same relation to matter as anger does to desire, the approach of the former endowing the latter with motion, without which it remains inert. Vitiating thinking stands in the same relation to pleasure, which it naturally endows with a particular form, since in its own principle of existence it lacks form and shape. And this is also made clear by the meaning of their names. For *the name of the Midianite woman is Cozbi*, which means “my titillation,”<sup>203</sup> and that of *the Israelite is Zimri*, which means “my song,” that is, “my arousal.” For when the rational part of the soul turns away from its concentration on divine meditation and is aroused by the material titillations of the flesh, coupling with it in the *alcove*<sup>204</sup> of sin, then by all means it has need of the zealous high priest, reason, to slay [1201D] what has coupled in wickedness, and so to turn aside the impending threat of divine indignation.

#### **50. Contemplation of the phrase: *Do not give dogs what is holy*, and on the notion that the apostles must not carry a staff, nor a bag, nor sandals**

{10.117} And it seems to me that this could be what the Lord Himself meant when He said: *Do not give* [1204A] *dogs what is holy*, and *do not throw pearls before swine*, calling our power of intellection “holy,” since it is an image of the divine glory; and He exhorted us not to allow this glory to be troubled by the barks and bites of anger. The divine and shining thoughts of the mind he calls “pearls,” which we typically use to adorn whatever is precious, and He commands us to keep them undefiled and free

<sup>203</sup> An Epicurean term for the excitation of bodily pleasure; cf. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* 3.54 (LCL 1:408).

<sup>204</sup> Or, “furnace.”



from the impure passions of material desire. He seems to have meant something similar when, in sending His holy disciples to preach, He told them how they should be equipped only with what is essential, saying: *Take no bag for your journey, nor a staff, nor sandals for your feet*—since the one who sets out on the high road to knowledge [1204B] must be free of every material weight, and pure from every impassioned inclination of desire and anger, signified respectively by the bag and the staff, and above all to be naked of the malice of hypocrisy, which like a sandal covers the tracks of one's life, hiding the passions of the soul under a semblance of kindness. Such "sandals" were worn rather mindlessly by the Pharisees, who had the appearance of piety but not its substance. And if they thought this would escape notice, they learned otherwise from the reproaches of the Word.

### **51. Contemplation of the epileptic**

**{10.118}** [1204C] It was again, I think, from this material dyad—by which I mean anger and desire—that the Lord freed the epileptic, for whereas the evil demon wished to destroy him by the fire of anger and the water of desire, the Lord restrained his frenzied ravings. Now in those men who have been defeated by material things, their relation to generation and corruption differs in no way from the waxing and waning of the moon.<sup>205</sup> The demon, who arouses the passions, takes possession of this relation, and casts the mind into the fire of anger and the water of desire, seeking to drown it, and will not cease from this until the Word of God appears and drives away the wicked, material spirit (which characterizes *the old and earthly man*), and so frees the possessed man from the evil tyranny, [1204D] restoring to him and granting him his natural soundness of mind, which is the mark of the new man created by God. **{10.119}** It was in this manner that all the saints, having genuinely received the divine and unerring Word, passed through this present age, without their souls leaving so much as a footprint in any of its pleasures. For it was on the highest attributes (*logoi*) accessible by man concerning God, namely, His goodness and love, that they rightly concentrated their vision, and it was from these that they learned that God was moved to give being to all the things that exist, and to grant them the grace of well-being—if it is permissible to speak of "movement" with respect to God, who alone is the Unmoved, [1205A] and not rather of His will, which moves all things, bringing them into, and sustaining them in, being, while never in any way being moved itself.<sup>206</sup> And it was with a view to these that the saints wisely modeled themselves, and owing to their expert imitation they now bear the distinguishing characteristic—manifest through the virtues—of the hidden and invisible beauty of the divine magnificence. Thus they themselves became good, and lovers of both God and their fellow men, full of compassion and mercy, and were proved to possess one single disposition of love for the whole of mankind, by means of which they held fast, throughout the whole of their earthly life, to the ultimate form of virtue, by which I mean humility, which is a firm safeguard of all that is good, and undermines everything that is opposed to it, and so they became impregnable to the temptations that besieged them, both those that fall within the power of our will [1205B] to control, and those that do not, for they wore down through continence the internal rebellions of the former, and by patient endurance they repelled the onslaughts of the latter.

**{10.120}** For being attacked on two fronts, that is, by glory and dishonor, they remained unshaken and immovable in the face of both, being neither wounded by insults, thanks to their voluntary self-abnegation, nor succumbing to earthly glory,

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<sup>205</sup> "Epileptic" renders the Greek word *seleniazomenos*, which means to be "moonstruck."

<sup>206</sup> Cf. below, Amb 23.

thanks to their extreme familiarity with poverty. And thus they were dominated neither by anger, nor envy, nor rivalry, nor hypocrisy, nor cunning, nor calculated pretences of friendship aiming to deceive through appearances and manipulate things toward some other end (which is the most destructive of all the passions), nor desire for the seemingly splendid things of life, nor any other vice from the wicked swarm of the passions, nor threats directed at them from their enemies, nor any [1205C] form of death. Therefore they are rightly judged to be blessed both by God and by men, for by the grace of the bountiful God they made themselves shining images of the radiant, ineffable glory that is to come, so that, filled with joy, they might be united with the principles of those very virtues that they had come to know, or rather with God (for whose sake they, dying a daily death, patiently endured their life on earth), for in Him pre-exist the principles of all good things, as if from an ever-flowing spring, in a single, simple, unified embrace, and they draw to Him all those who rightly and naturally use the powers that have been given to them for this very purpose.

### **Ambiguum 11**

**{11.1}** [1205D] From Saint Gregory's same oration on Saint Athanasios, concerning what he said about the blessed Job:

The rest are but little things, and have been granted as a dispensation for the sake of little men.<sup>207</sup>

**{11.2}** I take it that Saint Gregory, in view of God's response to Job, is speaking of the material goods that were restored to Job after his trials, which he says are "little," since they cannot in any way be compared to things that are eternal. And when he says that they "have been granted as a dispensation for the sake of little men," this is clearly a reference to those who are stunted in their powers of cognitive reasoning, and who are easily scandalized by the principles of providence and judgment, and consequently are shaken in their faith. [1208A] It was of men such as these, it seems to me, that the Lord spoke in the Gospels, when he said *whoever scandalizes any of these little ones* who would be scandalized upon seeing a righteous man fall ill or into poverty, or suffer some other affliction. And what would those even weaker have thought, who conclude from such events that God is absent from the universe, had they seen the sudden changes of circumstances surrounding Job—who was admittedly considered a righteous man by all—had not God restored to him twofold his former material abundance and glory? It was of these men, then, that the teacher spoke, when he said that these things "have been granted as a dispensation for the sake of little men."

### **Ambiguum 12**

**{12.1}** From Saint Gregory's same oration on Saint Athanasios:

He (i.e., Saint Athanasios) cleanses the temple of the God-hucksters and Christ-peddlers, [1208B] not however with a whip of woven cords, but with persuasive words.<sup>208</sup>

**{12.2}** It is not the case, as some have supposed, that with these words the renowned teacher makes our Lord and God appear more severe than our blessed father Athanasios—perish the thought!—neither is he being partial to Saint Athanasios by

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#### **Ambiguum 11**

<sup>207</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 21.18 (SC 270:146-48, lines 15-16).

#### **Ambiguum 12**

<sup>208</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 21.31 (SC 270:174, lines 1-4).

saying that whereas the Lord cleansed the “God-hucksters” from the temple with a whip, the saint used only his words. Faced with these interpretations (according to those who understand the text in this way), we are of necessity left with only one of two alternatives: either our Lord and God was ignorant of a more gentle method of treatment, or Saint Athanasios, not being versed in the ways of spiritual discipline, was unduly lenient. However, inasmuch as the reason that judges whatever we have done is active within us, [1208C] as if in an ensouled, living temple, it stirs up repentance in proportion to our faults, through which Christ, the Divine Reason, ever strikes us when we sin, wielding our own troubled conscience, twisted like a whip by wicked thoughts and deeds. Saint Athanasios, on the other hand, led those who were at fault to correction by more gentle means, since like them he too was clothed in weak flesh, and it seems to me that this is why the God-minded teacher expressed himself in this way.

### Ambiguum 13

{13.1} From Saint Gregory’s extemporaneous oration against the Eunomians:

There are, you can be sure, people who not only have *itching ears* but also *itching tongues*.<sup>209</sup>

{13.2} [1208D] Those who have devoted themselves to the study of words and consider the knowledge of their precise meanings a great achievement, say that one must assign an appropriate term to each thing, representing the unique characteristic of what is signified in relation to the meanings and verbal forms of all other things. These men say that those “who have itching ears and tongues” are those who wish only to hear or tell of something new, and who are always “delighted by innovations,”<sup>210</sup> and in *relocating the boundaries established by their fathers*—to use a biblical phrase—and who take pleasure in the ephemeral and the exotic, and who rise up against whatever is [1209A] well known, well established, and unchanging, as being dull, commonplace, and of no value. They would gladly embrace the latest fashion, even though it were demonstrably false and could bring no benefit to the soul.

{13.3} Yet it is precisely for the soul’s benefit that we exalt in song and commit to writing every devout word, and undertake the salvific labor of asceticism, the former to arm us against ignorance, and the latter against indulgence in pleasure. By cutting away the imperfections of the soul, the former aims to bring those who have the truth into greater intimacy with God through knowledge, and for this reason they take great delight in learning, so that when a devout word has directed their intellect beyond visible and intelligible things, it might captivate the intellect by the ineffable eros of divine beauty, and transfix it with longing, so that it will no longer be able to be carried anywhere else, or rather will no longer consent to be so carried, even though it is able to be.<sup>211</sup> The aim [1209B] of ascetic labor, on the other hand, is to extract the nails of desire, which fasten us to sensual pleasure (for it was through these that the soul, in the wake of that ancient disobedience, lost its longing and inclination for God, and became infixed within matter and corruptible things), and thus to wrest free those caught in the grip of vice, so that they might be genuine disciples of virtue, with souls unshakeable in the face of whatever might hinder them in their devotion to the Beautiful. Toward this end, ascetic labor teaches us, on the one hand, self-mastery, so

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### Ambiguum 13

<sup>209</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 27.1 (SC 250:70, lines 3-4).

<sup>210</sup> Id., Or. 43.58 (SC 384:250, line 26).

<sup>211</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.10.

that we might turn away from sensual pleasure, which, finding an opportunity in our wickedness, deceptively fawns on us and weakens the resolution of our will, persuading us to prefer what is at hand over what is to come, and to prefer visible realities over intelligible ones; on the other hand—so that we might set aside fear and timidity, which suggest to us that the gravity of the human condition is beyond the power of man to remedy, contriving to intimidate [1209C] the prudent mind with daunting, discouraging thoughts—it teaches patience, along with what is the fulfillment of the above-mentioned virtues, namely, courage, which is the unyielding and invincible ability to reject the pleasures that fall within our power, as well as to endure every pain that does not.

**{13.4}** With the words “itching ears and tongues,” the teacher was referring to the audience to whom he delivered the oration, for words are of a nature to be spoken and pronounced by the tongue, and to be heard and ascertained through the ear. If, however, we wish to understand the words “itching ears and tongues” differently, we may take them as a reference to men who are bent solely on finding fault with others, and on spreading malicious statements or abusive criticisms about them, and who take pride in behaving boorishly in the presence of a dignified speech and speaker, so that, even before the object [1209D] of their cynicism and envy has had a chance to complete a sentence (for so greatly does their spirit chafe within them that one half expects their souls to come rushing out of their bodies), their “ears” and their “tongues” are poised to seize upon a particular word or even syllable, not of course in order to relish it, but to revile it, and so add another handful of slime to their torrent of abuse against him.

**{13.5}** And this is exactly what the enemies of the truth did long ago to that holy man, when they jumped up from their seats and rushed forward because of the things that he said, even before he had said them—rather like cavalry horses, or those used for racing, which, even before the races and the blast of the trumpet, prick up their ears [1212A] and stamp their feet on the ground, scraping it with their hooves, rousing themselves for the race, and not infrequently breaking away from the gate and bolting forward before they have felt the sting of the starting whip. The difference of course is that horses are irrational beasts, and no one censures them for not waiting for the start of the race, whereas for those men who rose up against Saint Gregory no amount of censure would be commensurate with their wickedness. They are experts in the theory and practice of lying, and in obstructing the truth. Such men are rightly said to have “itching ears and tongues,” for just like an extremely bitter and thick secretion that has accumulated deep within the body, and which through [1212B] scratching is often irritated and rises to the surface, so too does a concealed disposition irritate those who hate whatever is well spoken, who take the opportunity to spew forth the malignancy of their soul, and the more it spreads, the deeper it lodges within them. For the disposition of degenerate and depraved men does not leave them simply because it has been manifested in their deeds, but to the contrary, it unrestrainedly befouls and corrupts everything around them, without, as I said, ever departing from the cavity of their soul.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> This fine example of Byzantine invective fairly describes the aggression and violence of Gregory’s fourth-century Arian opponents, who among other things had attempted to assassinate him while he was delivering a sermon, as he himself tells us in a poem called *Concerning his own life* (PG 37:1129-30, lines 1445-70). At the same time, Maximus’ remarks would seem to be equally directed at Gregory’s seventh-century detractors, including those who (unlike Maximus) had hastily drawn erroneous conclusions from Gregory’s orations without having taken the time and trouble to study his works in detail; cf. Amb 7.2.

## Ambiguum 14

{14.1} From St. Gregory's same oration against the Eunomians:

Just as a flower in winter is completely out of season, a man's clothing is out of place on a woman, a woman's on a man, and geometry during mourning.<sup>213</sup>

{14.2} [1212C] Here the teacher speaks of the good order that belongs to every word and thing, according to which the unmixed principle of excellence in each and all things is naturally manifested. He does this by enumerating a series of incongruities, on the basis of which he aims to teach propriety and piety to the insolent and disorderly, who know no order in general, but especially when it comes to speaking about God, for they brazenly mix up and confuse unrelated things and make a complete muddle of them. For if it is not natural, and therefore a mark of disorder, for a flower to be seen in the winter, or for women to wear men's clothing, or for men to wear the clothing of women, or to combine geometry with mourning—since the untimely flower [1212D] disturbs time and departs from its proper place; and for a man and a woman to wear one another's clothing perverts nature and disturbs their natural order; and the third example is of two things that can never be brought together, by which I mean joy and mourning, and any attempt to force them into one will only confuse them and bring an end to both—then how much more awkward and ill-fitting will a word about God be, when it is casually uttered by some chance individual, at a time and place where it is inappropriate, and when the word itself is not in any way worthy of God, with respect to whom speakers of any intelligence will take into account the right moment to the degree that God incomparably transcends the things He has created and brought into being in an orderly manner.<sup>214</sup>

{14.3} "Geometry is incongruous with mourning," [1213A] the teacher says, and this, I think, was what constituted your principal difficulty, for which we ventured the following propositions. When the leaders of an army have conquered a country, and wish to rule over it according to royal law, they use geometry to survey the land and distribute it among themselves; and it is an occasion of great joy—and the greatest joy for those who pursue the good things of this life alone—for them to be the victors, and to acquire great wealth, so that all mourning is banished from their midst. Or, since those who are experts in these matters say that it is compulsory syllogisms that are particularly germane to geometry,<sup>215</sup> a man would likely be perceived as tiresome, and negligent in his social obligations if at a funeral he endeavored by syllogisms to convince a man in mourning that his grieving was illogical. Or, if someone should say that it was inappropriate for the mourner [1213B] to devise syllogisms calculated to persuade himself that he had not suffered the loss that he actually did. Or, because such calculations are utterly opposed to the very nature of mourning itself, for in the same way that a syllogizing mourner drives mourning away from himself, so too does mourning itself cease to be mourning when it is transposed into a syllogism. For when a man loses the son who he had hoped would be his heir, he henceforth reckons all earthly things to be useless, and it is perhaps from this point of view that one might

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## Ambiguum 14

<sup>213</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 27.4 (SC 250:80, lines 17-18).

<sup>214</sup> Maximos's argument about the nature and limits of theological discourse is inspired by Gregory the Theologian, Or. 27.3 (SC 250:76-78).

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (ed. Diehl, 1903, 331, line 23); id., *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (ed. Cousin 1864, 1162-63); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.18.88.4 (SC 30:114); Gregory of Nyssa, *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection* (PG 46:33BC); and Gregory the Theologian, Letter 101.53: "This has now been proven by what they call geometric compulsions and demonstrations" (SC 208:58, lines 18-19).

conclude that these considerations are not entirely lacking in cogency, recognizing that rejoicing and mourning are mutually exclusive, since the causes that produce them are not grounded in a common principle.

{14.4} Saint Dionysios the God-minded Areopagite bears trustworthy witness to these things [1213C] in his remarks on the depiction of angels, when he says that “the geometric and architectural instruments with which they appear denote their capacity for founding, building, and completing, and whatever else belongs to the providence that elevates and guides the subordinate orders.”<sup>216</sup> Again, all of these things point to an optimistic state of affairs, to which mourning stands in utter contrast, and to which it is therefore inappropriate. If, however, we should wish to interpret this phrase differently, it would not be *out of season* to recall the words of Jesus the son of Sirach: *A tale out of season is like music in mourning*. Now music encompasses all the disciplines,<sup>217</sup> one of which, as the specialists say, is geometry, and it seems to me that for this reason [1213D] the teacher said that geometry is incongruous with mourning. Now if someone were to ask why he singled out this discipline as being incongruous with mourning, we answer that geometry alone is directly relevant to all the propositions mentioned above. In addition, the word “geometry” functions here as a synecdoche,<sup>218</sup> and thus does not exclude the other disciplines. These explanations, I think, are sufficient for our purposes. If, however, anyone can find a better one, I would gladly offer my thanks to him for enlightening me about matters of which I have hitherto been ignorant.<sup>219</sup>

## Ambiguum 15

{15.1} [1216A] From Saint Gregory’s Great Theological Oration:

That there exist God and a creative and sustaining cause of all things is taught to us both by sight and natural law—by sight, since it observes that visible things are firmly fixed and proceed along their courses, being immovably moved and carried, if I may put it like this; and by natural law, whereby one infers the author of these things by means of their orderliness.<sup>220</sup>

{15.2} Anyone who, with his senses informed by reason, has considered the magnitude of visible things in terms of their beauty and nature, allowing no room for sensation to operate independently of the reins of reason, nor allowing reason itself to range beyond the simplicity of the intellect, [1216B] but who, through the mediating power of reason, conducts the forms and figures perceived by the senses toward their manifold inner principles, and concentrates the manifold diversity of the principles that are in beings (discovered through the power of reason) into a uniform, simple, and undifferentiated intuition, in which that knowledge, which is called indivisible,

<sup>216</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, CH 15.5 (55, lines 9-11; 333B).

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Elias, *Prolegomenon to Philosophy* 11 (CAG 18/1:31, lines 1-2); and Philo, *On the Cherubim* 105 (LCL 2:70).

<sup>218</sup> See above, Amb 10.56, n. 146.

<sup>219</sup> According to some modern scholars, a “better explanation” is simply to emend “geometry” to “immoderate laughter” (γέλω ἀμετρία [*sic*]), since (1) Gregory mentions laughter in his summary of these remarks (Or. 27.5); (2) the phrase γέλωτος ἀμετρία is attested in Or. 11.5 (PG 35:837B); and (3) “laughter” is the word found in two ancient Syriac translations of Or. 27.4. However, Paul Gallay, the modern editor of Or. 27, refutes these arguments and retains the word “geometry” (SC 250:80, n. 2). Note, too, that Maximus was aware of the hazards involved in the transmission of texts (cf. PG 91:129B), and thus capable of discerning a *lapsus calami*, to say nothing of the fact that Gregory can hardly be advocating *moderate* laughter at a funeral. For discussion and bibliography, see Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 90-91, who supports the emendation.

## Ambiguum 15

<sup>220</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.6 (SC 250:110, lines 1-6).

non-quantitative, and unitary, consists—such a person, I say, through the medium of visible things and their good order, has acquired a true impression (as much as is humanly possible) of their creator, sustainer, and originator, and has come to know God, not in His essence and subsistence (for this is impossible and beyond our grasp), but only with respect to the simple fact that He exists.

{15.3} And these things come about after a person has made the complete [1216C] sensory transition through what is configured as local position and form, impression and imagination,<sup>221</sup> and when—at the risk of stating the obvious<sup>222</sup>—he finds himself completely beyond the level on which the intelligible principles of beings are differentiated, interposing himself as a kind of boundary between God and all that comes after God, for whereas God remains wholly transcendent, untouched by anything, outstripping even our highest intuitions, created things have been left behind, having been transcended by the abundance of knowledge that marks the intellect, and appearing far below any conceptual understanding, because what at any rate exists above them has been truly and surely understood.

{15.4} These, as it seems to me, are the things that the teacher is hinting at when, in terms of the reason given above, he refers to “sight” and the “natural law”—although he does not identify, as some have thought, sight and the natural law. To be sure, they both [1216D] operate in relation to the same objects, but they nonetheless admit of a conceptual distinction that sets them apart, for the power of sight, independently of reason, is grounded solely in its capacity to touch upon visible objects, beyond which it is not able to progress, whereas natural law examines these objects in conjunction with reason, and by means of the intellect it rightly and wisely transcends them, since the law of nature, through the power of sight, had already introduced the concept and belief that God exists.

{15.5} By “sight” he means the simple contact that sensation makes with physical objects, not the determinate mode of such contact, for it is not the property of simple sensation to compare objects and draw conclusions from them by syllogistic thinking.<sup>223</sup> By “natural law,” on the other hand, he means the natural activity, which, operating through sensation, unfolds in conformity with intellect and reason, [1217A] and drives the ascent from lower things to higher ones, along the way engaging in close, careful investigation. In saying that “visible things are moved and carried along without motion,” the teacher was referring to the intelligible principle according to which they were created, for they are unchanging in their nature, potential, and activity, as well as in their rank and station in the general order of things, so that they do not in any way go beyond their natural properties or change into other things and become confused with them. Yet they are in motion according to the principle of flux and counter flux,<sup>224</sup> and so they increase and decrease in quantity, and undergo alteration in terms of their qualities, and, to speak strictly, by their mutual succession, inasmuch as those that come earlier perpetually make way for those that come later. And, simply, to sum it all up, all beings are absolutely stable and motionless

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<sup>221</sup> The sequence here seems to be: 1) place or position (i.e., of a sensible object), 2) the sensory form of that object, 3) the mental impression received from that object, and 4) the mental image derived from the impression.

<sup>222</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *Or.* 7.2 (405:184, lines 8-9).

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* (CAG 11:204-5, lines 11-14).

<sup>224</sup> Cf. QThp 118 (PG 90:1400BC); and David, *Prolegomenon to Philosophy*, where this phrase occurs six times (CAG 18/2, p. 3, lines 33-34; p. 4, lines 6, 10, and 22-23; p. 5, line 15; p. 6, line 1). See also: John Philoponos, *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* (CAG 13/3:439, lines 8-10); Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Caelo* (CAG 7:599, lines 20-25); and Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Diehl 1903, 28, lines 23-25.)

according to the principle by which they were given subsistence and by which they exist, but by virtue of the principle of what is contemplated around them, [1217B] they are all in motion and unstable, and it is on this level that God's dispensation of the universe wisely unfolds and is played out to the end.

**{15.6}** They say, however, that "motion" is not identical to "locomotion."<sup>225</sup> "Motion," they say, belongs to things subject to generation and corruption, since what is contemplated around them admits of greater or lesser (although strictly speaking one may equally ascribe this same characteristic to all beings). On the other hand, they say that "locomotion" refers to the whirling round of that substance which is moved incessantly in a circle. I do not know which one of the two is safe for someone who dares speak about the universe to say that it is active by nature or being acted upon, although strictly speaking, "being moved locally" corresponds to "being acted upon." For no being is completely self-actualized, since it is not self-caused, and whatever is not self-caused is necessarily moved by a cause, which is to say that it is actualized [1217C] by being naturally set in motion by its cause, for which and to which it continues in motion. For nothing that moves does so in any way independently of a cause.

**{15.7}** But the beginning of every natural motion is the origin (*genesis*) of the things that are moved, and the beginning of the origin of whatever has been originated is God, for He is the author of origination. The end of the natural motion of whatever has been originated is rest (*stasis*), which, after the passage beyond finite things, is produced completely by infinity, for in the absence of any spatial or temporal interval, every motion of whatever is naturally moved ceases, henceforth having nowhere, and no means whereby, and nothing to which it could be moved, since it has attained its goal and cause, which is God, who is Himself the limit of the infinite horizon that limits all motion. Thus the beginning and end of every origin and motion of [1217D] beings is God, for it is from Him that they have come into being, and by Him that they are moved, and it is in Him that they will achieve rest. But every natural motion of beings logically presupposes their origin, just as every condition of rest logically presupposes natural motion. If, then, motion naturally presupposes origin, and rest presupposes motion, it is obvious that origin and rest cannot possibly be among those things which are simultaneous in existence,<sup>226</sup> since between them stands a natural obstacle that separates them: motion. For rest is not a natural activity inherent within the origin of creatures, but is rather the end of their potentiality or activity, or whatever one might wish to call it. [1220A] For it was for activity that created things were brought into being, and every activity exists in relation to a particular goal, otherwise it is incomplete.<sup>227</sup> For whatever does not have a goal of its natural activities is not complete, but the goal of natural activities is the repose of creaturely motion in relation to its cause.

**{15.8}** So that from one example we might understand the form of motion that obtains among all beings, take, for instance, the soul, which is an intellectual and rational substance, which thinks and reasons. Its potentiality is the intellect, its motion is the process of thinking, and its actuality is thought, for this last is the terminus of thinking, as well as of the thinker and the thing thought about, since it limits and

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 260a26-261b28; Plotinos, *On the Movement of Heaven* (2.2) (LCL 2:42-44); Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 14 (CAG 8:427-28, lines 15-10). "Locomotion" renders the Greek word *phora*, which elsewhere in this translation is rendered as "carrying" or (in passive forms) "being carried" or "being carried along."

<sup>226</sup> On the "simultaneous," see above, Amb 7.40, n. 99.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 201b31-35.



defines the relationship of the two poles that frame the entire process.<sup>228</sup> For when the thinking soul arrives at a complete thought, the process of thinking that led to it comes to a stop, since strictly speaking the actualization of a complete thought takes place only once, after which it no longer [1220B] draws forth the potential of the soul to think, and in this way every completed thought attains the condition of rest, which is the cessation of the activity of thinking relative to that particular thought. Thus when all the thoughts of all sensible and intelligible thinking beings reach the end of the process of thought, they cease, as do all the things being thought about, along with the whole of natural intellectual motion and its relation to all relative objects of thought, for the soul has nothing left to think about, having thought through everything that is naturally thinkable, after which, in a manner beyond intellect and reason and knowledge, without thought, without knowing, and without words, it simply casts itself forward to be united with God, without thinking in any way whatsoever, or reasoning about God.

**{15.9}** For God is not an object of knowledge or predication, so that He might be intellectually grasped by the soul according to a certain condition, but rather according to simple [1220C] union, unconditioned and beyond all thought, on the basis of a certain unutterable and indefinable principle, which is known only to the One who grants this ineffable grace to the worthy, that is, it is known only to God, and to those who in the future will come to experience it, when all things will be free from all change and alteration, when the endless, multiform movement of beings around particular objects will come to an end in the infinity that is around God, in which all things that are in motion will come to rest. For infinity is around God, but it is not God Himself, for He incomparably transcends even this.<sup>229</sup>

**{15.10}** Thus I think that whoever teaches the pre-existence of souls, and promulgates the existence of a wholly motionless “unity” of rational beings,<sup>230</sup> is rightly deserving of total condemnation, for after the manner of the Greeks he has mixed together the immiscible, and asserts that the origin of rational beings is simultaneous in existence with their rest. For it is [1220D] irreconcilable with true thinking that origin should be conceived of as anterior to rest,<sup>231</sup> since rest by nature is devoid of motion; and it is equally impossible to conceive of rest as subsequent to an origin devoid of motion, or to conceive of rest and origination together. For such rest is not a potential contained within origination, so that it might be conceived of together with the origination of all things that have come into being, but is rather the end of the potential activity in the origin of created things. Simply put, to speak concisely, rest is a relative concept, which is not relative to origin but to motion, with respect to which it stands in contradistinction, with no reference whatsoever to origin, with respect to which it does not stand in contradistinction. Thus when the word “rest” is spoken, I understand it to mean solely the cessation of motion.

**{15.11}** If, then, origination and rest are not among those things that are “simultaneous” according to their existence, [1221A] it follows that whoever proclaims such a thing obviously falsifies the word of truth, and he teaches, not simply the pre-existence of a “unity” of rational beings, but the simultaneous existence in this “unity” of immobility and origination. And if someone should ask: “How can rest be attributed to God without it having been preceded by motion?” I

<sup>228</sup> Cf. id., *An* 423b7.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Amb 10.10; Amb 10.99; CT 1.48-49 (PG 90:1100D-1101A); and the note in Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 95, n. 49.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.2.

<sup>231</sup> I.e., without the interposition of motion.

would answer first by saying that the Creator and creation are not the same, as if what is attributed to the one must by necessity be attributed likewise to the other, for if this were the case the natural differences between them would no longer be evident. I would, in the second place, state the principal objection: strictly speaking, God neither moves nor is stationary (for these are properties of naturally finite beings, which have a beginning and an end); He effects absolutely nothing, nor does He suffer any of those things which are conceived or said of Him among ourselves, since by virtue of His nature He is beyond all motion and rest, and in no way is subject [1221B] to our modes of existence.

{15.12} Let these things be said, by way of digression, about the need to affirm that no being by nature acts independently (so that we do not mindlessly introduce any kind of being after God existing without a cause), but that any being created by nature to act, naturally enacts its actions, upon receiving action.

### Ambiguum 16

{16.1} From Saint Gregory's same Theological Oration:

But if we say that God is "incorporeal," this term neither represents nor contains the divine essence. The same is true of "unbegotten," "beginningless," "immutable," and "incorruptible," indeed of whatever is said concerning God or of the things around God.<sup>232</sup> [1221C]

{16.2} I think that the teacher addressed these words to those who, believing that the condition of being "unbegotten" is the essence of the Father,<sup>233</sup> perversely teach that the Son is dissimilar to the Father. In this way, he teaches them to understand what is proper on the basis of things that are similar, so that, being led by the truth to true religion, they might together with us readily confess that the word "unbegotten" signifies only that the Father is without origin—themselves realizing that, were they to persist in asserting their doctrine that the "unbegotten" is the essence of God, they would be completely forced to maintain that the "incorporeal," and the "without beginning," and the "immortal," and the "immutable," and the "incorruptible" are also by necessity the essence of God, along with whatever else we say that God is by means of alpha-privative negations on account of His transcendence. [1221D] And being forced to be consistent with their own principles, they would be exposed and convicted for introducing many essences of God, and not one; and to speak more strictly and truly, they would be found to be suffering from the malady of Greek polytheism, and, being ashamed to admit such an impiety, they would surely abandon their madness even if they had no wish to do so. For the alpha-primitives or negations that are contemplated around something are not the thing itself (around which they are contemplated), otherwise they would assuredly be among the items signifying what this thing is, as being that very same thing, and not signifying what the thing is not. If this were the case, [1224A] then negations would prove to be the definitions of the things of which they are predicated, which is absurd and impossible. For the definitions of things are not based on what does not constitute their existence, but on those items from which the things exist, items which expand and explain the summary designation of a thing, which is its name.<sup>234</sup> Therefore absolutely nothing of what is said "about God or the things around God" can ever be the essence of God, for not

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### Ambiguum 16

<sup>232</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.9 (SC 250:116-118, lines 4-8).

<sup>233</sup> A reference to the theology of Eunomios, who argued that because God "exists before all things, He is unbegotten, or rather, His unbegottenness is unbegotten essence" (Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 40).

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* 1.275 (ed. Westerink 1954, 127).

even a positive affirmation (which is uniquely appropriate to God alone), devoid of all relation, and detached from the energy around a thing, is able to manifest that thing according to what it is in its essence.<sup>235</sup>

### **Ambiguum 17**

{17.1} From Saint Gregory's same Theological Oration:

Predicating a "body" or "is begotten" of something or other is not enough [1224B] to set forth and signify the entity to which these predicates refer, but it is necessary to mention the subject of these predicates, if one aims to set forth completely and sufficiently an object of knowledge; for whether it is a man, or an ox, or a horse, it will be "embodied" and "corruptible."<sup>236</sup>

{17.2} Inasmuch as Saint Gregory saw that the sole aim of the heretics<sup>237</sup> was ignorantly to drag down together with themselves the nature beyond all being, and that, by means of pedantic logical arguments, they were endeavoring intellectually to delimit and dominate (so they thought) the indomitable power that without exception is incomprehensible to all creation, he elected, throughout the whole of this oration, to refer absolutely all privative and negative language to God, [1224C] admitting no positive or cataphatic categories whatsoever, so that his opponents might not snap at them like *shameless curs*, and rabidly sink their poisonous teeth into the word of truth. For they would have seized upon any positive statement about God as an opportunity to push forward their irrational propositions, in the hopes of bringing their project to completion. This is why he does not state either that God is corporeal, or an immaterial corporeality, or absolutely incorporeal, or that He is in the universe, or in a particular element of the universe, or beyond the universe, and this is why, to put it simply, he does not assert that God is in any way or manner contained within any of the things that are seen, or contained, or uttered, or thought, or which in any way can be known—and this is true—thereby beating back his opponents on all sides from any comprehensive notion that might be misconstrued as knowledge of God in [1224D] His essence.

{17.3} In the second place, he makes these remarks because he is trying to lead his opponents to true piety in a more conciliatory fashion, and because he wants to show them that it is not right for someone to dare to form a mental concept or describe with words what is general concerning God, based on one's examination of things that are secondary and incomparably distant from God.<sup>238</sup> At the same time, he wishes to stress what he has already said to them about privative and apophatic language,<sup>239</sup> so that they might realize that precise comprehension even of the most infinitesimal creatures is beyond the reach of our rational activity,<sup>240</sup> and accordingly restrain the irrational impulse of their intellectual arrogance—which claimed knowledge of things

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<sup>235</sup> That the mere negation of attributes fails to disclose the positive content of a thing is an argument that Maximus draws directly from the same section of Gregory's oration, and which indeed is the major theme of this oration as a whole. The argument itself goes back to Aristotle, *Top* 101b37; cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics* 1.5 (CAG 2/2:41-43, lines 20-8).

### **Ambiguum 17**

<sup>236</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.9 (SC 250:118, lines 13-18).

<sup>237</sup> I.e., Eunomios and his associates, cf. above, Amb 16.1, n. 233.

<sup>238</sup> What is "general" in God is the divine essence.

<sup>239</sup> I.e., in the excerpt cited at the head of Amb 16.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* 1.275: "What something 'means' and what something 'is' are different, inasmuch as 'meaning' is the explanation of a thing based on a particular notion of it, whereas what something 'is' requires precise comprehension (*akribes katalepsis*) of its nature" (ed. Westerink 1954, 127, lines 8-11).

much greater—by learning [1225A] the natural limits of the mind in little things. For if we were to examine, for example, a particular compound,<sup>241</sup> such as a man, or a horse, or an ox, it is not enough, if we wish to have complete comprehension of it, simply to say that the compound in question is a “body,”<sup>242</sup> or that a man, or an ox, or a horse are simply “begotten,” or “suffer corruption,” but we must also set forth the subject of these predicates, for it is the subject which is born, suffers corruption, and is marked by qualities.<sup>243</sup> But a “body” as such is neither “birth” nor “corruption,” for if it were, it would necessarily follow that, if something is a body, it would also be a compound, or if something is begotten or corruptible, it would be either a man, or an ox, or a horse. But because something is a body does not mean that it is necessarily an compound, or a man, an ox, or a horse.

{17.4} If, on the other hand, something is a compound, then it must necessarily also be a body; but if something is a body, it is not necessarily a compound. In the same way, if something is a body, or begotten, or suffers corruption, it is not necessarily a man, otherwise every body that is born and suffers corruption would be a man. But if something is a man, it must [1225B] necessarily have a body, and be born, and suffer corruption; yet that which has a body, and which is born, and suffers corruption, is not necessarily a man. Neither does it follow that, if something is a man, it must necessarily also be a compound, and an ox, and a horse, or anything else with a body that is born and suffers corruption. For particulars are never predicated of universals, nor the species of the genera, nor what is contained of what contains,<sup>244</sup> and this is why universals cannot be converted<sup>245</sup> into particulars, nor genera into species, nor common qualities into the traits of an individual, [1225C] nor—to put it concisely—what contains into what is contained.

{17.5} Therefore one must think of the ox and the horse, or of anything whatever, in a manner consistent with the foregoing explanation. And if we wish to have complete knowledge of things, it is not enough to enumerate the multitude of characteristics contemplated around them—I mean by saying that something is corporeal, or is born, or suffers corruption, or whatever else is around the subject—but it is absolutely necessary that we also indicate what is the subject of these characteristics, which is the foundation, as it were, upon which they stand, if we wish to set forth completely and without remainder the object of our thoughts. For if we have to say “man,” or “ox,” or “horse,” these things are not simply “body,” but rather embodied things;

<sup>241</sup> “Compound” freely renders the Greek word *stoicheion* (“element”), which in this context denotes an elemental quality, component feature, or set of properties that mark an otherwise unqualified body or material substrate; cf. Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* (CAG 9:227-28); and QThal 55 (CCSG 7:489, lines 145-48), where *stoicheion* and *hypokeimenon* are closely identified.

<sup>242</sup> I.e., not the human body as such, but a mathematical or three-dimensional solid; cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 204b 5, 209a 4; *Met* 1020a 13.

<sup>243</sup> According to Aristotle, *Cat* 1a20, a “subject” (*hypokeimenon*) is a logical subject of predication, a “substrate” to which attributes are assigned. Aristotle speaks of predicates being “in” a particular subject, and defines this “in” as not being a “part” of the subject, e.g., “man” is predicated of an individual but is not “in” any particular subject (cf. *Met* 1017b13; *Top* 127b3). Such a view, however, seemed to reduce substantive characteristics to accidents, and was vigorously debated by later commentators; for the debate, see Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 8:44-75).

<sup>244</sup> In the logic of Porphyry, the fundamental rule of predication is that the higher, more generic terms are predicated of the lower ones, and never the reverse. Similarly, the higher terms “contain” the lower ones, and the lower are “contained” by the higher, and thus the species “man” belongs to the genus of “living beings,” but not vice versa.

<sup>245</sup> “Conversion” (*antistrephein*), also known as “counter-predication” (*antikategorein*), is a defining mark of Aristotelian properties, so that if X is a property of Y, then X is true of everything of which Y is true and Y is true of everything of which X is true; cf. Barnes *Porphyry*, 209-10.

neither are they “births” and “corruptions,” but things that are born and suffer corruption, so that these characteristics—by which I mean having a body, being born, and suffering corruption—which refer to living beings, are not the living beings themselves.<sup>246</sup>

{17.6} [1225D] If, then, no being whatsoever coincides in its essence with what is and is called the assemblage of characteristics that are recognized and predicated of it,<sup>247</sup> but to the contrary is something different from these characteristics, to which they all refer, and which holds them all together, but is in no way held together by them—for it is not derived from them, nor is it identical with them, or with anything from among them, neither is it derived from some of them, or from one of them, nor is it to be numbered among any of the things that are, and are said to be, around it—if, I say, this is so, then all those accustomed to idle impiety must cease to pounce impudently upon every word predicated of God, and, having learned their [1228A] limits in small matters, they should honor by silence the ineffable reality of the divine essence, which transcends all thought and knowledge. For as Saint Gregory had previously stated, consistent with true doctrine, “not even a small measure of the precise understanding of creation”<sup>248</sup> falls within the compass of our knowledge, a statement which affords me the opportunity to enlarge upon my theme, and to marvel at the inscrutability of the wisdom that transcends all things.

{17.7} For who, among even the wisest in this world, trusting solely in the powers of his reason, and emboldened by groundless logical proofs, could grasp by means of logic the magnitude of beings, reduce it to words, and set the whole of it before us? What are the intelligible principles that were first embedded within the subsistence of beings, according to which each being is and has its nature, and from which each was formed, shaped, and [1228B] structured, and endowed with power, the ability to act, and to be acted upon, not to mention the differences and properties in terms of quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, movement, and inclination—owing to which our own power of reason is of a nature wondrously to expand equally into intellect, and then into thinking, and then into concepts, and from thence to understanding, but also to self-reflection and interior discourse, which may then be exteriorized, and given volume, that is, by speaking and crying out, and again be gathered up and interiorized, disengaged from the differences and properties manifested in science and art, which pertain to quantity, and quality, and all the rest, enumerated above?

{17.8} What human being, as I have said, can know the intelligible principles of beings as they are in themselves, and how they are distinct from each other? Who can grasp how they have an immovable, natural rest, and a natural movement that prevents them from being transformed into one another? [1228C] Or how they have rest in motion, and—what is even more paradoxical—their motion in rest? What is the bond that unites things that are diametrically opposed, so that they constitute a single world? What is the mode by which their orderly and unconfused movement is governed? Indeed what, in our own bodies, is this complexion of opposites blended together in a synthesis, which brings things separated by nature into an amicable community, subduing, by virtue of the mean, the severities of the extremes, leading

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* (CAG 4/1:82, lines 5-22; p. 96, lines 7-13).

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *Isagoge* (CAG 4/1:7), where the subject seems to consist solely in the “assemblage” of its characteristics (or accidents), a doctrine which became the focus of an elaborate dispute between the Peripatetics and Platonists, with Maximos marking out a position on the Platonist side of the debate; see the remarks of Barnes, *Porphyry*, 152-53; 342-45.

<sup>248</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.5 (SC 250:108, lines 5-6).

each to inhere within the other without the loss of their integrity, but rather preserving the elements of the synthesis, which is the reciprocal presence of one extreme in the other by virtue of the blending?<sup>249</sup> Who can say how each of these elements exists, and what it is, or to where it carries things, or to where it is carried, and for what purpose it comes into being, or carries or is carried along?—and this not [1228D] simply, as was said a moment ago, in terms of the pre-existing intelligible principles, but with respect to the innumerable modes whereby each one by itself, and again with all the others, is divided and united both in thought and actuality?

{17.9} What, in turn, is the principle that underlies each particular substance, nature, species, form, compound, potential, actuality, and passivity? What, on the other hand, is the general principle which through mediation brings about the reciprocal convergence of the extremes from their respective limits, so that the thinking mind can be bound together with the object of its thought through the mean of thinking, that is, through a relationship that unifies the two divided extremes around the outcome of both—which is a thought—and which is at the same time their mutual convergence and integration, so that absolutely none of the things [1229A] after God are seen to be free of circumscription?<sup>250</sup> In the same way, all objects of sense and all sentient beings—that is, beings possessing the power of sense perception—are joined together through the mediation of sensation, which is a kind of common relationship of the two separated extremes. It is common to the one class, since by means of sense perception they apprehend sensible objects; and again to the other class, since it is through sense perception that they are apprehended by sentient beings through sensation, in which the two potentialities enabled by the common relation reach their limit, and around which the two poles are unified through the same mediating relation.<sup>251</sup>

{17.10} [1229B] When endeavoring to look deeply into these intelligible principles of the things mentioned above, or even into one of them, one is left feeling completely debilitated and speechless, for the intellect finds nothing to grasp, except for the divine power. And I think this is the sense of what Saint Gregory said, in an effort to train our minds in piety, namely, “even a small measure of the precise knowledge of creation is beyond our grasp.”<sup>252</sup> As for the other point, that “far before these things is that nature which transcends them, and of which they are the effects, while the nature itself is inconceivable and incomprehensible,”<sup>253</sup> this is, on the one hand, a reference to creation, and, on the other, to the nature that transcends creation, from which “they”—in other words, creatures—are derived from that which is “inconceivable and

<sup>249</sup> The relation or proportion of “extremes” and “mean terms” is already prominent in Plato’s *Timaeus* 31c-32a, where it is used by the demiurge to link and unify the elements of the world, constituting a system of analogy that could be illustrated in various fields (physics, geometry, harmonics, etc.). Among the Neoplatonist commentators, this system hinged on a geometrical relation (*logos*) between “extreme” and “mean” terms (i.e., in geometric proportion:  $1 : 2 = 2 : 4$ )—not of an equal qualitative difference (as in arithmetic proportion:  $1 : 2 = 2 : 3$ ), nor of the same fractions of extremes (as in harmonics:  $3 : 4 = 4 : 6$ )—resulting in the identity of relation that the mean term produces in regard to the extremes, binding them together and communicating to each the same relation; cf. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 187-90. This is a basic ordering principle for Maximus, who deploys it in a wide range of contexts, cf. below, Amb 19.2; Amb 41.2-3; Amb 50.3; Amb 67.10; Amb 71.5; QThal 62 (CCSG 2:117, lines 33-39); and the sixth *scholion* on Letter 1 (PG 91:392C).

<sup>250</sup> Cf. above, Amb 15.8.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* 1.11: “See then, how, like links in a chain, the powers of the living creature hold on to each other; for intellect and sense perception and object of sense being three, sense perception is in the middle (*meson*), while intellect and object of sense occupy each extreme (*akron*)” (LCL 1:165).

<sup>252</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.5 (SC 250:108, lines 5-6).

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. (SC 250:110, lines 10-11).

incomprehensible.” The words that follow this, “not *that* it is, but *what* it is,”<sup>254</sup> were uttered in response to an anticipated objection. So as not to be overtaken by a rebuttal from his interlocutor, saying, “If, then, [1229C] what we worship is totally beyond comprehension, it follows that *the preaching of Christians is in vain, and our faith is in vain*, founded as it is on nothing at all,” Saint Gregory added these words, and so forestalled the insolent word or man. I did not say that the nature in question is “incomprehensible” in terms of whether or not it exists, but in terms of what it is, and to confirm this point he adds: “being persuaded of a thing’s existence is quite different from knowledge of what it may be.”<sup>255</sup> In other words, there is a great difference between being persuaded that something exists, and possessing a precise comprehension of its essence. Do not, then—he means to say—because in good faith I said that the divine essence is incomprehensible, treacherously twist my words to mean that I am saying that its very existence is beyond comprehension, and from this conclude that I am promoting outright atheism. [1229D]

{17.11} Shortly after this, he says, “What can your conception of the Divine be, if you rely wholly on the methods of deductive argument?” (that is, if you believe that by reason you can enclose what you seek within a fragment of knowledge.) “Is it corporeal?” (that is, is it embodied?) “How then can it be infinite, and undefined, and formless, and impalpable, and invisible?”<sup>256</sup> His aim here is to make clear and intelligible, on the basis of prevailing common concepts,<sup>257</sup> that the Divine is infinite, which means not having boundaries. For having boundaries is the property of something that is contained in fact by four boundaries: point, line, surface, and volume; [1232A] as well as by three dimensions: height, width, and depth, which themselves are contained by six boundaries, since each one is bounded by two: “height” by an upper and lower limit, “width” on either side by right or left, and “depth” by front and back. The same common concepts demonstrate that God is indeterminate, that is, He is not susceptible of a discursive explanation, describing in detail what elements constitute His substance, or in what place He is located, or the nature of His beginning or end in time. Again, these same concepts also demonstrate that God is formless, for He is neither spherical, nor rectangular, nor upright, nor inclining, and, to be sure, not something palpable or visible, for He is not subject to apprehension by sense perception (which is proper to bodies). It follows from these refutations that it would be irrational to think that God is corporeal or in any way embodied, [1232B] a condition that would impose upon Him all the divisions into a multitude of parts to which bodies are subject.

{17.12} For the Divine is completely without parts, because it is completely without quantity; and it is completely without quantity because it is completely devoid of qualities; and it is completely devoid of qualities because it is completely simple; and it is completely simple because it is completely without extension or dimension; and it is completely without extension or dimension because it is completely infinite; and it is completely infinite, because it is completely free of movement (for that which has

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. (SC 250:110, line 12). Gregory is here referring to his previous statement about the “incomprehensibility” of the transcendent cause, and says: “I do not mean comprehending *that* it is, but *what* it is.”

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. (SC 250:110, lines 16-18).

<sup>256</sup> Id., Or. 28.7 (SC 250:112-14, lines 4-6).

<sup>257</sup> “Common concepts” (or “notions”) is the ubiquitous Stoic phrase for certain innate, immutable truths universally held by all mankind (e.g., divine providence, divine omniscience), which the Neoplatonists combined with a) the Aristotelian notion that certain principles are known, not by demonstration, but by intellectual insight, and b) with the geometrical concept of certain truths as axiomatic; cf. below, Amb 28.2.

nowhere to move to never moves); and it is completely free of movement, because it is without beginning (for there is nothing greater that is anterior to it, nor is there anything alongside it that is equal with it, nor is there anything subsequent to it that could parallel or contain it); and it is completely without beginning, because it is completely unbegotten; and it is completely unbegotten, because it is completely one and supremely singular above all others; and it is completely one and supremely singular above all others, because it is absolutely undetermined, and this is why it is, [1232C] in every respect, ineffable and unknown, and why it remains, for all who move toward it rightly and with reverence, the ultimate limit of knowledge, for the ultimate truth that we can know about it is that it cannot be known.<sup>258</sup>

## Ambiguum 18

**{18.1}** From Saint Gregory's same Theological Oration:

If what does not exist is nowhere, then perhaps what is nowhere does not exist; but if it (i.e., the Divine) is somewhere, as it surely must be, since it exists, then either it is in the universe, or beyond the universe.<sup>259</sup>

**{18.2}** Upon hearing these words, perhaps a listener might ask, "Why did the teacher make the antistrophe<sup>260</sup> ambiguous by the addition of the adverb 'perhaps,' since it is obvious to all that, consistent with rational premises, [1232D] it is conceded absolutely rightly that what is nowhere does not exist?" To this I would say (to the extent granted by the deficiency of my impoverished mind), that, in responding to Eunomios, and those of his party, who claim that they know God as God knows Himself, the teacher wished to restrain them from their great madness, and with these words maneuvered them into a position of logical absurdity. For in saying that they know God as God knows Himself, it necessarily follows that they would either have to disclose the location of the One whom they claim to know, thereby demonstrating their complete comprehension of what is signified,<sup>261</sup> for on their terms God is no [1233A] different from created beings, since He too is circumscribed in a particular place—and what could be more absurd than this? Or, if they are unable to name this place, then, on the terms of the argument, they would have to admit that the Deity does not exist—and what could be more godless than this? (For how and what sort of thing could exist without having its existence somewhere?). The only other alternative, consistent with the logic of their argument, would constrain them to acknowledge that "God does exist, but exists nowhere," and that therefore there is a God and that He exists, even though they do not know what He is or how He exists. For if the location of the Deity is unknown to them, how much more unknown will the essence of the Deity be to them? For this reason the exigencies of piety will require them to confess that what is not known by them exists nowhere.

**{18.3}** It was, I think, for this reason that, in the course of confronting the Eunomians, the teacher made the antistrophe [1233B] ambiguous by inserting the adverb "perhaps," and leaving it up to us to understand that the expression "what exists nowhere" does not, in any way, introduce a being that does not exist at all. For we say that God exists, but not in a particular place, since His essential existence is not spatially circumscribed, and He exists absolutely, since He has no need whatsoever of

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, Letter 1 (157, lines 1-5; 1065AB).

## Ambiguum 18

<sup>259</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.10 (SC 250:120, lines 4-6).

<sup>260</sup> The "antistrophe" is a rhetorical figure in which the same word or phrase is repeated at the end of successive clauses, or in which—as in this case—the repeated phrase is inverted.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. above, Amb 17.3, n. 240.



any beings in order to exist, without which He has existed, exists, and will be able to exist eternally, or rather who exists eternally, because one who existed prior to beings cannot have beings as His “place.” If, among us, artisans are absolutely unable to circumscribe the existence and subsistence of being within their works of art—a being which is subject to corruption, and which, to speak truly and correctly, has no existence—what could someone say about that ineffable and unknowable power that not even the totality of beings could contain and which is [1233C] always the same and unchanging?

### **Ambiguum 19**

**{19.1}** From Saint Gregory’s same Theological Oration:

Whether this was an appearance during the day occurring in the imagination, or a truthful vision in the night, or an impression made on the governing power (i.e., the intellect) drawing near to future realities, as though they were present.<sup>262</sup>

**{19.2}** Our blessed father Saint Gregory, being utterly purified by practical philosophy from all that habitually defiles human nature, and with his intellect thoroughly imbued with the qualities of the Holy Spirit (owing to his dedication to divine contemplations), through his true initiation into true knowledge, experienced the same things as the holy prophets, and with these words he enumerates for us the different forms of prophecy. Now if one must be so bold as to undertake an examination of these words, which were spoken with such brilliance and divine inspiration, and which are far beyond the grasp of anyone who is not himself like the [1233D] teacher, it would seem best to do so conjecturally and not categorically.

**{19.3}** Now it seems to me (speaking conjecturally on account of my intellectual shortsightedness) that by an “appearance during the day occurring in the imagination,” he was referring to the vision and audition of things and words, seen and heard by the saints,<sup>263</sup> that were not caused by the presence of some other person, but spiritually, not unlike a kind of perception. For it is not necessarily right to claim that in the case of divine realities an actual image of them must be present in order to impress itself on the [1236A] imagination, but rather that in such cases the imagination, in a manner that is paradoxical and beyond nature, operates without the presence of another person, and without audible sounds vibrating through the air, so that the one being initiated into divine realities truly hears and sees. For every mental image is either of things past or present, because there can be no object-based image formed of things that have not yet happened.<sup>264</sup> For the imagination itself is a relation that mediates between two extremes. By “extremes” I mean the capacity to imagine something and that which is imagined,<sup>265</sup> from which, through the mediation of the imagination (which is a relation of two extremes), an image is produced, being the end product both of the activity of the imagining subject and the passivity of the imaged object, in which the two extremes have converged through the relational

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### **Ambiguum 19**

<sup>262</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.19 (SC 250:140, lines 24-27).

<sup>263</sup> In a phrase omitted from the excerpt, Gregory indeed states that the diurnal vision he is speaking of was “of the kind seen only by the saints” (ibid., line 25).

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *An* 429a1-2, 431a16-17, 431b2, 432a8-10; Augustine, Letter 7.3.6, who argues that there are no images independent of sense perception (CSEL 34:17, lines 4-22); and Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 6 (ed. Morani 1987, 55-56).

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *An* 432a31-432b1.

medium of the imagination.<sup>266</sup> For whatever [1236B] apprehends certain objects is said to accomplish this actively, whereas whatever is susceptible to the apprehension of something else is said to undergo this passively. Thus whatever comprehends exercises a natural activity, whereas whatever is comprehended experiences a natural passivity, and both this passivity and activity have as a limit their conjunction in the mean term. For this reason, in my opinion, we must not regard an image projected by an object as suitable in the case of divine realities, for they are not the projection into the present of that which by virtue of its own existence is already concretely present, for if this were the case it could not be accepted as something divine, since it possesses nothing beyond the order of nature. For if we ourselves in our dreams at night have the capacity to imagine various sights and sounds, frequently seeing and hearing someone speak who is not physically present,<sup>267</sup> to a much greater degree the saints in waking life are able to experience this, because what God, by means of a [1236C] paradoxical gift of grace, accomplishes within them when they are conscious, we experience in our sleep according to a law of nature.

{19.4} When he says “a truthful vision in the night,” I take him to mean either the precise comprehension of future events by the soul during sleep (as in the case of Joseph and Daniel), or a certain vision of divine realities, which is visible to the bodily eyes of the saints, by virtue of their extreme purity and dispassion. And when he speaks of “an impression made on the governing power,” I understand him to be stressing the forms of future events that are manifested to the saints, which occur in a unique manner, as if they were seeing a picture, according to a simple intellective intuition, which is without spatial or temporal extension.

{19.5} Though I myself have not received the grace of experience in these matters, I nevertheless was emboldened to speak of them conjecturally [1236D] in response to the one who charged me to do so.<sup>268</sup> If, however, someone who has received this grace should read what I have written here, let him not censure my hasty and perhaps impetuous judgments, but rather accept them in light of the obedience under which I wrote them, even if what I have said has no explanatory value for the subject at hand.

## Ambiguum 20

{20.1} From Saint Gregory’s same Theological Oration:

Had Paul been able to express the experiences gained from *the third heaven*, and his progress, or ascent, or assumption.<sup>269</sup>

{20.2} Those who with wisdom have studied the divine words say [1237A] that names are predicated of things according to the following three comprehensive categories: some names are predicated of an essence, others of a condition,<sup>270</sup> and still others of grace or perdition.<sup>271</sup> A name of an essence, for example, is when they say

<sup>266</sup> Cf. above, Amb 17.9; and Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* 3.11 (CAG 8:312, lines 21-27).

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *An* 428a5-7; and Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* 3.3 (CAG 11:209, lines 2-8).

<sup>268</sup> Maximos can say no more since, in the passage under consideration, Gregory himself acknowledges that he is not entirely sure of how the prophets beheld their visions.

## Ambiguum 20

<sup>269</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.20 (SC 250:140, lines 1-3).

<sup>270</sup> The words “essence” (*ousia*) and “condition” (*schesis*) can also be understood as “being (*or* substance)” and “relation.”

<sup>271</sup> The exact source of this teaching is unknown, although ancient grammarians and philosophers held that names (or “nouns,” as distinct from verbs) express either *ousia* or *schesis*, a doctrine that Maximos appears to have modified by deploying biblical language and themes in a Christian metaphysical

“man,” while that of a condition is when they say a “good,” or a “holy,” or a “wise man,” as well as the opposite of this, namely, a “wicked,” or “foolish,” or “impure man” (for the category of condition, in setting forth the way a particular thing is somehow related to something else<sup>272</sup> in the case of diametrical opposites, rightly names it on the basis of what characterizes its freely chosen, habitual state). Again, a name indicative of grace is when man, who has been obedient to God in all things, is named “God” in the Scriptures, as in the phrase: *I said, you are Gods*, for it is not by nature or condition that he has become and is called “God,” but he has become God and is so named by placement and grace.<sup>273</sup> For the grace of divinization is completely unconditioned, [1237B] because it finds no faculty or capacity of any sort within nature that could receive it, for if it did, it would no longer be grace but the manifestation of a natural activity latent within the potentiality of nature. And thus, again, what takes place would no longer be marvelous if divinization occurred simply in accordance with the receptive capacity of nature. Indeed it would rightly be a work of nature, and not a gift of God, and a person so divinized would be God by nature and would have to be called so in the proper sense. For natural potential in each and every being is nothing other than the unalterable movement of nature toward complete actuality. How, then, divinization could make the divinized person go out of himself, I fail to see, if it was something that lay within the bounds of his nature.<sup>274</sup> In the same manner, but in the case of what is contrary, [1237C] the sages give the names of “perdition,” “Hades,” “sons of perdition,” and the like, to those who by their disposition have set themselves on a course to non-existence, and who by their mode of life have reduced themselves to virtual nothingness.

{20.3} I think that our great and holy teacher, in elaborating on the rapture of the holy Apostle Paul, had the aforementioned principles in mind, and thus appropriately assigned to each aspect of the apostle’s experience the most fitting name or word. Thus I am of the opinion that he uses the word “progress” to name the habitual state of virtuous dispassion, which established the holy apostle above the level of natural necessity, for in his dispassion he entered into no voluntary relation with nature; indeed he went beyond even the natural activity of sense perception itself, or rather he transformed even this into a permanent spiritual state. By “ascent” the teacher designates both the abandonment of all sensory objects—which no longer affected or [1237D] were affected by the apostle’s senses—and the transcendence of natural cognitive contemplation in the spirit, which reflects on those objects. “Assumption” is the name given to Saint Paul’s subsequent remaining and abode<sup>275</sup> in God, which the teacher appropriately called an “assumption,” indicating that this was not something that the apostle accomplished, but rather experienced. For an “assumption” is the passive experience of the one being assumed, but the activity of the one who assumes.

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framework; cf. Dexippos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 4/2:11, lines 14-17; p. 26, lines 24-36); Proklos, *Commentary on Plato’s Cratylus* 68 (ed. Pasquali 1908, 13-19); Elias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 18/1:212-13); Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* (CAG 9:17-18, lines 38-13); Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.16 (SC 250:210); Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomios* 2 [586-90] (GNO 1:397-98); id., *To Eustathios* (GNO 3/1:15-16); and Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians* 4 (PG 61:658B).

<sup>272</sup> “How something is related to something else” (*pros ti pos echein*) is a technical term from Aristotle, *Cat* 8a32, b1-3; *AnPr* 41a4; cf. Porphyry, *Isagoge* 1.19 (CAG 4/1:1, line 19).

<sup>273</sup> On the word “placement” (*thesis*), which here is closely related to divinization (*theosis*), and with which it is sometimes confused in the manuscript tradition, see above, Amb 10.38, n. 136.

<sup>274</sup> Here Maximus states that the grace of divinization is an uncreated energy of God, cf. above, Amb 10.44, n. 140.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.2.

From that point forward, the apostle left behind the names pertaining to nature and its qualities that had properly been his, for he transcended human nature, virtue, and knowledge.<sup>276</sup> [1240A] And the name of God, which formerly stood at an infinite distance from him, he came to share by grace, becoming and being called God, in place of any other natural or conditional name that he had prior to his assumption. {20.4} Or, again, along these same lines, “progress” is the complete renunciation of nature through virtue, whereas “ascent” is the transcendence of those conditions in which nature finds itself, that is, place and time, in which beings have their existence. “Assumption,” moreover, is the restoration of all things by grace *to Him from whom they came forth, and through whom they were made, and to whom they strive*, as if to a universal boundary. And, again, to put it differently, “progress” is the apostle’s [1240B] progressive guidance of his disciples to virtue by means of practical philosophy, for he is their teacher, and it is necessary that in all things a teacher should be advanced beyond his disciples, so that their proper duties can be fulfilled. “Ascent” is the scientific comprehension of the intelligible principles in beings through natural contemplation, whereas “assumption” is the pious and ineffable initiation into true, theological wisdom. The “third heaven”—to hazard a conjecture—most probably signifies the boundaries that circumscribe practical philosophy and natural contemplation, as well as the highest principles of theological mystagogy, in other words, their limits, since there is a certain measure to the comprehension of virtue, and of nature, and of the theology pertaining to both, and this is determined for all beings by God in a manner appropriate to the nature of each. Now it was these boundaries and these limits that the blessed apostle reached, after he surpassed, as much as was possible, the principles of the [1240C] aforementioned realities. For if the outer boundary of all that is contained by nature within these limits is “heaven,” then it is also the boundary and limit of all that is perceived by the senses, and thus it is clear, according to the principle of anagogy, that every termination, which circumscribes the principles of a particular virtue or form of knowledge, inasmuch as it is the boundary of things bounded, and the limit of things delimited, is understood figuratively under the name of “heaven.”

{20.5} Again, when Scripture speaks of the “third heaven,” it may perhaps be referring to the three successive orders of holy angels that are immediately above us, which Saint Paul may have reached, being initiated into their positive affirmations through the negation of his own cognitions and imitating their permanent habits of mind through the transcendent negations of those proper to himself. For every nature of rational beings, in accordance with its order and potential, is initiated into and imitates the cognitive states, propositions, and affirmations of the order and essence above it, and it does this by way of privation, [1240D] that is, through the apophatic negations of what is proper to itself. In this way, the positive affirmation of the knowledge of what is ranked above is a negation of the knowledge of what is below, just as the negation of the knowledge of what is below implies the affirmation of what is above, progressing by way of negation until it arrives at that nature and order which, being the highest of all, transcends all the rest, after which—after all the orders and powers have been transcended—there follows the immediate negation of knowledge concerning God, a negation beyond any positive affirmation by absolutely any being, since there is no longer any boundary or limit that could define or frame the negation. For just as intelligible realities are the natural negation of the objects of sense perception, so too, among the beings and powers that fill the upper world, the

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.43.

transcendent knowledge that the highest have concerning God [1241A] is negated by those that come after them, owing to their lower order.

{20.6} For just as we are not able to grasp with our intellect the things that are intelligible to the holy angels that are above us, so too, these same angels, who are above us, are not able to grasp the things that are intelligible to the angels who are above them, and so on in order of ascent, so that the mind is raised up and elevated *from power to power*, passing through all the ranks and powers, until it reaches a limit in that which is ineffable, incomprehensible, and absolutely unknowable. “If,” according to Dionysios the Areopagite, “negations respecting divine things are true, whereas affirmative statements are unsuitable for the hiddenness of things that are ineffable,”<sup>277</sup> it is likely that the divine apostle, having negated the intellectual understanding of all cognitions, and finding himself beyond every relation to being, was obviously neither *in the body*, as he himself said, [1241B] since his power of sense perception was no longer active, *nor* again *outside the body*, since his power of intellectual understanding was inactive during the time of his rapture, according to which, in a manner that was ineffable and beyond cognition, he received certain words in the course of his initiation into things beyond this world, and, honoring them by silence, he shielded them from all expression, for they were not such as to be understood by the intellect, spoken by the tongue, or even received through hearing.

{20.7} As those who have experience in these matters say, in the aforementioned “progress” it is right *faith* and the genuine fear of God that bring about the perfect practice of virtue. With respect to “ascent,” sure *hope* and sound understanding bring about unerring natural contemplation. With respect to “assumption,” perfect *love*, and an intellect completely and voluntarily blind to beings by virtue of its condition of transcendence, brings about divinization.<sup>278</sup> And, again, they say, the task of practical [1241C] philosophy is to purge the intellect of all impassioned images, while that of natural contemplation is to show forth the intellect as understanding the science of beings in light of the cause that created them, while the aim of theological mystagogy is to establish one by grace in a state of being like God and equal to God, as much as this is possible, so that by virtue of this transcendence he will no longer give any thought to anything after God.

## Ambiguum 21

{21.1} [1241D] From Saint Gregory’s same Theological Oration:

John, the forerunner of the Word and great voice of the Truth, affirmed that *the lower world itself would not be able to contain them.*<sup>279</sup>

{21.2} Upon seeing the immense wisdom that God gave to this holy and great teacher of the truth, I had good reason to address to him the very words that David (that most illustrious of prophets and kings) addressed to God, for being struck by God’s boundless magnificence in all things, he was inspired to say: *Your knowledge is too marvelous, it is beyond me; [1244A] it is very difficult, I can never attain it.* And this was not unwarranted, for only by some marvel could he describe such indescribable power, there being no other support for the shifting foundation of his soul in the face of realities beyond explanation. As for me, it would have been quite sufficient, as I had said, to receive a blessing solely by marveling at the mind of the wise teacher, and not to be overly inquisitive concerning how and why, contrary to the literal sense

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<sup>277</sup> Dionysios, CH 2.3 (12-13, lines 20-2; 141A).

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Letter 2 (PG 91:396C).

## Ambiguum 21

<sup>279</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.20 (SC 250:142, lines 16-18).

of Scripture, he reassigns the names that the divine voice has mystically bestowed upon the saints, for in the passage cited above he refers to John,<sup>280</sup> *the son of thunder*, as the “forerunner.”<sup>281</sup> Yet since the *reward of obedience is great*, and more so because the commandment orders that we *obey our superiors*; and since I also know that to *study, and know and search the Scriptures, and meditate day and night on the divine law*, is placed among good [1244B] and proper pursuits, I shall speak of these matters according to the measure of my abilities and by way of conjectures, having placed my confidence in the prayers of the one who charged me with this task, for I fear the danger of delay and disobedience.

{21.3} I think that what the inspired teacher said, when, in contrast to the literal sense of Scripture, he called John the Evangelist the “forerunner of Christ” instead of the “son of thunder,” cannot be resolved by any means other than spiritual contemplation. For this alone is capable of smoothing out the apparent contradictions perceived among different elements on the literal level of things, revealing, in an incorporeal manner, that the truth present in all things is by nature simple and free of the thickness of words or bodies. We know that the great John the Baptist was named “forerunner” in relation to Him who was truly expected, and thus he was like a voice in relation to the Word, heralding the latter’s advent. He was like a lamp in relation to [1244C] the sun, that is, an artificial, conventional, and temporary source of illumination in relation to the light that is natural, essential, non-artificial, eternal, and inextinguishable.<sup>282</sup> He is also, I think, like the call to repentance in relation to righteousness, which by nature exists before repentance, but which by dispensation appears after it. In the same way, I believe that when the godly-minded teacher, in contrast to the literal sense of Scripture, called the great apostle John by the name of “forerunner,” he wanted to suggest that the great Evangelist, by means of his Gospel, is the forerunner of a greater and more mystical Word, which he points to, but which cannot be expressed in letters nor uttered with sounds made by a tongue of flesh.

{21.4} For the written form of the Holy Gospels is but elementary instruction when compared either to the knowledge that is acquired unfailingly by [1244D] those who are lifted up through the Gospels, and who spiritually remove from themselves the thickness of corporeal thinking, or to the knowledge that *will* be acquired after the future consummation of the things that are now in motion. For in the same way that the law, when compared to the knowledge hitherto manifested through it, was but elementary instruction for those who through it were being *tutored unto Christ*, the incarnate Word, and who were being gathered together for the Gospel that would be preached at His first coming—so too, I say, is the Holy Gospel but elementary instruction for those who through it are *tutored unto Christ*, the spiritual Word, and who are being gathered together for the world to come, which will be revealed at His second coming. Since the same Christ is both flesh and spirit, [1245A] He becomes the one or the other analogous to the form of knowledge in each, for every word is susceptible of expression through sounds and letters.

{21.5} I would even venture to affirm that every thought capable of forming an impression in the intellect is nothing other than an elementary outline, pointing to realities that are beyond it. This is why the Gospels are four in number, so that they

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<sup>280</sup> I.e., the Evangelist.

<sup>281</sup> I.e., John the Baptist. Though John the Baptist is not called the “forerunner” (or “precursor”) in the New Testament, this epithet became so closely identified with him in the Christian tradition that it came to function virtually as his proper name, and thus Gregory’s use of this title for John the Evangelist requires an explanation.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.14 (SC 358:136, lines 18-19).

might be intelligible to those who are still under the sway of sensation and corruption, for this world consists of the same number of elements.<sup>283</sup> The virtues, moreover, are also four in number, from which the spiritual world of the mind is constituted, enabling the inner principle of truth to encompass both the intelligible world within us and the world in which we find ourselves, bringing the two together in a union without confusion, and distinguishing them without division, through the correspondence of the elements of which they are composed. [1245B] They say, for example, that ether, which is the fiery element in the sensible world, corresponds to understanding in the world of the mind.<sup>284</sup> This is because understanding is a state of mind that illumines and reveals the spiritual principles inherent in each created being, unerringly bringing to light through these principles the cause that is present in them all, and succeeds in attracting the soul's desire for the divine. Air in the sensible world corresponds to *courage* in the world of the mind, since it is a permanent condition that is in motion, actively sustaining the existence of natural, spiritual life, and invigorating the tone of the soul in its ceaseless motion around the Divine. Water in the sensible world corresponds to temperance in the world of the mind, for it is a permanent condition that creates a spiritual, life-giving fecundity, and gives birth to an [1245C] eternal bubbling up of loving enchantment in one's desire for the Divine. Earth in the sensible world corresponds to justice in the world of the mind, for it is a condition engendering all the principles of created things according to their kind, equitably distributing to each its spiritual gifts of life, and granting them according to placement an immovable abode in the Beautiful that is proper to each.

{21.6} The Gospel according to Matthew mystically corresponds to earth and *justice*, since its account adheres closely to the natural order of things. The Gospel according to Mark occupies the place of water and temperance, since it begins with the baptism of John and the repentance he preached, by which temperance is established. Air and courage are the marks of the Gospel according to Luke, with its more expansive sentences and density of abundant narratives. [1245D] But the Gospel according to John is the element of ether and understanding, for it rises far above all the rest, and mystically teaches simple faith and thought concerning God. They say that, in another sense, the four Holy Gospels are symbols of faith, and of practical, natural, and theological contemplation. Of these, the Gospel of Matthew symbolizes faith, since it begins with the unbelieving magi, who brought gifts and worshiped Christ. Mark is the symbol of practical philosophy, for he begins his teaching with repentance, through which the practical life becomes a life of virtue. Natural philosophy is symbolized by Luke, since his interpretation of the account is more expansive, and the body of teaching is presented [1248A] according to suitable narrative modes. But the Gospel of John is the symbol of theology itself, since it begins and ends in a matter that is befitting to God.

{21.7} Again, just as the sensible world is, by nature, the most elementary guide of the five senses, falling under their powers of sensation and leading them to comprehend the world they perceive, so too, in the mind, the world of the virtues, falling under the powers of the soul, leads them in an elementary way to the spirit, making them uniform in their movement around the spirit alone, as they become increasingly grounded in their apprehensions of it. And even the senses of the body themselves, according to the more divine principle that is appropriate to them, are said

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<sup>283</sup> Cf. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.4.21 (SC 120:68); and Irenaeos, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8 (SC 211:160-67).

<sup>284</sup> "Understanding" renders the Greek word *phronesis*, which is more commonly rendered as "prudence," or sometimes "sagacity."

to be the elements for the powers of the [1248B] soul, gently guiding them into actualization through the perceptions of the inner principles of beings, through which, as if through letters, God the Word is legible to those with a sharp eye for the truth.<sup>285</sup> For this reason some have even called the senses paradigmatic images of the powers of the soul, since, according to a certain mystical principle, every sense along with its respective organ (that is, its organ of sense perception) has been given primordially and naturally an analogous power of the soul.<sup>286</sup> They say that the power of intellection, that is, of the intellect, corresponds to the sense of sight, while rationality, or the power of reason, corresponds to hearing. The incensive, spirited power corresponds to olfaction; desire to the gustatory sense; the vital force to touch; and, to put it all more simply and clearly: the sense of sight, or the [1248C] eye, is the image of the intellect; hearing, or the ear, is the symbol of reason; smell, or the nose, is the symbol of anger; taste is the symbol of desire; and touch symbolizes the power of life. {21.8} In accordance with the law of God, who created all things in wisdom, the soul is naturally conveyed by the vehicle, as it were, of the senses, which it sets in motion by its own powers, and by means of which it is variously transported through the sensible world. If the soul, in drawing on its own powers, makes proper use of the senses, it will single out the manifold principles of beings, and will be able wisely to transfer to itself the whole of what it sees—in which God is concealed and silently proclaimed—it will have succeeded in creating by the mind's power of free choice a superlatively beautiful and spiritual world within itself. Moreover, it will unite the four general virtues like elements in a synthesis, [1248D] and by means of the intellect will frame a world that will be completed by the spirit, since the soul endows each virtue with subsistence through the actualization of its own inner potentials in relation to the senses. For example, the virtue of understanding is realized through cognitive and scientific activity when the soul's intellectual and rational potential is made to converge with the senses of sight and hearing in the actual apprehension of their respective objects of sensation. Courage arises from the highest equilibrium that is realized through the convergence of the spirited<sup>287</sup> power with olfaction, that is, through the nostrils, which, as they say, is the courtyard of the breath, in the natural vicinity of its related objects of sense. Temperance is realized through the convergence of the measured use of [1249A] the desiring power with the sensation of taste, again, in conjunction with the respective organ of sense. Justice is realized through the equal, ordered, and harmonious distribution of vital power to more or less all objects of sense perception through the sense of touch.

{21.9} The soul subsequently learns to combine these four general virtues into two virtues that are more general, namely, *wisdom* and *gentleness*. This is possible because *wisdom* is the perfection and limit of what can be known, just as *gentleness* is the perfection and limit of what can be practiced. Thus from *understanding* and *justice* the soul fashions *wisdom*, since *wisdom* is the sustaining cause of the knowledge that pertains to *understanding*, as well as of science that pertains to *justice*, and in this way, as I have said, it is the goal and limit of all that can be known. From [1249B] *courage* and *temperance*, the soul fashions *gentleness*, which is nothing other than the complete immobility of anger and desire in relation to what is contrary to nature, a state that some have called dispassion, and for this reason it signals the consummation of what can be practiced. In turn, the soul draws together these two more general virtues into the most general virtue of all, by which I mean *love*, which

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.11 (156-57, lines 13-3; 708D-709A); and above, Amb 10.31.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. id., DN 7.2 (195, lines 16-17; 868C).

<sup>287</sup> Or, "irascible."



enraptures those who take their origin from it, leads forward those who abide within it, and unites those who, having set out toward it, strayed not from its course, and in it attained their goal; above all, love is that power which preeminently divinizes all.

**{21.10}** In this way, moving wisely and acting in conformity with the perfect divine principle according to which it exists and came into being, the soul apprehends sensible objects through its powers of sensation in a manner that is useful and beneficial, familiarizing itself with the spiritual principles within these objects, the senses—having already been “rationalized,” [1249C] as it were, by the profusion of reason—serve as vehicles of reason, and admit of the soul’s own powers, which latter the soul joins to the virtues, and, through the virtues, unites itself to the more divine principles that they contain. At the same time, the more divine principles of the virtues are united to the spiritual intellect imperceptibly hidden within them, while the spiritual intellect is united to these same principles, and so drives away the whole of the soul’s natural and voluntary relation to things that are present to it, and offers the simple, whole soul to the whole God. In response, God wholly embraces the soul along with the body that is connatural to it, and, in a way that is appropriate to each, assimilates both to Himself, so that He might be wholly manifested throughout the whole of the soul without restriction—He who of His own nature can in no way be manifested in any being whatsoever. [1249D]

**{21.11}** This is perhaps what the blessed and great teacher had in mind when, in his eulogy for his brother, Kaisarios, he spoke of the resurrection, saying: “After a time, it”—by which he obviously means the soul—“will receive back its kindred bit of flesh, with which it had meditated on the life to come, taking it back from the earth which gave it, and to which it had been entrusted, in a manner known to God, who bound them together and separated them; together with the body, his soul will receive the glory of heaven, and just as the soul shared in the body’s sufferings on account of their natural conjunction, so too will it give the body a share in its pleasures, since the whole of it will be absorbed by the soul, becoming one together with it: one spirit, one intellect, and one God, since *that which is mortal* and [1252A] *transient will be swallowed up by life*.”<sup>288</sup> For just as the flesh was swallowed up by corruption as a result of sin; and likewise the soul by the flesh (since it is known only through the activities of the body); and the knowledge of God by the soul’s complete ignorance (to the point of not even knowing whether or not God exists), so too, in the time of the resurrection—when the Holy Spirit will restore the correct order, for the sake of the God who became flesh—the flesh will be spiritually swallowed up by the soul, and the soul by God, who is true life, inasmuch as the soul will possess God exclusively, wholly manifested through all things to the whole soul, and, to put it simply, in contrast to the present state of affairs in which we now exist and live, all that is ours will be revealed under the aspect of the future by the divine grace of the resurrection, so that just as [1252B] death prevailed over this life and swallowed all through sin, death itself will be justly defeated by that life, and swallowed up by grace.

**{21.12}** All of these things will come about if the soul, as I have said, uses its own powers properly, and if, consistent with God’s purpose, it passes through the sensible world by way of the spiritual principles that exist within it, so that with understanding it arrives at God. If, however, it makes the wrong or mistaken use of these powers, delving into the world in a manner contrary to what is proper, it is obvious that it will succumb to dishonorable passions, and in the coming life will rightly be cast away from the presence of the divine glory, receiving the dreadful condemnation of being

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<sup>288</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 7.21 (SC 405:234, lines 12-20).

estranged from relation with God for infinite ages, a sentence it will not be able to contest, for it will have as a perpetually relentless accuser its own disposition, which created for it a mode of existence that in fact did not exist. But let us return to the main point.

{21.13} When John the Evangelist said: *There are also many* [1252C] *other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written*, he made it clear to us with these words that his writings were but a preliminary smoothing of the way for the more perfect and heretofore incomprehensible Word. If, then, someone were to characterize the holy John the Evangelist as a “forerunner” with this idea in mind, so that by means of his written Gospel he prepares the way for the mind to receive the more perfect Word, he would not fall outside the truth. And it is indeed on the basis of this idea that the teacher calls him a “great voice of truth,” which thundered forth spiritual things, because “thunder” is a sound that induces solely astonishment in those who hear it, without explaining anything clearly, and this is precisely an elementary discourse.<sup>289</sup> For every word given by God to man and written down in this present age [1252D] is a forerunner of the more perfect Word, which—through that word—is announced to the intellect, spiritually and without writing, and which will be manifested in the age to come, for whereas the written word possesses an indication of the truth in itself, it does not reveal the truth itself, naked and unveiled.

{21.14} I believe, therefore, that if the meaning<sup>290</sup> of the whole of divine Scripture is properly and piously smoothed out, the disagreements perceived on the literal level of the text will be seen to contain nothing contradictory or inconsistent. For in accord with true teaching, all the saints from the beginning [1253A] were “forerunners” of the mystery, which they proclaimed in advance and prefigured through their sufferings, deeds, and words. Therefore, the saints can justifiably stand in the place of each other: all can stand in place of all, and each in place of each. Moreover, the saints can be named in place of the books written by them, just as the books can be named in place of the saints, which is why the books are called by their names, as is the habit of Scripture. And the Lord Himself clearly demonstrates this when he calls John the Baptist by the name of “Elijah,” either because the two were equal in the habit of virtue (as the teachers say), in the purity of their intellect in all things, and in the austerity of their way of life; or because of their identical power of grace; or because of some other, hidden reason, which is known to God (who identified the two figures) and [1253B] to those whom He enlightens about these mysteries. And, again, when He told the story in which Abraham spoke to the man who was rich on earth, but tormented in Gehenna, He called the law “Moses,” and the prophetic books “prophets,” saying: *They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them*, using the names of Moses and the prophets in place of the divine books written by them. And this is nothing to be marveled at. For if He who is proclaimed through them is one, then all those who proclaim Him may also be understood as one, and one can serve in the place of all, and all may reverently serve in the place of all the others, both those who ministered to the mystery of the Old Testament, and all those who were entrusted with the [1253C] preaching of the grace of the Gospel.

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Int* 16a4-9. In the language of Scripture, a “great” or “loud” voice is often one that registers a sound that is enigmatic, misunderstood, or has an eschatological import (e.g., Mt 27:46, 50; Act 7:60); cf. John 12:28-30. Note also the parallels in the Apocalypse—a work ascribed to John, the “son of thunder” (Mk 3:17)—where the Lamb speaks “with a voice of thunder” (e.g., Apc 6:1).

<sup>290</sup> Literally, “intellect” or “mind” (*nous*).

{21.15} Thus, just as the great John the Baptist can be reverently identified with the whole Old Testament and its worship, which is a forerunner of the New Testament and its worship, so too can John, the truly great Evangelist, be rightly associated with the whole of the New Testament and its worship, which is a forerunner of the secret hiddenness of the ineffable *good things* of the age *to come*, for he is the precursory voice of a more divine Word, which will be clearly uttered in the age to come, and an image of the truth that will be made manifest. For the entire mystery of our salvation has been wisely arranged to unfold in a shadow, an image, and truth.<sup>291</sup> *The law has but a shadow*, as the divine apostle says, *of the good things to come; it was not the image of the* [1253D] *realities themselves*, through which God the Word prepared those under the law to receive the Gospel, in the manner that was appropriate to them, that is, through a dim manifestation of the truth. The Gospel, on the other hand, possesses the image of true things, and already clearly bears all the characteristics of *the good things to come*, and it is through this image that those who choose the pure and undefiled life of the Gospel, through their strict exercise of the commandments, take possession of the likeness of the good things of the age to come, and are made ready by the Word through the hope that they will be spiritually vivified by their union with the archetype of these true things, and so become living images of Christ, or rather become one with Him through grace (rather than being a mere simulacrum), or even, perhaps, become the Lord Himself, if such an idea is not too onerous for some to bear,<sup>292</sup> for now, consistent with the wisdom of our God-bearing teacher, the Word is called the forerunner of Himself, since He manifests Himself according to the measure of those who receive Him, in [1256A] both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in which the Word runs ahead of Himself through riddles, words, and figures, by which he leads us to a truth that exists without these things. And the Lord Himself bears witness to this when He says: *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*, indicating to them a teaching that is more sublime than the one that preceded it, but which is itself lower than that which would follow through the divine Spirit.

{21.16} And thus He rightly added that, *when the Spirit of truth comes, He will lead you into all truth*, along with what He says elsewhere: *Behold, I will be with you always, unto the consummation of the age*. This does not mean that He would not be absolutely with them after this, [1256B] but that they would come to know Him as something more sublime, in comparison to the lower form by which, on the basis of their own abilities, they had hitherto been able to know Him. For even though He Himself is always the same, and is beyond all change or alteration, becoming neither greater nor lesser, He nonetheless becomes *all things to everyone* out of His exceeding goodness: lowly for the lowly, lofty for the lofty, and, for those who are deified through His grace, He is God by nature, and Deity beyond all knowledge as God beyond God. It follows from this that all the forms and mysteries of divine providence on behalf of man in this present age, even though these be of great importance, constitute but a precursor and prefiguration of future things. Thus, when

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<sup>291</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.20: “Let us heed Paul when he says: *Now we know in part, and we prophesy in part* (1 Cor 13:9) . . . for he counts all knowledge in this world as nothing more than *mirrors and enigmas* (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), being but the arrested image of the truth captured in miniscule reflections . . . And this is what the Word Himself intimated when He said that there were things which could not now be borne, but which would be borne and be made clear in the future, and which John, the forerunner of the Word and great voice of the Truth, affirmed to be *beyond the ability of the lower world to contain* (John 21:25)” (SC 250:140-43, lines 5-7, 10-12, 14-18). See also below, Amb 37.8.

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.20 (SC 250:142, lines 14-16).

we compare the apprehensible word of the Lord to the more hidden and mystical word that will be granted to the disciples in the coming age (or when we compare His first coming [1256C] to His second), we see that it is the forerunner of itself. And this is something the Lord indicated indistinctly in Himself, in proportion to the capacity of those who receive Him. But He has not yet revealed the mysteries that are hidden silently within Him, because for the time being the *whole world could not contain them*. For, as was mentioned above, whatever is subject to written expressions and spoken words, as well as the meaning emerging from it—even if it is something spiritual—compared to whatever cannot be grasped at all by written expressions and utterances, holds the place of plain sound compared to a masterly articulated speech. For this reason, perhaps, the godly teacher set all the words that were uttered to the disciples through Christ our God in juxtaposition with that ineffable mind or intellect that is John, well and wisely naming the forerunning grace from the ability to receive it.

## Ambiguum 22

{22.1} From Saint Gregory's same Theological Oration:

But as for discourse about God, the more perfect it is, the harder it becomes to approach, since it has more [1256D] perceptions and more arduous solutions.<sup>293</sup>

{22.2} If created things are many, then they must certainly be different, precisely because they are many. For it is impossible that many things should not also be different. And if the many are different, it must be understood that their logoi, according to which they essentially exist, are also different, since it is in these, or rather because of these logoi that different things differ. For different things would not be different from each other if their logoi, according to which they came into being, did not themselves admit of difference. If, then, just as when the senses apprehend material objects in a natural manner, [1257A] they must, in receiving them, necessarily recognize that the perceptions of these objects (which underlie and are susceptible to their grasp) are many and diverse—so, too, when the intellect naturally apprehends all the logoi in beings and contemplates within them the infinite energies of God, it recognizes the differences of the divine energies it perceives to be multiple and—to speak truly—infinite. Then, as regards scientific inquiry into that which is really true, the intellect—for reasons one may readily appreciate—will find the power of any such inquiry ineffective and its method useless, for it provides the intellect with no means of understanding how God—who is truly none of the things that exist, and who, properly speaking, *is all things*, and at the same time beyond them—is present in the logos of each thing in itself,<sup>294</sup> and *in all* the logoi together, according to which *all things* exist.

{22.3} If, therefore, consistent with true teaching, every divine energy indicates through itself the whole of God, indivisibly present [1257B] in each particular thing, according to the logos through which that thing exists in its own way, who, I ask, is capable of understanding and saying precisely how God is whole in all things commonly, and in each being particularly, without separation or being subject to division, and without expanding disparately into the infinite differences of the beings in which He exists as Being, or without being contracted into the particular existence of each one, or without contracting together and fusing all the differences of these

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## Ambiguum 22

<sup>293</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.21 (SC 250:142, lines 8-10).

<sup>294</sup> Eriugena's Greek text seems to have read: "—is *One* in the logos of each thing . . ."

beings into a single totality, but on the contrary is truly *all things in all*, never going out of His own indivisible simplicity? Well did the teacher say that the “perceptions” concerning the principle of divinity are many, from which we are taught only that God exists, and that the “solutions are arduous,” from which we learn what God is not. [1257C] So let there be an end to pointless and harmful curiosity on the part of all those who think they can understand the Deity by means of the vacuous constructions of the mind, with which they are incapable of understanding even the lowermost creature in terms of the logos of its being and existence.

### **Ambiguum 23**

**{23.1}** From Saint Gregory’s First Oration On the Son:

For this reason the Monad from the beginning moved toward a dyad and at the Trinity comes to a halt.<sup>295</sup>

**{23.2}** Everything which is moved according to nature is necessarily moved in consequence of a cause, and everything moved in consequence of a cause necessarily also exists in consequence of a cause; and everything that exists and is moved in consequence of a cause necessarily has as the beginning of its being [1257D] the cause in consequence of which it exists and from which it was initially brought into being; likewise, the end of its being moved is the same cause in consequence of which it is moved and toward which it hastens. Now everything which exists and is moved in consequence of a cause is necessarily also created, and if the end of whatever is moved is the cause in consequence of which it is in motion, this cause is necessarily the same cause in consequence of which it was created and exists. From this it follows that the cause of whatever exists and is moved, in any way at all according to nature, is one single cause encompassing both the beginning and the end, to which everything that exists and is moved owes its existence and motion.<sup>296</sup> For it is an actively efficacious power, [1260A] and in a divinely fitting manner it both creates (insofar as it is the beginning) the things that exist and sends them forth, and (insofar as it is the end) providentially draws the things that are in motion back to the limit that it has established for them. Now if every being which is moved (which also means that it has been created) exists and is in motion and has been created in consequence of a cause, then whatever does not exist in consequence of a cause is obviously neither created nor moved. For that which does not have a cause of being is not moved at all. If, then, the uncaused is necessarily also unmoved, it follows that the Divine is unmoved, insofar as it does not owe its being to a cause, being itself the cause of all beings.

**{23.3}** How, then, someone perhaps might ask, does this marvelous teacher, in the passage cited above, introduce a Divinity in motion? To this we respond that the teacher knew far better than anyone else that the Divine is unmoved, but just as the scientific principle constitutive of every art or skill, while remaining completely unmoved in itself—if I may avail myself of an example—is said to be moved as it receives form [1260B] with respect to each type of art or skill that is subject to it, it is rather the case that it moves the artifact by its own force, and not that it itself is manifestly subject to motion. Or, one might say that because light stirs the power of sight to see, it too must be subject to motion, yet properly speaking it is not moved but rather moves all sight and vision. In the same way, the Divine by essence and nature is completely unmoved, insofar as it is boundless, unconditioned, and infinite, but not

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### **Ambiguum 23**

<sup>295</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.2 (SC 250:180, lines 13-14); cf. above, Amb 1.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 241b1-267b26.

unlike a scientific principle that exists within the substances of beings, it is said to be moved, since it providentially moves each and every being (in accordance with the principle by which each one is naturally moved); and as the cause of beings, it may receive—without suffering any change—all the attributes of the beings of which it is the cause.<sup>297</sup> This indeed was what the theologian and great Areopagite, Saint Dionysios, was inquiring into when he asked: “What do the theologians mean when at one time they call the Divine [1260C] ‘Desire’ and ‘Love,’ and at another, ‘Desired’ and ‘Beloved’?” and he answers by saying, “For by the one He is moved, but by the other He moves.”<sup>298</sup> To put it more clearly, insofar as the Divine is “desire” and “love,” it is moved, but as “desired” and “beloved,” it moves to itself all things capable of desire and love. And to be even clearer: the Divine is moved to the extent that it creates an inner condition of desire and love among beings capable of receiving them, and it moves insofar as it naturally attracts the yearning of those who are being moved to it. And again, it moves and is moved, since it “thirsts to be thirsted for,”<sup>299</sup> desires to be desired, and loves to be loved.

{23.4} It was in this manner that the godly-minded Gregory likewise said, “the Monad from the beginning moved toward a dyad and at the Trinity came to a halt.” For the Deity is moved in the [1260D] intellect that is receptive of it, whether angelic or human, insofar as, through and in the Deity, the intellect searches for insights that pertain to it. To state this more clearly, in the Deity’s initial approach, it indivisibly teaches the intellect the principle of unity, lest division be attributed to the first cause, spurring the intellect to receive the divine and ineffable fecundity, whispering quietly and mysteriously to the intellect that it should never consider this Good to be infertile of the Word and Wisdom<sup>300</sup> or the Power that sanctifies, which are consubstantial and exist hypostatically, lest the Divine be thought to be compounded of these as if from accidents, and not believed to be eternally existing as these. The Deity is therefore said to be moved insofar as it is the cause of the mind’s search to understand the Deity’s mode of subsistence, for without being so illumined, [1261A] apprehending the Deity must be reckoned among those things that are impossible. The Deity is further said to move according to its more progressive manifestation and more perfect teaching in Holy Scripture, beginning with faith in God the Father, proceeding to a common confession of faith in the Father and the Son, to the reception of the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son, so that those who have been so taught are led to worship together the perfect Trinity in perfect unity, that is, one essence, divinity, power, and energy in three hypostases.<sup>301</sup>

## Ambiguum 24

{24.1} [1261B] From Saint Gregory’s same First Oration On the Son:

Now, unless we are intoxicated, we make a distinction, I think, between “willing” and “a will,” between “begetting” and “a birth,” and “speaking” and “speech.” The former refer to a subject in motion, the latter designate the motion itself. What is willed does not belong to a will—it is not a necessary concomitant of it. Nor does what is born belong to a begetting, nor what is heard to an act of speech. They belong instead to the subject who wills, who

<sup>297</sup> Cf. above, Amb 5.1.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.14 (160, lines 1-2, 3-4; 712C).

<sup>299</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.27 (SC 358:260, line 28).

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.10 (155, lines 18-20; 708B); and Plato, *Theaet* 150c.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 31.25-27 (SC 250:322-30).

begets, who speaks. What belongs to God, however, transcends all these cases, since for Him begetting may well just be the will to beget.<sup>302</sup>

{24.2} It was in opposition to the Arians—who were availing themselves of every opportunity to blaspheme the only-begotten Son, saying that He was not the Son of the Father, but of the Father’s will—that [1261C] the wise teacher addressed these words, thereby demonstrating that all their machinations against the truth were feeble and easily refuted. For if we say that the soul’s powers, which one might well call essential powers able to complete its substance,<sup>303</sup> are able to operate in the substance in which they exist, we do not say that they are capable of actively moving to produce anything without the consent of a willing subject. If, however, we grant hypothetically that, on the basis of their natural movement, these powers “will” to act or operate on their own, without, if I may put it like this, the impulse of him whose powers they are, then there is absolutely nothing to prevent them from operating effectively on their own impulse. However, actual deeds do not by any means follow upon power when this latter does not have the impulse of him, whose power it is, proposing to it the concrete, [1261D] actual end, because the power in and of itself is not self-subsistent. Thus it was in vain that the Arians rallied round the “will” as such, for it can effectively accomplish nothing apart from the willing subject who possesses and exercises it. And this is what the teacher is saying. For it is obvious that what is willed does not follow upon the will, nor do any of the other things he mentioned follow the others, without the consent of the subject to whom they belong.

{24.3} If, then, you gentlemen<sup>304</sup> wish to calculate divine realities based on human precedents, then you must accept—consistent with your own presuppositions—that things which co-exist according to the relation of intermediate reciprocity are necessarily simultaneous, by which I mean the subject who wills and that which is willed, or the subject who begets and that which is begotten, which co-exist in reciprocal relation [1264A] to willing and begetting.<sup>305</sup> For just as there is no vision apart from a seeing subject and an object of sight, or thought apart from a thinking mind and an object of thought, so too, apart from him who begets and that which is begotten there is no begetting, just as there is no willing apart from one who wills and that which he wills, since, as I have already pointed out, what is willed does not proceed from the will without the intervention of the one who wills. And if these are among things that are simultaneous according to their relation, for the relation between them is permanent, then, on your own terms, the Son who is begotten is simultaneous with the Father who begets, and who is eternally a Father, by virtue of His begetting, without admitting in any way the slightest interposition of any temporal distance between Him and the Father who begets Him, so that the Son is not a Son of the will, but of the begetting Father.

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#### Ambiguum 24

<sup>302</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.6 (SC 250:188, lines 26-33).

<sup>303</sup> “Essential [powers] able to complete” renders the Greek *sympplerotikas*, which means both “able to complete” and “forming an essential part of,” in the way that form is the fulfillment of matter, or natural qualities are the completion of a substance; cf. John Philoponos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (CAG 13/1:34, 64); Basil, *Hexaemeron* 1.8 (SC 26bis:120); Ps.-Cyril of Alexandria, *Extracts from the Old Testament Sayings* (PG 77:1265A); and QThal 49 (CCSG 7:355, lines 81-85).

<sup>304</sup> Here Maximus addresses the fourth-century Arians directly. This anachronism may be either a simple rhetorical device, or Maximus may be assuming the voice of Gregory, or perhaps addressing seventh-century Arians or others who held similar views.

<sup>305</sup> On the Aristotelian categories of the “simultaneous,” and the “reciprocal relation,” see above, Amb 7.19, n. 75; and Amb 7.40, n. 98 and 99; on the “intermediate relation,” cf. Proklos, *Platonic Theology* 3.24 (ed. Saffrey and Westerink 1978, 85, lines 4-8; cf. n. 333).

{24.4} Let even these things, the teacher says, which are derived from human [1264B] precedents, be mentioned, but far beyond them all are the things of God, “for with Him, perhaps, begetting is the same as willing.” By adding the adverb “perhaps,” he rendered the statement doubtful, since the birth of the Son from the Father is beyond willing. Between the Father and the Son there is no mediation of will, for not even the will of the Father can be thought of in any way whatsoever before the Son, because the Father did not exist before the Son, just as the intellect is not separate from the word that comes forth from it, nor the light separate from its radiance.<sup>306</sup> Because insofar as the Father and the Son, who is begotten timelessly from Him, have their being simultaneously, they also have one will, which is simple and indivisible, just as they have one substance and one nature.

### **Ambiguum 25**

{25.1} [1264C] From Saint Gregory’s same First Oration On the Son:

For what hinders me, if I assume the same minor premise, namely, “the Father is greater by nature,” and then add that “by nature He is not absolutely greater, nor Father,” and then concluding that “the greater is not absolutely greater,” or that “being the Father” does not absolutely entail “being the Father”?<sup>307</sup>

{25.2} Because the teacher wisely stated that the Father, as cause, is greater than the Son—since the Son is from the Father, but not the Father from the Son—the Arians took the premise as pertaining to causality on the level of nature, and maliciously concluded the superiority of that nature. In his initial response to this, the teacher forcefully refutes what they had so illogically concluded, saying, “I do not know whether they confuse themselves more by their own fallacies, or those to whom they address them. For it is not the case that all the predicates affirmed of a particular thing can be affirmed unconditionally [1264D] of its underlying nature; but to the contrary, it is clear that they are affirmed of some particular thing, in some particular respect.”<sup>308</sup> He means that not everything predicated of the cause as cause must necessarily be predicated of its nature. For it is not rational to maintain, for example, that what is predicated of a wise man (because he is wise), or of a king (because of his kingship), must also be predicated of their underlying nature, that is, to the fact that they are human beings, and thereby unlawfully adopt into the definition of the essence of their underlying natures whatever is said about wisdom as such, or of kingship as such, which do not in any way share in the principle of their essence, for they neither comprise its constitutive differences [1265A] nor contribute to the completion of its definition.

{25.3} After this, he crafts an even more cogent syllogism from their premise, and thereby makes them refute themselves by their own argument. Here is the syllogism:

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<sup>306</sup> Gregory had used this image earlier in the oration (Or. 29.3): “Clearly a cause is not necessarily prior to its effects—the sun is not prior to its light” (SC 250:182, lines 17-19).

### **Ambiguum 25**

<sup>307</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.15 (SC 250:208, lines 7-11). Gregory’s point turns on a principle of Aristotelian logic (*Cat 1a*), i.e., whether or not an individual can belong to a species or class only if it shares all the characteristics of every member of that species or class. Aristotle found this to be a false conclusion, and Gregory agreed. Thus, conceding some differences in particulars (e.g., that in some ways the Father is superior to the Son) does not demand that the individuals in the species be reclassified. As Gregory states later in this section of his oration, the Arian fallacy lies in arguing from the particular to the general, from a conditioned to an unconditioned term, which Gregory says “is like saying ‘X is a dead man,’ and then drawing the conclusion: ‘mankind without qualification is dead’,” cf. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 150-51.

<sup>308</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.15 (SC 250:208, lines 4-7).



“For what hinders me, if I assume the same minor premise, namely, that ‘the Father is greater by nature,’ and then add that ‘by nature He is not absolutely greater, nor Father,’ and then concluding that ‘the greater is not absolutely greater,’ or that ‘being the Father’ does not absolutely entail ‘being the Father’?” So that this might be made clearer to us, I propose to transpose the argument, if you concur, into what is called a “figure,”<sup>309</sup> beginning with the opposing arguments, and closing with the teaching of our father Gregory.

**{25.4}** The premise of the Arians, that is, the Eunomians:

If by nature the Father is the cause of the Son, and if the Father is greater than the Son, then the Father is greater than the Son by nature. [1265B]

The solution of our holy father Gregory, which refutes the above by a *reductio ad absurdum*:

If, in your view, the Father is by nature greater than the Son, and if by nature He is not absolutely greater or Father, then the greater is not absolutely greater, nor the Father absolutely Father.

In this way, those who reject the truth were refuted by their own arguments, being ensnared in their own machinations, cast out from true piety, left with nothing but their own empty pretensions. For in these arguments the conclusions are probative of the premises, while the premises define the conclusions, and it is in the conclusions that they—who thought themselves wise—became entangled because of their exceeding ignorance.

## Ambiguum 26

**{26.1}** [1265C] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Son:

Suppose, then, if you like, that “Father” is the name of an activity; you will not ensnare us this way either. He will actively have produced that very consubstantiality (i.e., of the Son), even if the notion of activity employed here is decidedly absurd.<sup>310</sup>

**{26.2}** Those who had their *tongues sharpened like razors* in order to lacerate the truth, were saying, under the guise of a question: “Is ‘Father’ the name of an essence or an activity?” Their aim was that if we, in response, were to say that “Father” is the name of an essence, they could conclude from this that the Son is of a different essence from the Father, since two names, properly different, are not predicated of the same essence.<sup>311</sup> (In other words, if “Father” is the name of an essence, then the same essence could never receive the name of “Son.”) If, on the other hand, we say that it is the name of an activity, they would quite rightly point out that we confess the Son to be a creation of the Father, since he would be a product of the Father’s activity.

[1265D] For this reason, the teacher, having drawn out the contrast between the proper names, immediately affirmed that the name of “Father” is neither the name of an essence nor an activity, but rather of a relation, and of the manner in which<sup>312</sup> the

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<sup>309</sup> In logic, a “figure” (*schema*) is the form of a syllogism, classified according to the position of the middle term.

### Ambiguum 26

<sup>310</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 29.16 (SC 250:210-12, lines 20-23). My translation of this passage is slightly expanded in light of Gregory’s larger argument.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. LrdPr (CCSG 23:41-42, lines 250-57).

<sup>312</sup> The “manner in which” (*tou pos echei*), sometimes translated as “disposition,” is a technical phrase closely related to the category of *schesis* (i.e., relation, condition), and answers the question “What is it like?” or “What is its mode of being?” Its Stoic origins overlap with its later Aristotelian and Neoplatonist usage, as in Plotinos, *En* 6.1.29, where the phrase is rendered as “being in a certain state” (LCL 6:103); cf. Barnes, *Porphyry*, 52 n. 9, and 312-14.

Father is related to the Son, or the Son to the Father, he spoke accommodatingly, adding: “Let it be, then, if you like, the name of an activity,” but then adds: “He will have actively produced that very consubstantiality.” Now a person of an inordinately inquisitive nature, of the type that cannot abide not knowing all the details about something that he thinks concerns him, might very well ask: How does the Father “actively produce the consubstantiality (of the Son)?” This can be answered in the following manner.

**{26.3}** They say that among beings there exist two general kinds of activities.

[1268A] The first of these enables beings naturally to bring forth from themselves other beings identical in form and substance and absolutely identical to them. With this in mind, the teacher generously condescended to their prattle, in order to bridle, if only a little, their blasphemous tongues, and said: “Let it be, then, if you like”—“consistent with what we said was the purpose of the argument—that ‘Father’ is the name of an activity.” From this premise he concludes that “the Father will actively have produced that very consubstantiality (of the Son),” as an activity essentially subsisting and living, precisely as the God-minded teachers of the truth have taught, saying that the only-begotten Word of God and Son of the Father is the Living Word and *Power* and self-subsisting *Wisdom*. The second kind of activity is said to produce things that are external to the essence, as when a person actively engages something extrinsic and substantially different, and from it produces something foreign [1268B] to his own substance, having constructed it from some other source of already existing matter. They say that this kind of activity is a scientific characteristic of the arts. This is why the godly-minded teacher says that “the notion of activity employed here is decidedly absurd,” that is, used in a manner that is not acceptable, especially when it is applied to the Father and the Son, to whom not even the first kind can be either received or countenanced by a religiously dutiful intellect, since it is far beneath the ineffable and inconceivable existence of the only-begotten Son, which is from the Father, with the Father, and in the Father.

## **Ambiguum 27**

**{27.1}** [1268C] From Saint Gregory’s Second Oration On the Son:

On the other hand, God would not be called “God” of the Word (for how could He be the God of one who, properly speaking, is God?), but God of the one who was visible, in the same way as God is “Father,” not of the one who was visible, but of the Word, because He (i.e., Christ, the Incarnate Word), was twofold, with the result that the former are properly attributed to both, but the latter not properly so, which is the opposite of what happens in our case, since, properly speaking, God is our “God” but not our “Father.”<sup>313</sup>

**{27.2}** “The former are properly attributed to both,” the “former” indicating the terms “Father” and “God,” both of which may properly be affirmed with respect to Christ, by virtue of the one hypostasis. Because, properly speaking, the Father of Christ is God, since Christ is the Son and Word of God, and one of the Holy Trinity, even after the Incarnation. [1268D] And, again, properly speaking, the Father is the God of the same Christ, since Christ is truly man by virtue of the flesh, and by being one among men. This is because, properly speaking, the parts may be predicated of the whole that they comprise, since, properly speaking, the whole admits of all the natural

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## **Ambiguum 27**

<sup>313</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.8 (SC 250:240, lines 1-6). The context here is a discussion of John 20:17, where Christ says to Mary Magdalene, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

characteristics belonging to the parts, from which it has its subsistence. The phrase “but the latter not properly so,” must likewise be taken as pertaining to both, that is, “God” and the “Father,” since, properly speaking, neither of these can be affirmed with respect to Christ, by virtue of the natural difference of the natures, from which and in which He exists. This is because in the case of a whole that is also a compound, the attributes of one or another of its parts can, properly speaking, never be predicated of the whole.

{27.3} But this is the “opposite of what happens in our case,” that is, the reverse of what happens in our case, because when I [1269A] contemplate the difference of the natures, and mentally conceptualize their distinction, I am not able to affirm that “the former are properly attributed to both,” that is, “Father” or “God.” For, properly speaking, the Father is neither the God of the Word nor the Father of the flesh. “But the opposite happens,” that is, a reversal, or an inversion, with respect to what may “properly be said” and what may “not properly be said,” by virtue of both the unity of the one hypostasis and of the difference of the natures (distinguished through the mind’s conceptualization of them), because to the one hypostasis we may, properly speaking, affirm “God” and “Father,” since Christ is one, and thus admits of “God” in the manner that has been explained, whereas when the situation is reversed, the essential difference of the natures, properly speaking, will not admit of this, “as happens in our case.” In other words, God, properly speaking, is our God, [1269B] just as He is the God of the flesh of the Word, but He is not, properly speaking, our Father, just as, properly speaking, He is not the Father of the flesh of the Word. By a reciprocal exchange, we need to say that the things of the whole belong to the parts, and the parts to the whole, and then one easily acquires a clear grasp of the issue at hand.

{27.4} To make this clearer, when Christ is contemplated as a hypostasis, then we must affirm what, “properly speaking, are attributed to both,” that is, “God” and “Father.” When, however, the two natures of Christ are contemplated in light of their unconfused existence, in which and from which He is, then we must affirm the reverse, that is, the “not properly speaking, which happens in our case.” And the teacher makes this clear when he adds: “This is what leads the heretics astray: the coupling of the attributes, [1269C] since the attributes overlap because of the intermingling. The mark of this is that, when the two natures are separated by the mind in thought, their respective attributes<sup>314</sup> are divided with them.”<sup>315</sup> In other words, so long as you contemplate Christ as a single hypostasis, the coupling of the attributes in their mutual interchange is indivisible; but when, on the other hand, you separate in your thoughts the two natures that complete the one hypostasis in Christ, you simultaneously divide the attributes together with the natures. Or, again, because Christ by nature is twofold, both “God” and “Father” may be affirmed in His case: properly speaking when the attributes are appropriately predicated of the natures, and not properly so when the name of each—of which He consists, and in which He exists—is attributed to the other by virtue of the exchange that takes place owing to the one hypostasis. But not knowing how to make such a distinction, or rather [1269D] not willing to endure such a distinction, heretics then and now<sup>316</sup> do not cease to blaspheme the only-begotten Word of God, some reducing Him to the level

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<sup>314</sup> Literally, “names.”

<sup>315</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.8 (SC 250:240-242, lines 6-10).

<sup>316</sup> I.e., the Arians and the Monophysites, respectively.

of a creature on account of His human attributes, and others confusing the dispensation<sup>317</sup> by denying the natures of which He is composed.

{27.5} I once posed the problem presented by this passage to a man who was exceedingly wise in matters pertaining to divine things, and he said that both the “properly speaking” and the “not properly so” belong to the same predicate of relation, whether the term is “Father” or “God” or both, since the relation in question is predicated of the one Christ, who consists of the two opposites, that is, of what is predicated “properly speaking” and what is “not properly so.” If, when one distinguishes the two natures in thought, the Father of Christ is called “God,” this can be said to be “properly spoken” with respect to the nature of the creature, but “not properly so” with respect to the Divine Word. Similarly, but from the opposite point of view, God is, properly speaking, the Father of the Word, but not, properly speaking, of the [1272A] creature, consistent with what holds true in our case. For us, He is, properly speaking, God, but not, properly speaking, Father. Having accepted the interpretation of this wise man as being correct, it seemed good to append it here.<sup>318</sup>

### **Ambiguum 28**

{28.1} From Saint Gregory’s same Second Oration On the Son:

*He* (that is, Christ) *receives life, judgment, the inheritance of the Gentiles, authority over all flesh, glory, disciples,* or whatever else is mentioned. [1272B] (To which the teacher adds) And these things belong to His humanity (after which he says), yet it would not be absurd to grant them to God. For you will not be granting to Him acquired properties, but properties that have existed together with Him from the beginning, not by grace, but by reason of His nature.<sup>319</sup>

{28.2} Many were the times I pondered the difficulty posed by this passage, and about how and why, as the teacher says, God is named according to His nature based on what He has received. Being unable to provide myself with a satisfactory solution, I judged it, in the end, a good thing to put the matter before a wise elder, who with great intelligence steered a course through the subject at hand.<sup>320</sup> He said that “If, hypothetically speaking, we knew someone who was able to explain clearly to others the natures of beings, and he said to them: ‘Let us grant to God the attributes of omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and [1272C] justice, and to creation let us grant servitude, obedience, circumscription, creation *ex nihilo*, and all that follows from these, since according to common concepts<sup>321</sup> the nature of each thing demands what is proper to it.’ Now when this fellow said, ‘Let us grant to God,’ he was not attributing to God anything that God did not already possess, but the very things that belong to His nature. And this is because ‘let us grant’ means to define and distinguish nature in terms of what constitutes its natural attributes and what does not.” In the same way you may reverently understand the teacher when he says “to

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<sup>317</sup> I.e., of the Incarnation.

<sup>318</sup> This is the first mention in the *Ambigua to John* of the “wise elder,” along with a transcription of his teaching; cf. above, Amb 4.5.

### **Ambiguum 28**

<sup>319</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.9 (SC 250:242, lines 1-6). The words in parentheses are presumably the remarks either of Maximos, John of Kyzikos, or perhaps a later editor or copyist; they are extant in the Latin translation by Eriugena.

<sup>320</sup> This is the second reference to the “wise elder,” cf. above, Amb 27.5, n. 318.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. above, Amb 17.11, n. 257.

grant them to God,” that is, with God’s nature receiving the attributes that naturally belong to it, consistent with those who define and make distinctions among things.

### Ambiguum 29

{29.1} [1272D] From Saint Gregory’s same Second Oration On the Son:

For we affirm that it is impossible for God to be evil or not to be.<sup>322</sup>

{29.2} I also asked the aforementioned wise elder<sup>323</sup> about this passage, and he told me that the words “not to be” should not be taken as conditioned by the previous statement, lest it be concluded that God is evil. Because to say that “it is impossible for God to be evil or not to be evil,” is to say that He is evil, since “evil” is common to both negations, and a double negation produces a positive. The “impossible” is one negative, and when connected to the “not to be evil,” results in the conclusion that God is evil. But this of course is not true—perish the thought! Instead, each part [1273A] of the passage has its own logical principle and sequence, and in order for the phrase to be balanced—“just as we affirm that it is impossible for God to be evil”—we need to add a comma (i.e., after the word “evil”), and so make the final clause the beginning of a new idea, so that “or not to be” means “or not to exist.”

### Ambiguum 30

{30.1} From Saint Gregory’s same Second Oration On the Son:

There you have the Son’s titles. Walk in a godly manner through all those that are sublime, and compassionately through all that are corporeal; or rather, treat them all in a godly manner, so that you might become God by ascending from below, for the sake of Him who descended for us from above.<sup>324</sup>

{30.2} [1273B] He who has illumined his intellect through the sublime contemplation of the conception of each of the divine names, having elevated and transformed it in light of the primal and spiritual principle of each, and having subjected *the mind of the flesh* to the spirit by the labors of virtue, becoming *obedient even unto death*, is the one who has truly “walked through the divine titles of the Son” blamelessly in spirit and flesh, undertaking his divine journey to God both “in a sublime manner” (according to mystical contemplation through the sublime names), and “compassionately” (according to practical philosophy through the corporeal names), hastening to his repose on high, or “rather” he journeyed through “them all in a godly manner,” since practice itself is contemplative, and not without a share in the grace of reason.<sup>325</sup> Yet the reason for which<sup>326</sup> he chose voluntary [1273C] estrangement to the flesh by the perfect circumcision of its natural movements clearly indicates that, in order to become God by grace, he established himself beyond matter (as far as flesh was concerned) through ascetic practice, and beyond form (as far as intellect was concerned) through contemplation—for it is from matter and form that beings derive

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### Ambiguum 29

<sup>322</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.11 (SC 250:244, lines 2-3). In the preceding chapter of this oration (Or. 30.10), Gregory examined at least five different meanings of “cannot” in his exegesis of John 5:19 (“The Son cannot do anything of Himself but only what He sees the Father doing”). The passage under consideration in Amb 29 continues this discussion, with the “cannot” having the sense of something impossible or inconceivable, as Gregory notes at the outset of Or. 30.11.

<sup>323</sup> This is the third mention of the wise elder, on which see above, Amb 28.2, n. 320.

### Ambiguum 30

<sup>324</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.21 (SC 250:274, lines 32-35).

<sup>325</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.2.

<sup>326</sup> Eriugena reads: “Yet he who *for the sake of the Word* chose voluntary estrangement . . .” (CCSG 18:158, lines 16-17).

their existence—and to tell the whole of it, he became completely immaterial and formless through his state of virtue and knowledge, for the sake of God the Word, who for our sake took on matter and form, becoming as we are and truly one from among us, though by nature He is strictly immaterial and formless.<sup>327</sup>

{30.3} Or, again, the phrase, “or rather, treat them all in a godly manner,” means that, having established within himself the virtue and knowledge that is within human grasp, he acquired dispassion from his [1273D] compassion for God and neighbor, and he suffers so that others might benefit, and is eager to lay down his life for them, for he is completely free of defilement.

### **Ambiguum 31**

{31.1} From Saint Gregory’s oration On the Nativity:

The laws of nature are abolished; the world above must be filled. Christ commands this, let us not resist.<sup>328</sup>

{31.2} If in truth the abolition of the laws of nature caused the world above to be filled, it is clear [1276A] that, had these laws not been abolished, the world above would have remained deficient and unfilled. And what are these laws of nature that were abolished? Conception through seed, and, I think, birth through corruption, neither of which characterized in any way whatsoever the true enfleshment of God and His perfect humanization. For this was a conception pure of any seed, and a birth completely untouched by corruption, which is why the mother of the one born remained a virgin even after giving birth, and indeed suffered no pain while giving birth—which is a paradox that goes far beyond every law and principle of nature—and God deemed it worthy to be born from her in the flesh, and through His birth bound the bonds of His mother’s virginity more tightly. And this is really a wondrous event and [1276B] report, that a child should be conceived and come forth without the seals of his mother’s body being opened. It was truly necessary, yes, necessary, for the Creator of nature, in restoring nature through Himself, to begin by abolishing the first laws of nature—for it was by these that sin, *finding an opportunity through disobedience*, condemned human beings to be marked with the same characteristic as irrational animals, in being generated one from another—and the laws of the first and truly divine creation were renewed, so that God with His strength could restore, out of His love for mankind, what feeble man, in his negligence, had destroyed.

{31.3} If, therefore, these laws of nature, which were established because of sin, have been abolished in Christ, and every servile uprising of the passions has been completely routed by the presence of the Word, then “the [1276C] world above must” unquestionably “be filled,” as the teacher said. And let us not resist this. For if the old Adam, a mere man subject to sin, was able through his disobedience to abolish the first spiritual laws of nature, and thereby fill the lower world with those who were born in the flesh from him to corruption, becoming their leader *by their likeness to his transgression*—a fact which no one disputes—then to a much greater degree will the new, sinless Adam, Christ our God, abolish the laws of illogic, which were introduced into nature because of sin, for He is the Logos, and will be able to fill the world above rightfully with those who are born from Him by the Spirit into incorruptibility, becoming their leader *by their likeness to His obedience*. And let this not be doubted by anyone who has even a trifling sense [1276D] of God’s power, and who is not totally ignorant of its magnitude. In this way, then, the world above is filled by those

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<sup>327</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.45, n. 141.

### **Ambiguum 31**

<sup>328</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.2 (SC 358:106, lines 9-10).

who are spiritually born in Christ, and thus the law of flesh and of earthly birth reaches its appropriate limit, being reformed in light of the world above.

**Another interpretation<sup>329</sup> of St. Gregory's words**

{31.4} Since it seems to me that, in addition to these things, the saying of the teacher also possesses another meaning, I shall do what is within my power to give expression to this too, with God guiding my discourse to the Gospels. My Jesus, who is God and the sole cause of all [1277A] things, taught secretly in parables that man is like a *sheep who wandered away* from the divine flock of one hundred, and a *silver coin* that fell from the divine *decad*, and a *prodigal son* who stubbornly turned away from his father and dissolved the spiritual unity of the divine fraternal dyad.<sup>330</sup> I believe that He called man a “sheep” insofar as he needs careful tending, and because he is a follower, and is ranked in an order, and provides his owner with three useful things: wool, lambs, and milk, because man both is nourished and provides nourishment through the principle and mode of natural contemplation; and he is clothed and clothes by the mode of ethical philosophy; and he is enriched and enriches by giving birth to others like him through the mystery of true vision.<sup>331</sup> He called man a *silver coin*, since he is shining and royal, and by virtue of being an image he bears the characteristic mark of the divine [1277B] archetype; and also because he is able to receive, within the limits of what is possible for him, the whole of the divine beauty. And he called him a *son*, since he is the inheritor of the Father's good things, and equal in honor to the Father according to the gift of grace.<sup>332</sup>

{31.5} But when this man had *wandered away like a lost sheep*, God in His providence *sought him like a shepherd and found him*, and, *placing him on His own shoulders*, He returned him to the sheepfold and to the fellow members of his flock.<sup>333</sup> When, like the image on the face of the *silver coin*, man became tarnished by the passions and bereft of his original beauty, the Word in His wisdom, as if *lighting a lamp*, made His own flesh to shine by the light of His own divinity, and *found him*, and made this finding the occasion of great *joy*, insofar as it restored what had gone missing from the divine *decad*.<sup>334</sup> And like a good father He embraces him upon his return like the son who was *dead* in his sin and *lost* in his ignorance of God, [1277C] restoring to him all the marks of his former dignity, and, greatest and most mysterious of all, He *sacrifices* for him *the fatted calf*, whatever such a calf or its strange sacrifice might signify—though I understand it to be the supreme Word, who is supremely hidden and unknown, according to the incomprehensible and supremely unknown mode of His divine and ineffable providence, whereas the “sacrifice” is his divinely fitting distribution to beings—and He considers the return of the son to be the summit of ineffable joy, for it magnificently filled the dyad of sons (whatever this might

<sup>329</sup> “Interpretation” renders the Greek word *epibole*, which also means “direct insight.”

<sup>330</sup> The *decad* may be the nine orders or choirs of angels with the addition of humanity; the fraternal dyad may be an expression of the union of the human and the angelic, who are often described as “brothers,” cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* (GNO 6:254, lines 1-4); id., *Life of Moses* 2.47 (GNO 7/1:46, lines 13-23); Evagrius, *On Proverbs* 163: “If the ‘sons’ of Christ are the ‘brothers’ of each other, and if the angels and the righteous are the sons of Christ, then the angels and the saints are brothers, for they are begotten by the same Spirit of adoption (cf. Rom 8:15)” (SC 340:260).

<sup>331</sup> “Vision” renders the Greek word *epopsia*, which can also mean “oversight” in the sense of “spiritual care and direction.” The word is heavily attested in the writings of Dionysios the Areopagite, where it denotes the care of superiors for subordinates in the various hierarchies, as well as that of masters for disciples.

<sup>332</sup> Maximos discusses these three Lucan parables in Letter 11 (PG 91:453C-456A).

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.14 (SC 358:136, lines 6-11); id., Or. 26.2 (PG 35:1229B); and Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 2.3 (71, lines 1-4; 393C).

<sup>334</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.14 (SC 358:136, lines 12-18).

mean), just as the coin filled the decadrachm, and the sheep filled the flock of one hundred. If you agree, we can for the moment refrain from commenting on [1277D] these numbers, and, God granting us the opportunity, undertake at some later time a detailed study of their hidden meaning.

{31.6} If, then, the *Good Shepherd* placed man like a *sheep on His shoulders*, and returned him to the flock; and if the Lord and Savior, the *Wisdom and Power of God* the Father, through His Incarnation recovered man, who was like a lost *silver coin*, stamped with the royal image; and if He received man back like a good and compassionate father receives a son upon his return, and placed him in the ranks of the heavenly powers, thereby filling the void in each heavenly number by the salvation of humanity, then it is clear that Christ God filled the world above, by divinely bringing about on His own the salvation of all.

[1280A] **Another contemplation of the same**

{31.7} If you wish, we may contemplate the present difficulty in another way. Those who have made a careful study of the nature of beings say that one of nature's laws is the unwavering and unalterable permanence of the inner principle according to which each nature exists and came into being, and it seems to me that any rational person hearing this would agree that this is a correct definition of the law of nature. If, then, this is true, it is obvious that the law of nature, which by necessity preserves inviolate the principle of nature, likewise maintains nature's place absolutely immovable according to its position.<sup>335</sup> But He who by law, reason, and nature defined with wisdom each being's subsistence according to its species, while He Himself subsists beyond nature, and law, and intellect, and reason, and place, and motion, in [1280B] no way operates within nature like any of the things subject to nature. Instead, in a manner that is natural to Himself, He actively performs and passively experiences the things of nature in a manner beyond nature, in both instances paradoxically preserving Himself inviolate while experiencing them, along with the things He performs and brings about, so that the integrity of their natural immutability remains unchanged.

{31.8} Thus, He Himself, being moved to draw near to us in the lower world, truly became perfect man consistent with all the positive marks of humanity, without in any way moving outside of Himself, or experiencing any limitation to a particular place; and He completely divinized us, without in any way violating or essentially altering our nature, for having totally given the whole of Himself, and assuming the whole of man, in an ineffable and perfect union, He in no way suffered any diminishment of His perfection. And in truth the same one is whole God and whole man, [1280C] bearing witness within His own self—by the perfection of the two natures in which He truly exists—to the unchangeable and unalterable condition of both. This is how God abolishes the laws of nature: He engages Himself with nature amidst the things of nature in a way beyond nature.

**Another interpretation of the words: "The world above must be filled."**

{31.9} If, then, Christ as man is the *first fruits* of our nature in relation to God the Father, and a kind of *yeast that leavens the whole mass* of humanity, so that in the idea of His humanity He is *with God the Father*, for He is *the Word*, who never at any time has ceased from or gone outside of His remaining in the Father, [1280D] let us not doubt that, consistent with His prayer to the Father, we shall one day be where He is now, the first fruits of our race. For inasmuch as He came to be below for our sakes and without change became man, exactly like us *but without sin*, loosing the laws of nature in a manner beyond nature, it follows that we too, thanks to Him, will come to

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<sup>335</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.38, n. 136.



be in the world above, and become gods according to Him through the mystery of grace, undergoing no change whatsoever in our nature. And thus, according to the wise teacher, the world above will again be filled, with the *members of the body* being *gathered together with their head*, each according to its worth. Through the “harmonious architecture of the Spirit,”<sup>336</sup> each member, [1281A] according to the degree of its progress in virtue, will receive the place that is appropriate to it, filling *the body of Him who fills all in all*, which fills and is filled from all things.

{31.10} Thus, whether it is by the spiritual rebirth of those who are born according to Christ, as we said a moment ago, or whether it is by the completion in Christ and through Christ of the secret numbers of heaven—I mean the one hundred rational sheep, the ten intelligible silver coins, and the honorable reunion of the two brothers—or whether by the gathering of *the members of the body in union with their head* and the *first fruits* of the *rising mass* of humanity, the world above will surely be filled, just as the teacher said. In fact, [1281B] it has already been filled in Christ, and will be filled again in those who become like Christ, when they, who have already *shared in the likeness of His death* through their sufferings, *shall come to be natural outgrowths of His resurrection*.

### Ambiguum 32

{32.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Nativity:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, whose government is upon his shoulder*, for He is exalted by means of the cross.<sup>337</sup>

{32.2} Being wholly inspired by the Word, the great teacher adds to the previous words,<sup>338</sup> in accordance with the Word, the word about the Word that the great prophet Isaiah mystically spoke concerning the Incarnate [1281C] Word, namely, *whose government is upon His shoulder*. By so doing, he indicated succinctly, as is his habit, how we are to understand properly this “government,” by saying that “He is exalted by means of the cross.” But because the cross, by virtue of the conceptions surrounding it, admits of many contemplations, it is well worth searching for the concept that the teacher had in mind when he identified the cross with the principle of “government.” For the cross is contemplated in light of its shape, its composition, the characteristics of its parts and its function, but also in light of many other concepts, which are visible to those who love to behold divine realities.<sup>339</sup>

{32.3} When contemplated in light of its shape, the cross hints at the power which embraces all things—things above and things below, in both directions—within their proper limits. In light of [1281D] its composition, it points to essence, providence, and judgment, that is, to their manifestations, by which I mean wisdom, knowledge, and virtue, which belong to the power that governs the universe. Essence and wisdom, as the creative power, are seen in the vertical line; providence and judgment, as the preserving power, are seen in the horizontal; judgment and virtue, as that which destroys evil, and by which what has been created and preserved is joined to its

<sup>336</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 19.8 (PG 35:1052C); cf. Maximos, Letter 28 (PG 91:621A).

### Ambiguum 32

<sup>337</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.2 (SC 358:106, lines 11-13).

<sup>338</sup> I.e., the passage from Gregory’s Or. 38.2 (“The laws of nature are abolished”), cited at the head of Amb 31, which is the first passage Maximos cites from that oration; the passage that immediately follows it (“For to us a child is born . . . for He is exalted by means of the cross”) is the one under consideration here.

<sup>339</sup> For what follows, cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Interval of Three Days* (GNO 9/1:300-3); and id., *Catechetical Oration 32* (SC 453:286-92).

proper governing cause and origin, are seen throughout the whole.<sup>340</sup> As for the properties of the parts, these are seen, on the one hand, through the [1284A] vertical line, by which the cross signifies that God is always the same, never departing from His own permanence, by virtue of His unshakeable and immovable abiding. The horizontal line, on the other hand, hints at creation's absolute dependence on God, for apart from Him it has no other governing cause or basis of existence. Finally, the activity of the cross appears in the inactivity and mortification of those who have been nailed to it.<sup>341</sup> It was, then, according to this mode of contemplation, I think, that the teacher understood the words of the prophet.

{32.4} Every government—for it is good to draw on examples from our own life to point to the truth of the realities that are above us—has distinctive insignia, which make their bearers known to all as persons who have received authority from the emperor. Here one thinks of the so-called [1284B] *codicilli*, which are borne by the provincial governor, or the sword that is the sign of the duke, or the distinctive signs and standards belonging to others in different offices.<sup>342</sup> Moreover, these officials receive their insignia directly from the emperor, and they carry them in their own hands, and when they appear in public they place them in the care of their most trusted retainers. In the same way, our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the concept of His humanity, received the symbols of His own government, and appeared in public bearing His cross upon His shoulders. He was the first to bear it, but afterwards He gave it to another to bear, indicating through these things that whoever is entrusted with governing must first lead those who are governed, by complying with all the rules of government (for only thus will his own rulings be acceptable), and then he can issue directives to those who have been entrusted to him to perform the same things. And if the insignia of the government [1284C] of our Lord Jesus Christ is the cross, which He carried on His shoulders, we need to know the hidden meaning that He wished to manifest by means of these “shoulderings,” which He Himself arranged and submitted to. Those who possess scientific knowledge of symbols say that the “shoulder” is a token of ascetic practice, and the cross a sign of dispassion, since it induces mortification.<sup>343</sup>

{32.5} By means of these enigmas, then, our Lord and God experienced both of the realities signified by them—I mean ascetic practice and perfect dispassion, so that practice might not be debased by human vainglory—and He manifested this by His actions to those who were obedient to Him, just as if He had cried out loudly and said: “This is the symbol of my government.” Anyone of us, therefore, who desires a place in such a government [1284D] *must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*, which means that he must take up the life of ascetic practice (which mortifies the passions), and lay hold of the goodness and beauty of His bounty, for Christ desires that all should exercise government in the manner that He did. For when the God-

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<sup>340</sup> “Governing cause” renders the Greek word *aitia*, since the notion of “cause” operative here is not simply an isolated act of remote origination, but a power that continues to inform and govern its effects. The same holds for the word “origin” (*arche*).

<sup>341</sup> Cf. below, Amb 47.2-3.

<sup>342</sup> The *codicillus* (a Latin word) designates an imperial document conferring some privilege, cf. *Codex Theodosianus* 6.4.23. Extremely rare among patristic writers, the word *codicillus* is attested fifteen times in the *Novels* of Justinian, supporting the tradition that Maximus had been in the service of the imperial government. On the ducal office (*protospatharios*), cf. *Cod. Th.* 7.4.30; 11.25.1; 15.11.2; and Guillard, *Recherches*, 99-131.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Clement, *Stromateis* 5.6.37.2 (SC 278:84); Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* 12 (GNO 6:52, lines 10-17); Chrysostom, *On the Cross and the Thief* 1 (PG 49:404C); Evagrius, *Praktikos*, Prologue (SC 171:488, lines 29-34); and QThal 3 (CCSG 7:55-57, lines 25-36).

bearing teacher said, “He is elevated by means of the cross,” I believe that with these words he was emphasizing for us the fact that, when the rational nature of man is exalted through ascetic practice and the dispassion that is paired with it, [1285A] Christ Himself is said to be exalted, by which I mean the “form of Christ”<sup>344</sup> inherent within human beings—for it is this that rises upwards, in proper sequence and order, and through dispassionate practice moves to the cognitive contemplation of nature, and from there to initiation in theology.

{32.6} It seems to me that this is exactly what the great Saint Dionysios the Areopagite means when he says: “Inasmuch as the Divine is the governing origin and cause of the beautiful sacred orders, whereby the sacred intellects arrive at self-knowledge, he who reverts to the proper view of his own nature will see what he is in light of the governing cause, and will acquire this, the first holy gift, as a consequence of his return to the light. Having looked rightly upon his own proper condition with dispassionate eyes, he will depart from the gloomy recesses of ignorance, but being imperfect he will not, of his own accord, at once desire the most perfect unity and participation [1285B] in God, but little by little will be carried in an orderly and sacred manner through the first things, to things more primary, and through these to things most primal, and, when perfected, to the supreme summit of communion with the Divine.”<sup>345</sup>

{32.7} It is in this manner, then, according to that great and God-minded teacher, that the only exalted One is “exalted by means of the cross,” for He is spiritually exalted through us who are exalted according to Him, when, through ascetic practice coupled with dispassion, we are led up to knowledge, and with minds free of matter we are raised up from there to mystical contemplation and initiation into divine realities, and even, I make bold to add, to participation in God.

### Ambiguum 33

{33.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Nativity:

The Logos becomes thick.<sup>346</sup> [1285C]

{33.2} When the God-bearing teacher says that the “Logos becomes thick,” I think he does so with the following ideas in mind. Either because the Logos, who is simple and incorporeal, and who spiritually nourishes all the divine powers in heaven according to rank, deemed it worthy to “become thick” through His manifestation in the flesh (which was taken from us, and for us, and is consistent with us, *but without sin*), so that He might instruct us, by means of words and examples suited to us, in mysteries that transcend the power of all human speech. (For we know that *all that He said was in the form of parables, and that He said nothing without a parable*, for teachers typically have recourse to parables whenever their pupils are not immediately able to follow them, and so endeavor to lead them to [1285D] an understanding of what is being said.) Or one could say that the Logos “becomes thick” in the sense that for our sake He ineffably concealed Himself in the logoi of beings, and is obliquely signified in proportion to each visible thing, as if through certain letters, being whole in whole things while simultaneously remaining utterly complete and fully present, whole, and without diminishment in each particular thing. He remains undifferentiated and

<sup>344</sup> I.e., the “Christ-form” (*christoeides*), a word coined by Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 1.4 (114, line 8; 592C); EH 7.2 (121, line 22; 553D).

<sup>345</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 2.4 (75, lines 10-19; 400BC).

### Ambiguum 33

<sup>346</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.2 (SC 358:106, lines 16-17); cf. id., Letter 101.49 (SC 208:56, lines 15-18).

always the same in beings marked by difference; simple and without composition in things that are compounded; without origin in things that have a beginning; invisible in things that are seen; and incapable of being touched in all that is palpable. Or one could say that the Logos “becomes thick” in the sense that, for the sake of our thick minds, He consented to be both embodied and expressed through letters, [1288A] syllables, and sounds, so that from all these He might gradually gather those who follow Him to Himself, being united by the Spirit, and thus raise us up to the simple and unconditioned idea of Him, bringing us for His own sake into union with Himself by contraction to the same extent that He has for our sake expanded Himself according to the principle of condescension.<sup>347</sup>

### **Ambiguum 34**

**{34.1}** From Saint Gregory’s same oration *On the Nativity*:

Not from those things that He is in Himself <can we know God>, but from those things that are around Him, selecting one impression from out of another, and combining them into some sort of image of the truth.<sup>348</sup>

**{34.2}** [1288B] “From those things” that pertain to God’s essence, that is, from the essence itself, it has never at any time been known what God is. For to have even an idea of what God might be is impossible and completely beyond the reach of all creation, whether visible or invisible. Moreover, “from those things that are around” the essence, we learn only *that* God exists, and when these things are contemplated properly and piously, God yields Himself up to those who gaze upon Him. But all the things that are “around” the essence do not disclose what the essence itself is, but what it is not, such as not being created, not having a beginning, not being finite, not being corporeal, and any other such things that are around the essence, and which indicate what it is not, but not what it is. And this is true even of the principles of providence and judgment, according to which the universe is wisely governed, and with which the harmonious contemplation of nature around God is said to take place, which shows only [1288C] by analogy that its Creator exists. To be sure, negations stand in opposition to affirmations, becoming amicably interwoven with each other around God, each entering into and reciprocally complementing the other. Thus the negative statements indicate not that the Divine is something, but rather what it is not, and these are in compliance with the affirmations around that something (which the Divine is not). And the affirmations, which indicate solely *that* the Divine exists, but not in anyway *what* it is, are united with the negations around that something (which the Divine is not). To the extent that the negations and affirmations are taken in relation to each other, they express opposition through antithesis, but when they are referred to God, they reveal their intimate relation by the manner in which the two extremes mutually condition each other.

### **Ambiguum 35**

**{35.1}** [1288D] From St. Gregory’s same oration *On the Nativity*:

But since this did not suffice to Goodness—to move solely within self-contemplation—it was necessary that the Good should overflow and make progress, so that a greater number of beings would benefit.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.31-32.

#### **Ambiguum 34**

<sup>348</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.7 (SC 358:116, lines 9-11); cf. id., Orr. 28.13; 30.17 (SC 250:128, lines 17-20; *ibid.*, 262, lines 9-13).

#### **Ambiguum 35**

{35.2} When I asked that great and wise elder (whom I have already mentioned several times)<sup>350</sup> about this passage, he told me that, with these words, the great and God-bearing Gregory wished to make it clear that God is one in Himself, as being strictly one, possessing absolutely nothing different within His nature that may be contemplated together with Him, but instead uniquely possesses within Himself an inconceivable, eternal, infinite, and incomprehensible permanence, from which, by virtue of an “ever-giving effusion”<sup>351</sup> of goodness, He brought forth beings out of nothing [1289A] and endowed them with existence, and also willed to impart Himself without defilement to them in a manner proportionate to all and to each, bestowing upon each the power to exist and to remain in existence, according to the great and godlike saint, Dionysios the Areopagite, who said that the “the Oneness of God must be praised, for by transcending all things, and owing to Its goodness, it brought into being the entire order of intelligible beings, and the beauty of the visible ones, so that, according to some ineffable principle of wisdom, He exists without diminution in each of the created things in a manner proportionate to each, without being contained by them in any way, being present in some by the excess of His munificent effusion, in others by a more measured impartation, and in others so that they are able to reflect only a glimmer of His goodness.”<sup>352</sup> Perhaps, then, this, as far as my foolishness allows me to see, is what is meant by the “effusion of the Good” and its “progress,” namely, that the [1289B] one God is multiplied in the impartation of good things proportionally to the recipients.

### Ambiguum 36

{36.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Nativity:

He communicates a second communion, far more marvelous than the first.<sup>353</sup>

{36.2} It was not so amazing, I think, though it was clearly something great, for God to bring into communion with Himself, through the *infusion of breath*, the first formation of human nature (which was pure, since it was honored by His own hand), granting to that *likeness* a share of the divine beauty *according to His image*—as it was for Him to deign to draw near to it after it had been stained, and ran from Him (on account of the passions with which it was smeared), [1289C] and to enter into intimate communion with it, and to partake of what was inferior, and to heighten the miracle by means of a marvelous union with things utterly beyond mixture with Him. In the first instance, nature did not in any way whatsoever obtain unity with God according to mode or principle either of substance or hypostasis, according to which all beings universally are seen to exist. Now, however, through the ineffable union, nature has obtained unity with God according to hypostasis, preserving unaltered, on the level of its essence, its proper principle of difference in relation to the divine essence, with respect to which it has become one and not different, by virtue of having been united to it in a union according to hypostasis, so that with regards to the principle of its being (according to which it was created and exists), nature should continue to abide with its essence strictly intact and in every way undiminished, while with regards to the principle of how it does exist, it should receive its subsistence in a

<sup>349</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.9 (SC 358:120, lines 1-3). Gregory, having already spoken of the Holy Trinity (Or. 38.8), is speaking of the diffusion of the Good in creation.

<sup>350</sup> This is the fourth mention of the wise elder, cf. above, Amb 29.2.

<sup>351</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 9.2 (208, line 13; 909C).

<sup>352</sup> Not an exact quotation, but a paraphrase of ideas from DN 2.11 (135-37; 649AB-652A).

### Ambiguum 36

<sup>353</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.13 (SC 358:134, lines 38-39).

divine manner, so that it would neither know nor admit of absolutely any impulse of movement [1289D] toward anything else. In this way, the Word entered into “communion” with human nature in a way that was “far more marvelous than the first,” essentially uniting nature to Himself in a union according to hypostasis.

### Ambiguum 37

{37.1} From Saint Gregory’s same sermon On the Nativity:

Now then receive together with me the conception (i.e., of Christ) and leap before Him for joy, if not like John in the womb, then at least like David at the repose of the ark.<sup>354</sup>

{37.2} The great John is not only an image of repentance, the [1292A] dispassion of practical philosophy, and cognitive contemplation (for he is the first as a preacher and baptizer, the second as a hermit completely separated from the world, and the third as a Levite and priest and forerunner of God the Word), but he is also a symbol of the unchanging habit of mind that is common to them all, because from his mother’s womb until his death he maintained his soul at its full intensity in all of them. David, on the other hand, is an image of confession, the practical life, and contemplation, as first the shepherd, then the king of the tribe of Judah, and then the destroyer of *enemy tribes*. In relation to these things, however, he is not a symbol of an unchanging habit of mind. For he fell subsequent to receiving knowledge, succumbing to a human weakness, and did not preserve unchanged the habit of virtue and knowledge. Perhaps this is why it is not [1292B] written of him, as it is of the great John, that he anticipated the Word by *leaping in his mother’s womb*, but <that he *leapt*> only after the enemy tribes were utterly destroyed and *the ark had come to its rest*, that is, after the departure of the passions and the return of knowledge.

{37.3} John, therefore, is a type of all those who through repentance are spiritually reborn in virtue and knowledge, and who through progress reach the end of their course having maintained their habit of mind unchanged. David, on the other hand, is a type of all those who have fallen after attaining knowledge, and who afterwards through repentance restored to the soul the gladness of divine joy that is found in virtue and knowledge. Now insofar as the great teacher is a man of few words, he spiritually and intellectually compressed the potential breadth of meaning contained in the words cited above,<sup>355</sup> and so compared those who hear divine words to the great John and David [1292C] through their respective habits of mind. For it is surely to one of the two, as it seems to me (in light of what we have said about each of them), that anyone living a pious life will correspond, as if the teacher were plainly saying: “All of you, who through repentance have conceived within yourselves the divine principle of virtue and knowledge, should strive to maintain, either like John or David, the divine leaping of joy. That is, either, like the great John, through a habit of mind that remains unchanged from the beginning to the end of your progress, without ever being drawn away by any form of evil or ignorance—or, short of this, in the manner of the blessed David, so that, even if something unwished for has befallen you on the divine path, you will labor strenuously to repent, [1292D] and to restore virtue and knowledge to yourselves through patient endurance and the practice of the divine

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### Ambiguum 37

<sup>354</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.17 (SC 358:142, lines 1-3); cf. above, Amb 6.3.

<sup>355</sup> Simplicios, in his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, reports that Iamblichos, in commenting on the work of the Pythagorean philosopher Archytas, had to “unfold” what the philosopher had “intellectually concentrated” (*ekeina te noeros synespeiramenā exeplose*) (CAG 8:2, line 21); cf. above, prol. John 6.

commandments, lest you suffer the fate of the priest Eli, negligently exposing to the passions the divine ark of virtue and knowledge, and, *falling backwards by the gates of the temple of Shiloh*, you die, *breaking the back* of the practical life.”

{37.4} I think that our blessed father teaches the same thing more clearly in his oration on the “New Sunday,”<sup>356</sup> when he says: “We are exhorted to *sing to the Lord a new song*, whether, after being dragged away by sin into the evil confusion of Babylon, [1293A] we have returned safely to Jerusalem (for there we could not *sing the divine song in a foreign land*, but here we have found a new song and a new way of life), or whether we have remained in what is morally beautiful and have established our permanence in it or continue to make progress and persevere in this process through the Spirit who makes all things new.”<sup>357</sup> These things then, put forward conjecturally, to the extent that my mindlessness allows, are what I think the teacher had in mind when he said: “Now, however, receive with me the conception and leap for joy, and if not like John in the womb, then at least like David at the repose of the ark,” for the things we have unfolded here at length, he compressed by the mode of contemplation according to rank and genus.

{37.5} For according to those who study these mysteries with precision, and [1293B] the lovers and devoted visionaries of the spiritual principles that pertain to them, the general principle of scriptural contemplation, though it happens to be one, is seen to expand in a tenfold manner: by place, time, genus, person, rank (that is, occupation), by practical, natural, and theological philosophy, by present and by future (that is, by type and truth). When, on the other hand, this principle is contracted, the first five modes are reduced to three, and the three to two, and the two are completely enfolded in the one principle that is not in any way susceptible of numeration.<sup>358</sup> For example, the five modes of place, time, genus, person, and rank are contracted into the second three, namely, the modes of practical, natural, and theological philosophy, and these three in turn are united the next two, which signify present and future, and these last two are gathered into the perfecting, and simple (as they say), and ineffable inner principle that contains them all, from which [1293C] the generic set of ten modes for the contemplation of Scripture come forth in procession, and to which they return (for therein lies its origin as a tenfold reality), being gathered up in an ascending movement through contraction back into a monad.<sup>359</sup>

{37.6} Now the inner principle of Scripture is contemplated according to time whenever the “when,” or the “was,” or the “is,” or the “shall be,” or the “before that,” or the “present,” or the “after which,” and the “in the course of which,” and the “from the beginning,” and the “past,” and the “future,” are used to indicate years, seasons, months, weeks, days, nights, and their various divisions, and in general anything that

<sup>356</sup> I.e., the Sunday after Easter.

<sup>357</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 44.1 (PG 36:608AB). Maximus will return to this oration below, in Amb 61-64.

<sup>358</sup> Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, compresses the “decad” of Aristotle’s ten categories to a “tetrad” (i.e., substance, accident, universal, particular), which is in turn compressed to a “dyad” (i.e., self-existing beings, and those that subsist in others) (CAG 8:44-45).

<sup>359</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.89-90, 96-99. What are ostensibly modes of biblical interpretation are in fact intelligible patterns used in the ordering of matter. Though directly related to Aristotle’s categories, their ontological character is largely that of the Platonic Forms, the synthesis of the two systems being a hallmark of late-antique Neoplatonic philosophy. With the addition of Pythagorean principles, the synthesis was strongly mathematized (through Nikomachos of Gerasa’s *Introduction to Arithmetic*, the anonymous *Theologoumena arithmeticae*, and Anatolios’ *On the Decad*), so that the categories in question are all present in, emerge from, and return to the monad, features which closely align the monad with the divine source of productivity and order; cf. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*. Maximus’s anonymous sources surely include the numerologically adept “wise elder,” cf. below, Amb 66.

is indicative of time. The mode of place is contemplated when heaven, earth, air, the sea, the inhabited world, the limits of that world, countries, islands, cities, temples, villages, fields, mountains, ravines, roads, rivers, deserts, winepresses, threshing floors, and vineyards are mentioned, and in general with whatever can be characterized as a place. The category of genus [1293D] emerges whenever any general mention is made of “angels,” or of any of the other ranks of intellective beings that adorn the heavens, as well as of things like the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, and whatever is in the air, or on the earth, or in the sea, whether animals, zoophytes,<sup>360</sup> or plants, and whatever materials are extracted from the earth and worked by man and his arts, and whatever is like these things—and also, in a special way, men, nations, peoples, languages, tribes, clans, and the like, with or without number. Genus is further distinguished by person when the name of a particular angel or archangel or seraphim is given (or of any of the other intellective beings residing in the heavens), or when it gives the name of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or any other name mentioned in Scripture, regardless if the name in question is held up for praise or blame; [1296A] and again into rank, whenever it describes something as a kingdom or a king, or a shepherd or a flock, or a priest or priesthood, or a farmer, or a general, or a builder, and in general any activity with which human beings are occupied. {37.7} For all of these things, which our discussion has shown to be contained within the five modes, are, in their primary divisions, constituted of substance, potency, and activity, whether they move or are moved, or whether they are acted on or act, or whether they contemplate or are contemplated, whether they speak or are spoken, whether they teach or are taught, whether they call for acceptance or rejection, and simply, to speak concisely, whether in an active or in a passive manner they introduce us to practical, natural, and theological philosophy by means of their variegated combination with one another. To be sure, each of the things we have named can be understood under various modes [1296B] through concepts about it gathered through contemplation, in a way that denotes either praise or blame, and it manifests the principles that pertain to it, whether these should be practiced or avoided, whether they are natural or unnatural, intelligible or unintelligible. For, as I have said, there is a double mode for each item, according to the capacity of the person who undertakes an intelligent examination of their respective contemplation. Through, then, the affirmation of those principles that are practicable, natural, and intelligible, and the negation of those that are not to be practiced, are unnatural, and are mere mindless imaginings, the pious will attain to practical, natural, and theological philosophy, which is the same as saying the love of God.

{37.8} And these three modes of philosophy are further divided into present and future, for like a shadow they stand in relation to truth, type, and archetype.<sup>361</sup> That man is able, in [1296C] this present age, in a manner that is lofty and beyond nature, to reach the most extreme measure of virtue and knowledge and wisdom, and attain the science of divine realities, is something that occurs through the types and images of the archetypes. This is because everything that is now reckoned by us to be truth is in fact a type, and the *shadow* and *image* of the greater Word. For the Word, who created all things, and who is in all things according to the relation of present to the future, is comprehended both in type and in truth, in which He is present both in being and manifestation, and yet He is manifested in absolutely nothing, for inasmuch as He transcends the present and the future, He transcends both type and truth, for He

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 1 (ed. Morani 1987, 4, line 5).

<sup>361</sup> Cf. above, Amb 21.15-16.



contains nothing that might be considered contrary to Him. But truth has a contrary: falsehood. Therefore the Word in whom the universe is gathered transcends the truth, and also, insofar as He is man and God, [1296D] He truly transcends all humanity and divinity.

{37.9} Therefore the first five modes, through the multiform contemplation to which they are subject, are gathered together into practical, natural, and theological philosophy, and these three are further gathered into the modes of present and future, that is, type and truth. Present and future, in turn, are gathered up in the beginning, that is, in the *Word who is in the beginning*, who enables the worthy to experience and see Him, for, in the manner described above, they diligently pursued their course to Him, and it was for Him that they transformed into a monad what for their sakes had become a decad, which expelled from them every impassioned movement whether natural [1297A] or intellectual, and which by divine grace formed within them, throughout their whole habit of mind, the quality of simplicity that is natural to the Divine. We should also know this: the principles of providence and judgment have been planted within natural and practical philosophy respectively, consistent with the modes that are proper to them, and they come to light through the contemplation both of beings and of things coming into being.

{37.10} These things, then, as I have said, were what that godly-minded teacher was thinking, and it seems to me that whereas he quite fittingly identified the saints by the modes of genus and rank which belong to them through contemplation, he also identified the great John by the mode of place. This is because Saint John, as a preacher of repentance, is an image of the practical life, as a hermit he is an image of dispassion, and as a Levite and priest he is an image of cognitive contemplation. And inasmuch as he *leaped in his mother's womb* [1297B] at the approach of the Word, he is a symbol of an unchanging habit of virtue and knowledge. Saint David, on the other hand, as a Judean and a shepherd, is an image of practical philosophy arrived at through confession; but as the king of Israel he represents initiation into contemplation. The genus of Saint John is the nation and tribe from which he had his existence, while his rank and occupation were preaching and the priesthood; his place was the desert in which he dwelled. The same is true for Saint David: his genus is his nation and tribe, while his occupation, that is, his rank, is that of shepherd and king. By means of these modes, each of these saints, when seen for what he is in light of the proper principle of the modes that apply to him, unfailingly reveals the mystery that is made known through him.

### Ambiguum 38

{38.1} [1297C] From Saint Gregory's same oration On the Nativity:

If He flees into Egypt, eagerly flee together with Him, for it is good to flee together with the persecuted Christ. Should He linger in Egypt, call Him out of Egypt, for there He is rightly worshiped.<sup>362</sup>

{38.2} In addition to knowing that the Lord fled to Egypt, I think one also needs to know who is persecuting Him. The Lord does not simply flee to Egypt, but He is persecuted by Herod, who at that time was ruling in the land of Judea. They say that Herod means "passion," "of skin," and "nature." Egypt, too, is understood in many ways, according to the meanings of which it admits through the modes of

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### Ambiguum 38

<sup>362</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.18 (SC 358:146, lines 4-7). That Christ is "rightly worshipped in Egypt" is probably a reference to the Nicene orthodoxy of Peter II, who at the time of Gregory's oration was the bishop of Alexandria (373-380).

contemplation. Sometimes it designates the present [1297D] world, or sometimes the flesh, at other times it designates sin, or ignorance, or *affliction*, and it is surely in this last sense that we should understand the Lord's flight to Egypt. So "it is good to flee together with Christ to Egypt," that is, together with the divine discerning reason that dwells within us (which is now persecuted on account of His infancy because of our infancy, for we are infants compared to Him), pursued by the *earthly mind* that still reigns and rules over us from the impassioned movements of the flesh, leading us to the [1300A] "afflictions" of the practical life, until such time as the advent of dispassion informs us of the death of *those who sought the life of the* divine reason, which lives like a child within us. What they seek to kill is the rational life within us which is perfected in God, and they rage to destroy the form of Christ, that is, our habit of mind, for it is through our free and unhesitating power of choice, as if through a *light cloud*, that He sets foot on our *Egypt*, that is, the flesh, and *throws down headlong* its movements and passions as if they were so many *handmade idols*, and thus completely shifts the foundation and seat of the soul.<sup>363</sup> Having removed all the idols, He redirects worship to Himself, as is right. It is in this manner, then, that "it is good for us to flee together with the persecuted Christ," [1300B] receiving, through our voluntary affliction, dispassion as a good reward for our flight with Him. {38.3} Again, we call Christ "out of Egypt," when, subsequent to the departure of the passions and their complete mortification, we neither allow the divine, discerning reason within us to dwell mindlessly on contrivances concerning things that do not exist, nor cede a place within ourselves or others for the Word to be known solely as flesh. But after preparing ourselves properly and faithfully in the types of practical philosophy that require affliction for the acquisition of the virtues, let us ascend through contemplation from these to the knowledge of which they are types and preliminary markings, as if ascending properly from a kind of Egypt to the land of Judea, teaching those with us also to ascend; and from knowing Christ the Word as flesh, let us through the practical life pass over to the [1300C] *glory* that is the knowledge of Him *as the only-begotten Son of the Father*.

{38.4} This, then, is how someone can rightly and reverently "flee together with the persecuted Christ," and this is how he can also "call him," passing beyond the practical life to contemplation and knowledge, doing all things with the Word, according to the Word, and for the Word. And do not think it strange that "Egypt" is understood here as the affliction necessary for the acquisition of virtue, but consider carefully what has been written in the Old Testament, for not only were the Israelites afflicted by the making of bricks, but with the advent of Moses the Egyptians themselves were plagued with death. For Egypt means both "affliction" and "darkness," as I said a moment ago, but through contemplation the subject of every proper interpretation generally admits the notion either of what is praiseworthy or deserving of [1300D] censure. If, therefore, the flesh flourishes and burgeons, the soul is oppressed by the passions and plunged into darkness (because the habit of the virtues and the light of knowledge have receded). Conversely, when the soul is fortified and made resplendent with the divine beauty of the virtues, and shines with the light of knowledge, the *outer man wastes away*, for with the advent of the Word, the soul puts off the natural vigor of the flesh, in which lies hidden, or rather over which rules, the dragon *whose power is the navel*, like an invisible Pharaoh

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<sup>363</sup> A reference to the tradition that when the infant Christ entered Egypt, its idols fell from their pedestals; cf. *The Gospel of Ps.-Matthew* 23-24 (trans. J.K. Eliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford, 2006], 96-97).

“scattering good things,”<sup>364</sup> slithering like a serpent and sinking the teeth of sin into the soul. Yet with the gradual eradication of *the mind of flesh* through the hardships of the practical life, [1301A] he ebbs away like a dissolving corpse, leaving not even so much as a trace of his former tyranny, so that those who have attained their freedom through Christ can cry out, even before the general resurrection (on account of the voluntary resurrection of their will that has already taken place), and say: *Death, where is thy sting? Hades, where is thy victory?* In other words, the pleasure of the flesh, and its affinitive power to deceive the soul through ignorance, by means of which, before the advent of Christ, the all-abominable devil held sway over human nature, and without pity wounded it with the sting of pleasure, relentlessly driving it to destruction by the sword of deception.

### Ambiguum 39

{39.1} [1301B] From Saint Gregory’s oration On the Theophany:

So if they were absolutely bound to be impious, and to fall away from the glory of God, being led astray to idols and fabrications of art and things fashioned by hands, men of sense could not imprecate anything worse upon them than that they might worship and honor such things.<sup>365</sup>

{39.2} You stated that, when these words were read, some of those who were listening denounced the teacher, saying that it was not right for “men of sense,” and who intend to live according to the Gospel, to be “imprecating” that others “might worship and honor such things.” To these people I have nothing of my own to say, but I will share with you what I once learned about this from a certain elder, who was wise in divine matters, and who greatly esteemed the teaching of the Fathers.<sup>366</sup> Our holy and [1301C] blessed father and teacher, Gregory, my good sirs—for I will address these men as if they were present—seeing that previously the Greeks were so mindlessly deluded, and had wandered so far away from the notion of the true God, uttered these words according to the law of compassion, so that, by means of an extensive refutation (for their sake) of the arguments in favor of their form of worship, the transition from the mindless and futile—indeed I should say abominable—worship of theirs to the right faith might be easier for them and come about with less danger of any of them being swept away into heresy, since their delusion would be so obvious to all and easy to detect that it would not conceal the hidden evil from anyone who claims to be honest.

### Ambiguum 40

{40.1} [1301D] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Theophany:

Where there is purification, there is also illumination, and illumination is the fulfillment of longing among those who desire the greatest, or the greatest, or something beyond what is great.<sup>367</sup>

{40.2} Those who comprehend divine mysteries say that where there is “purification” of the soul by the virtues, there is also “illumination” by knowledge, subsequent to

<sup>364</sup> The phrase is from Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 19.69; 11.48 (LCL 2:144-46, lines 1-2; 130, lines 8-9); id., *On the Rules of Allegory* 3.12; 3.236 (LCL 1:306; 460); cf. LCL 10:399.

#### Ambiguum 39

<sup>365</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 39.6 (SC 358:160, lines 4-8).

<sup>366</sup> This is the fifth mention of the wise elder, cf. above, Amb 35.2.

#### Ambiguum 40

<sup>367</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 39.8 (SC 358:164, lines 16-18).

pious reflection on beings.<sup>368</sup> This illumination raises up the soul to the understanding [1304A] of God, and unites its desire with the ultimate object of its desire, which is God, who properly speaking exists in and is known in “the greatest,” that is, in three hypostases that are one in essence and power, and which are unconfused by virtue of the precise and unalterable property of each, by which I mean ingenerateness, generation, and procession. And (God is known) in “the greatest,” that is, in the unity, identity, and uniqueness of the Godhead according to essence; and as “beyond what is great,” since “the Divine is not circumscribed by any quantity, magnitude, or spatial extension,”<sup>369</sup> nor is it marked off by any limits. For every magnitude is strictly limited, whereas the Divine alone is limitless, as the great David says: *The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised, and there is no limit to* [1304B] *His majesty*, insofar as the Divine is not limited by any boundary. For this reason the Divine is infinite, and transcends absolutely all the concepts of time or nature that have been devised by those who follow the technical method of logical syllogisms.<sup>370</sup> For these men have proved to be completely useless in the discovery of the truth, since they are incapable of believing in the existence of anything that cannot be apprehended by their thoughts.

**{40.3}** The teacher himself makes it clear that this is his meaning, since he uses these same expressions in other places. Thus, in his oration “On the Arrival of those from Egypt,” he says that “The one is called God, and subsists in three greatest, namely: [1304C] the Cause, Creator, and Perfecter, by which I mean the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>371</sup> And again, in his oration “On Baptism,” in speaking of one and the same Divinity in three holy hypostases, he says: “In every respect it is equal, in every respect it is the same, just as the beauty and greatness of heaven is one, it is an infinite cohesion of three infinite Ones.”<sup>372</sup> As you can see, to those who possess more than a merely superficial acquaintance with his divine orations, the teacher interprets himself.

## Ambiguum 41

**{41.1}** [1304D] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On the Theophany:

The natures are innovated, and God becomes man.<sup>373</sup>

**{41.2}** Having received the greater part of the divine mysteries handed down to them in succession from those who before them were the followers *and ministers of the Word*, and being directly initiated into the knowledge of beings through these mysteries, the saints say that the existence of all things that have come into being is marked by five divisions.<sup>374</sup> The first of these, they say, is that which divides the uncreated nature from the whole of created nature, which received its being through a process of becoming. For they say that whereas God in His goodness [1305A] created

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, CH 7.3 (30, lines 15-22; 209C); EH 5.3; 6.6 (106; 504AC; 119-20; 537AC).

<sup>369</sup> The text in PG places these words in quotation marks; they would seem to be a paraphrase of Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomios* 3.7 [32] (GNO 2:226); cf. Basil, *Against Eunomios* 1.23 (SC 299:252-54).

<sup>370</sup> Cf. above, Amb 22.2; QThal 51 (CCSG 7:399, lines 73-82); and Gregory of Nyssa, *Canonical Letter* (PG 45:224A).

<sup>371</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 34.8 (SC 318:212, lines 8-10).

<sup>372</sup> Id., Or. 40.41 (SC 358:292-294, lines 11-12).

## Ambiguum 41

<sup>373</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 39.13 (SC 358:176, lines 8-9); cf. above, Amb 5.7; and below, Amb 42.26-29.

<sup>374</sup> Cf. QThal 48 (CCSG 7:333-335, lines 65-81).

the splendid orderly arrangement of all beings, it is not immediately self-evident to this orderly arrangement who and what God is, and they call “division” the ignorance of what it is that distinguishes creation from God. For to that which naturally divides these realities from each other, and which excludes their union in a single essence (since it cannot admit of one and the same definition), they did not give a name. The second is that according to which the totality of nature, which received its being through creation by God, is divided into the intelligible and the sensible.<sup>375</sup> The third is that according to which sensible nature is divided into heaven and earth. The fourth is that according to which the earth is divided into paradise and the inhabited world; and the fifth is that according to which man, who is above all—like a most capacious workshop containing all things,<sup>376</sup> naturally mediating through himself all the divided extremes, and who by design has been [1305B] beneficially placed amidst beings—is divided into male and female, manifestly possessing by nature the full potential to draw all the extremes into unity through their means, by virtue of his characteristic attribute of being related to the divided extremes through his own parts.<sup>377</sup> Through this potential, consistent with the purpose behind the origination of divided beings, man was called to achieve within himself the mode of their completion, and so bring to light the great mystery of the divine plan, realizing in God the union of the extremes which exist among beings, by harmoniously advancing in an ascending sequence from the proximate to the remote and from the inferior to the superior.<sup>378</sup>

**{41.3}** This is why man was introduced last among beings<sup>379</sup>—like a kind of natural bond mediating between the universal extremes through his parts, and unifying [1305C] through himself things that by nature are separated from each other by a great distance—so that, by making of his own division a beginning of the unity which gathers up all things to God their Author, and proceeding by order and rank through the mean terms, he might reach the limit of the sublime ascent that comes about through the union of all things in God, in whom there is no division, completely shaking off from nature, by means of a supremely dispassionate condition of divine virtue, the property of male and female, which in no way was linked to the original principle of the divine plan concerning human generation, so that he might be shown forth as, and become solely a human being according to the divine plan, not divided by the designation of male and female (according to the principle by which he formerly came into being), nor divided into the parts that now appear around him, [1305D] thanks to the perfect union, as I said, with his own principle, according to which he exists.

**{41.4}** Then, once he had united paradise and the inhabited world through his own proper holy way of life, man would have fashioned a single earth, not divided by him in the difference of its parts, but rather gathered together, for to none of its parts

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<sup>375</sup> These first two divisions are discussed by Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomios* 1 [270-72] (GNO 1:105-6, lines 19-11); and *ibid.*, 2 [66-67] (GNO 2:209-10, lines 19-11).

<sup>376</sup> “Workshop” renders the Greek word *ergasterion*, which here suggests a center of both production and exchange, as described by Chrysostom, *On the Statues* 16 (PG 49:172A). The word also has the metaphorical sense of a “womb,” cf. Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.85 (LCL 6:490); Clement, *Stromateis* 3.12.83 (GCS 52:234); Gregory the Theologian, *Or.* 28.22 (SC 250:146); and Proklos of Constantinople, *hom.* 1.1, 14 (ed. Constan 2003, 136, cf. 149-50).

<sup>377</sup> Maximos has taken the Platonic principle of cosmological analogy and placed it at the center of his philosophical anthropology; cf. above, Amb 17.8, n. 249.

<sup>378</sup> Cf. *LrdPr* (CCSG 23:33-34); and Dionysios the Areopagite, *CH* 1.1 (7, lines 4-5; 120B).

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 25-29 (77-88) (LCL 1:60-72); Gregory the Theologian, *Or.* 38.11 (SC 358:124-26); *id.*, *Or.* 44.4 (PG 36:612AB); Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 2 (PG 44:132D-133B); and Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 1 (ed. Morani 1987, 4, lines 12-16).

would he be subjected. After this, having united heaven and earth through a life identical in virtue in every manner with that of the angels (as much as this is humanly possible),<sup>380</sup> he would have made the sensible creation absolutely identical and indivisible [1308A] with itself, not in any way dividing it into places separated by distances, for he would have become nimble by means of the spirit, without any corporeal weight holding him to the earth, and thus proceed unhindered in his ascent to the heavens, for his intellect would no longer behold such things, but hasten purely to God, and in the wisdom of his gradual ascent to God, just as if he were traveling on an ordinary road, he would naturally overcome any obstacles standing in his way. {41.5} Then, once he had united intelligible and sensible realities through knowledge equal to that of the angels,<sup>381</sup> he would have made the whole of creation one single creation, not divided by him in terms of knowledge and ignorance, since his cognitive science of the principles of beings would be completely equal to the knowledge of the angels. [1308B] Owing to this knowledge, “the ever-giving effusion”<sup>382</sup> of true wisdom integrally and immediately endows the worthy (as much as possible) with a concept of God that is beyond understanding or explanation. And finally, in addition to all this, had man united created nature with the uncreated through love (O the wonder of God’s love for mankind!), he would have shown them to be one and the same by the state of grace, the whole man wholly pervading the whole God, and becoming everything that God is, without, however, identity in essence, and receiving the whole of God instead of himself, and obtaining as a kind of prize for his ascent to God the absolutely unique God, who is the goal of the motion of things that are moved, and the firm and unmoved stability of things that are carried along to Him, and the limit (itself limitless and infinite) of every definition, order, [1308C] and law, whether of mind, intellect, or nature.

{41.6} But moving naturally, as he was created to do, around the unmoved, as his own beginning (by which I mean God), was not what man did. Instead, contrary to nature, he willingly and foolishly moved around the things below him, which God had commanded him to *have dominion over*. In this way he misused his natural, God-given capacity to unite what is divided, and, to the contrary, divided what was united, and thus was in great danger of lamentably returning to non-being. This was why “the natures were innovated,” so that, in a paradox beyond nature, the One who is [1308D] completely immobile according to His nature moved immovably, so to speak, around that which by nature is moved, “and God became man”<sup>383</sup> in order to save lost man, and—after He had united through Himself the natural fissures running through the general nature of the universe, and had revealed the universal pre-existing principles of the parts (through which the union of what is divided naturally comes about)—to fulfill the great purpose of God the Father, *recapitulating all things, both in heaven and on earth, in Himself, in whom they also had been created*.

{41.7} To be sure, initiating the universal union of all things in Himself, beginning with our own [1309A] division, He became perfect man, having assumed from us, and for us, and consistent with us, everything that is ours, lacking nothing, *but without sin*, for to become man He had no need of the natural process of connubial intercourse. In this way, He showed, I think, that there was perhaps another mode,

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17, 22 (PG 44:188D, 205A); id., *Against Apollinarios* (GNO 3/1:212, lines 6-7); id., *On Ecclesiastes* 6 (GNO 5:386, lines 18-21).

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17, 18 (PG 44:188C, 189C, 196A); id., *Against Apollinarios* (GNO 3/1:212, line 4); id., *On the Song of Songs* 1 (GNO 6:30, line 7).

<sup>382</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 9.2, cited above, Amb 35.2, n. 351.

<sup>383</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 39.13 (SC 358:176, lines 8-9).

foreknown by God, for the multiplication of human beings, had the first human being kept the commandment and not *cast himself down to the level of irrational animals* by misusing the mode of his proper powers—and so He drove out from nature the difference and division into male and female, a difference, as I have said, which He in no way needed in order to become man, and without which existence would perhaps have been possible. There is no need for this division to last *perpetually, for in Christ Jesus*, says the divine [1309B] apostle, *there is neither male nor female*.<sup>384</sup>

{41.8} Then, having sanctified our inhabited world by the dignity of His conduct as man, He proceeded unhindered to paradise after His death, just as He truly promised to the thief, saying: *Today, you will be with me in paradise*. Consequently, since there was for Him no difference between paradise and our inhabited world, He appeared on it, and spent time together with His disciples after His resurrection from the dead, demonstrating that the earth is one and not divided against itself, for it preserves the principle of its existence free of any difference caused by division. Then, by His ascension into heaven, it is obvious that He united heaven and earth, for He entered heaven with His earthly body, which is of the same nature and consubstantial with ours, [1309C] and showed that, according to its more universal principle, all sensible nature is one, and thus He obscured in Himself the property of division that had cut it in two. Then, in addition to this, having passed with His soul and body, that is, with the whole of our nature, through all the divine and intelligible orders of heaven, He united sensible things with intelligible things, displaying in Himself the fact that the convergence of the entire creation towards unity was absolutely indivisible and beyond all fracture, in accordance with its most primal and most universal principle.

{41.9} And finally, after all of these things, He—considered according to the idea of His humanity—comes to God Himself, *appearing* as a man, as it is written, *before the face of God* [1309D] the Father *on our behalf*—He who as Word can never in any way be separated from the Father—fulfilling as man, in deed and truth, and with perfect obedience, all that He Himself as God had preordained should take place, having completed the whole plan of God the Father for us, who through our misuse had rendered ineffective the power that was given to us from the beginning by nature for this purpose. Thus He united, first of all, ourselves in Himself through removal of the difference between male and female, and instead of men and women, in whom this mode of division is especially [1312A] evident, He showed us as properly and truly to be simply human beings, thoroughly formed according to Him, bearing His image intact and completely unadulterated, touched in no way by any marks of corruption. And with us and for us He encompassed the extremes of the whole creation through the means, as His own parts, and He joined them around Himself, each with the other, tightly and indissolubly: paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the sensible and the intelligible, since like us He possesses a body, sense perception, soul, and intellect, to which (as His own parts), He associated individually the extreme that was thoroughly akin to each one of them (i.e., His parts), according to the mode described above, and He recapitulated in Himself, in a manner appropriate to God, all things, showing that the whole creation is one, as if it were another human being, completed by the mutual coming together of all its members, inclining [1312B] toward itself in the wholeness of its existence, according to one, unique, simple, undefined, and unchangeable idea: that it comes from nothing.

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<sup>384</sup> Cf. QThal 1 (CCSG 7:47, lines 5-17); LrdPr (CCSG 23:47, lines 341-43; pp. 49-51, lines 377-14; p. 54, lines 467-70); and Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16-17, 22 (PG 44:177D-192A, 205A)

Accordingly, all creation admits of one and the same, absolutely undifferentiated principle: that its existence is preceded by non-existence.

{41.10} For according to the true doctrine, all beings after God, which possess their being from God by virtue of having been created by Him, coincide with all the others (even if not in absolutely all respects)—and in general no being, including those from among the greatly honored and transcendent, is completely free by nature from the condition of general relation to what is Itself totally unconditioned, nor is the most ignoble among beings completely [1312C] destitute or devoid of a natural share in the general relationship to the most honored beings. For all things that are distinguished from each other by virtue of their individual differences are generically united by universal and common identities, and they are drawn together to one and the same by means of a certain generic principle of nature, like genera that are united with each other according to substance, and consequently have something one and the same and indivisible. For nothing that is universal, or which contains something else, or which is a genus, can be divided in any way by what is particular, contained, and individual. For that which does not draw together things that are naturally separated is no longer able to be generic, but rather divided up together with them and so departs from its own individual unity. For every generic item, according to its own proper principle, exists as a whole indivisibly and really in the whole of those things subordinate to it, [1312D] and with respect to the particular it is viewed as a whole in general. Species, according to their genus, being released from variations grounded in difference, likewise admit of identity with each other. Individuals, according to their species, to the extent that they share common features, become completely one and the same with each other, since by virtue of their common origin and nature they are indistinguishable and free of all difference. Accidents, finally, also possess unity, on the level of the subject, where they are in no way scattered.<sup>385</sup>

{41.11} And the unerring witness to these things is the true theologian, the great and holy [1313A] Dionysios the Areopagite, who, in the chapter on the “Perfect and the One” in his treatise *On the Divine Names*, says the following: “For there is no multiplicity which does not in some way participate in the One, but that which is many by its parts, is one in the whole; and that which is many by its accidents, is one in the subject; and that which is many in number or potentialities, is one in species; and that which is many by the species, is one by the genus; and that which is many by the processions, is one in its source. And there is none among beings that does not participate in some way in the One.”<sup>386</sup> And simply, to speak concisely, the principles of whatever is separated and particular are, as they say, contained by the principles of what is universal and generic, and the more generic and more universal principles are held together by wisdom, whereas the principles of particulars, which are contained in various ways by those of the generic terms, are encompassed by *prudence*, [1313B] according to which, having first been simplified and divested of the symbolic diversity they acquire in lower material things, are made one by wisdom, having received the natural affinity that leads to identity through the more generic principles. But *the Wisdom and Prudence of God* the Father is the Lord Jesus Christ, who through the power of wisdom sustains the universals of beings, and through the prudence of understanding embraces the parts from which they are completed, since He is by nature the Creator and Provider of all things, and through Himself draws into one those that are separated, dissolving strife among beings, and binding together all

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<sup>385</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 24 (PG 44:212D-213C).

<sup>386</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.2 (227, lines 13-17; 980A).



things in peaceful friendship and undivided concord, *both in heaven and on earth*, as the divine apostle says.

**41a. [1313C] Another contemplation of this same difficulty**

{41.12} Again, the “natures are innovated,” since the Divine, in its goodness and measureless love of mankind, accepted in a manner beyond nature, and according to its own free will, our fleshly birth, while our nature paradoxically and by a strange ordinance contrary to nature produced flesh, endowed with a rational soul, without seed, for the sake of God, who became flesh, and this flesh was in every way the same and indistinguishable from ours, *but without sin*—and what is more paradoxical, His birth did not diminish in any way the virginity of the one who became His mother.<sup>387</sup>

Strictly speaking, the “innovation” is not only the fact that God the Word, who was already timelessly and ineffably begotten of God the Father, was born in time according to the flesh, but also that our nature gave flesh without seed, and that a virgin gave birth without [1313D] corruption. For each of these clearly manifests the innovation, while at the same time on the one hand concealing and on the other hand revealing the ineffable and unknown principle according to which they took place; concealing in accordance with the mode that is beyond nature and knowledge, and revealing by the principle of faith, by which all things beyond nature and knowledge may readily be grasped.

{41.13} [1316A] In this way, then, as it seems to me, the difficulty is resolved as best it can be—I, in any case, do not know how one might otherwise explain it. It is now for your philosophical mind either to approve of what has been said, or to discover on your own and give expression to a better and wiser solution, and to communicate to me the fruit of heavenly knowledge free of all earthly elements.

**Ambiguum 42**

{42.1} From Saint Gregory’s oration On Baptism:

Scripture acknowledges three births for us: from bodies, from baptism, and from the resurrection.

After having added a few more remarks to these, [1316B] and having explained the three births, he says:

My Christ has clearly honored all these births in Himself: the first by the original and *vital inbreathing*; the second by His incarnation and the baptism with which He was baptized; and the third by the resurrection, to which He led the way, insofar as He became the *firstborn among many brethren*, and deigned to become *the firstborn from the dead*.<sup>388</sup>

{42.2} How is it that, in this latter passage, the godly-minded teacher appears to have made a rather striking addition to what he had previously stated? For having spoken of three births—from bodies, from baptism, and from the resurrection—he subsequently adds a fourth, as if it had escaped his attention, and, in what appears to be a superfluous [1316C] remark, he speaks of the birth “by the original and *vital inbreathing*.” He did not mention this with the three births, but afterwards he spoke of it as if he had, by saying: “the first by the original and *vital inbreathing*.”

{42.3} How in truth the teacher said this will be perfectly obvious to a person who is more or less his equal in virtue, and who is not far removed from his wise science of

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<sup>387</sup> Cf. above, Amb 5.7.

**Ambiguum 42**

<sup>388</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.2 (SC 358:198, lines 14-15; and p. 200, lines 11-17).

divine realities.<sup>389</sup> To the extent that I myself am able to understand this, hindered as I am by the weakness of my feeble mind, I do not think that the additional fourth birth is unwarranted or superfluous, but rather complements the aforementioned bodily birth and explains its attendant divine principles and modes. For He who deigned to become man because of the creation of the first Adam, [1316D] and who did not disdain to be born because of Adam's transgression, conspicuously displayed, by accepting creaturely origin, His gracious condescension to the fallen one, and, by accepting to undergo a human birth, He manifested His voluntary *self-emptying* to the one who stood condemned.<sup>390</sup> By accepting, on the one hand, creaturely origin, He was naturally identified with man through the *vital inspiration*, through which, in assuming the uncompromised and blameless *image of God*, He remained as man possessing the freedom of sinlessness. By accepting, on the other hand, birth in the flesh, that is, by voluntarily clothing Himself in the *form of the slave*, so as to assume the likeness of corrupted humanity, He willingly subjected Himself to natural passions like ours, but *without sin*, as if the sinless one were being held responsible for sin. For He was compounded according to and from out of both of these conditions<sup>391</sup> of ours, and became [1317A] completely a *new Adam*, bearing within Himself the first Adam, undiminished in both conditions.

{42.4} For in deference to the law of condescension, He embraced creaturely origin just as it was before the transgression of Adam, and in being formed as man He naturally assumed, through the inbreathing, the condition of sinlessness—but He did not assume incorruptibility. On the other hand, when in His voluntary self-emptying He experienced the form of birth that emerged subsequent to the divine condemnation of the transgression, He naturally assumed human passibility—but not the proclivity to sin.<sup>392</sup> And thus he became a new Adam, assuming the same sinless creaturely origin and submitting Himself to the same passible birth. In thoroughly and mutually combining these two conditions in relation to Himself, He powerfully remedied their deficiencies by their extremes. In other words, He made the second and ignoble birth the salvation and renewal of the first one, [1317B] and at the same time He made the first birth constitutive and preservative of the second one. By “extremes” I mean, in the case of the primal and noble creation, incorruptibility, which is the first principle of sinlessness; and in the case of the secondary and ignoble birth, the proclivity to sin, which is the cause of all passion and corruption. In becoming flesh, the Savior did not in any way assume sinful passion or corruption into Himself, but He accepted their consequences, and so made birth the salvation of creaturely origin, and paradoxically renewed the incorruptibility of creation by means of the passibility made possible by

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Simplikios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*: “The worthy exegete of Aristotle's writings must not fall wholly short of the latter's greatness of intellect” (CAG 8:7, lines 23-24); and Themistios, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, who argues that if a teacher and a student do not have the same concepts (*noemata*), teaching and learning become impossible, and that, “if the concept is the same, as it is necessary for it to be, then the intellect of the teacher will be identical with the intellect of the student because in the case of the intellect its essence is the same as its activity” (CAG 5:104, lines 7-11); and below, Amb 45.3.

<sup>390</sup> I.e., Adam. The argument here turns on a distinction between “creation” or “creaturely origin” (*genesis*) and “birth” (*gennesis*), the former designating the initial moment of human creation, marked by the divine “inbreathing” (Gen 2:7), and the latter the process of human reproduction which emerged after the fall. Note that Adam was not born, but created from the earth, so that procreation and birth are realities that appear subsequent to Adam's transgression; cf. above, Amb 2.2-5; Amb 31.2; and QThal 21 (CCSG 7:127, lines 5-17).

<sup>391</sup> Literally, “parts.”

<sup>392</sup> On the distinction between “creation” (*genesis*) and “birth” (*gennesis*), cf. Origen, *Scholia on the Gospel of Matthew* 1 (PG 17:289AC).

His birth. At the same time He made creaturely origin preservative of birth, sanctifying the passibility of birth by the sinlessness of creation, so that He might completely restore the integrity of creaturely origin, which holds nature together [1317C] by its divinely perfect inner principle, but also so that He might completely free that same nature from the birth to which it had become subject through sin, so that it might no longer be dominated by the same mode of procreation infused by seed common to the other animals of the earth. Now, if you naturally connect creaturely origin, the making of the body, and the inbreathing with the Word's incarnation and His birth, and separate them only in thought, you will find that, in accord with the great teacher, the fourth birth complements the birth that takes place through bodies, and that it can be distinguished from it only in thought, in the manner explained above. My point is that bodily birth, which was introduced later, is identical with the creaturely origin that is naturally conceived as preceding it, the characteristic of which is the original and *life-giving inbreathing*.

**[1317D] Contemplation of "Scripture knows three births for us"**

**{42.5}** In sum, if you wish to know the precision with which the teacher speaks, you must seek to understand what is the causal principle that preceded the creation of man, which always remains inseparably within its own proper state of permanence, and what is the mode of His birth as a corrective dispensation directed to human sin, a mode which aims to reform the one corrected and restore him completely to the principle of his creation. By understanding these things, you will see clearly how God, in becoming man, became perfect in both, [1320A] wisely restoring the mode of dispensation to the true principle of creation, and then you will rightly admire the teacher for his wisdom, seeing how he subtly articulated the whole of the supremely divine mystery which pertains to us by separating in thought things that are united by nature. For by conceptually distinguishing bodily birth from the *vital inbreathing* and the Incarnation, he alluded to the difference between the principle of man's creation and the mode of his birth, with a view to set forth an unconfused and distinct explanation of these realities. In assuming both of these for our sake, God renewed our nature, or to put it more accurately, He made our nature new, returning it to its primordial beauty of incorruptibility through His holy flesh, taken from us, and animated by a rational soul, and on which He lavishly bestowed the gift of divinization, from which [1320B] it is absolutely impossible for the enfleshed God Himself to fall, since it is innate to the body, as is the soul, wholly interpenetrating it in an unconfused union, and by virtue of His manifestation in the flesh, He accepted to be hidden exactly to the same degree that He Himself, for the sake of the flesh, was manifested and to all appearances seemed to go outside of His own natural hiddenness.

**{42.6}** And what greater paradox could there be than that, whereas He is God by nature and deemed it fitting to become man by nature, He did not alter the natural definitions of either one of the natures by the other, but being wholly God He became and remained wholly man? For being God did not hinder Him from becoming man, nor did becoming man diminish His being God, and thus He remained wholly one and the same in both, truly existing naturally in both, being neither [1320C] divided by the unadulterated integrity of the essential differences of the two natures, nor confused by the fact that the two natures came to exist in an absolutely single and unique hypostasis, and so He neither changed nature nor underwent a transformation into something He was not. Neither did He fulfill the plan of salvation in an imaginary form or simulated appearance of the flesh (as if He had simply appropriated the accidents of a substrate without the actual substrate itself), but to the contrary He

made human nature His very own—literally, really, and truly—uniting it to Himself according to hypostasis without change, alteration, diminishment, or division, and maintaining it unaltered in accordance with its essential principle and definition. It was with this human nature—according to that great and holy teacher—that He honored our bodily birth, and by truly becoming [1320D] man and being born like a man, He freed us from the bonds of birth and the law of reproduction whereby, because of the condemnation that came about because of sin, we multiply like grass from seed, and come into being in a manner directly akin to that of plants and irrational animals. This is what the great Ezekiel, that seer of magnificent visions, says somewhere, addressing himself to Jerusalem, having been initiated into divine realities and learning the reason behind the order of salvation that has now been made available to mankind: *Thus says the Lord to Jerusalem: Your root and your birth are of the land of Canaan. Your father was an Amorite [1321A] and your mother a Hittite. On the day wherein you were born they did not bind your umbilical cord, and you were not washed in water; nor were you salted with salt nor swaddled in swaddling clothes, but you were cast out upon the face of the field because of the deformity of your soul, in the day wherein you were born. And when I passed by you and saw that you were defiled with your own blood, I said to you: From your blood is your life, and so multiply, for I have granted you to be like the rising of the field, or, as Symmachus says, as I have granted you to be like the sprouting of the field.*<sup>393</sup>

{42.7} It was thus from being condemned to reproduction through seed like grass sprung from the field, and from obtaining our life through blood like the other animals, that the Lord—who heals human nature and returns it to its primordial grace of incorruptibility—came to liberate nature. His purpose was to reveal the beauty toward which human nature failed to move when it was first created, and to trample down the [1321B] wickedness to which it, being deceived, unnaturally moved at the very moment it was created, and which emptied it of all its power; and to bind the power of human desire to Himself—of which the *umbilical cord* is the symbol—granting it a condition of fecundity which is fixed and unalterable in the Good; and to *wash it in water*, I mean to cleanse it from the stains of ignorance in the ocean of knowledge poured out on it by grace; and to *salt it with salt*, and *wrap it in swaddling clothes*, that is, to fortify, by means of the Spirit, its natural energy in relation to the beauty for which it was created, and to purge it of the putrefaction of passions and make it resistant to them, and, by binding it tightly in the true principles of beings as if they were swaddling clothes, to make it completely incapable of being squandered and wasted.

#### **Another contemplation of the same phrase**

{42.8} Perhaps through these words the teacher, in proposing that the principle and mode of origination of human nature is twofold [1321C] (that of the soul and that of the body), divided bodily birth into two, emphasizing both the ineffable constitution of the soul from the divine and *vital inbreathing*, and the formation of the body from the underlying matter of which it is composed at the moment of conception together with the soul. For it is not valid to speak indistinguishably of the same principle and

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<sup>393</sup> This particular variant is attested neither in Origen's *Hexapla* (PG 16:2485-86), nor in the Göttingen Septuagint, 16/1:147), but it was common knowledge among patristic exegetes that Symmachus used *blastema* in place of *anatole*; cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Zechariah* (ed. Pusey 1868, 363, line 25); Eusebios, *On the Psalms* (PG 23:641D-644A); and Chrysostom, *On Jeremiah (Fragments from the Catena)* (PG 64:944).

mode of origination with respect to both the soul and the body, since the two are not identical in essence. Indeed, of things among which there is no identity of being, it is obvious that their principle and mode of origination will differ. But with respect to the soul, it is correct to think that the principle and mode whereby it was created, exists, and remains in existence is one thing, whereas the principle and mode of the body, [1321D] whereby it was created, exists, and immutably remains a body though conjoined to the soul, is another.

Digression 1

**A concise argument against those who say that souls exist either before or after bodies**<sup>394</sup>

{42.9} And if the time of their coming into being is one and the same for both—I mean the soul and the body—with neither of them, as I have said,<sup>395</sup> existing before or coming into existence after the other, so that the [1324A] form as a whole which they jointly constitute not be dissolved, then quite rightly the principle of reciprocal relation<sup>396</sup> holds that when an individual subsistence functioning as a part is prior to the existence of the whole, and its union with another part is completely unconditioned in nature, then no <composite> subsistence is completed by the natural synthesis of one part with another without the destruction and alteration of one of these parts into something that it was not. For that which already subsists as an individual entity by its nature cannot be imparted to the subsistence of another form. If, however, an already subsisting entity admits of synthesis with something else for the completion of a different form, it can only accomplish this either according to nature or contrary to nature. If it does this according to nature, it follows that it will never cease from synthesizing itself with other elements to complete another form, owing to the force of nature [1324B] that prevents it from moving outside its own laws, which is why it is inconceivable to think of either the soul without the body or the body without the soul. (Thus, the clever conceit of those possessing only a superficial understanding of these matters is shown to be utter folly, dragging them by logical necessity to the very conclusion they were so anxious to avoid.) If, on the other hand, contrary to nature, one of the two should admit of synthesis with the other for the completion of another form, it will certainly suffer destruction, transgressing the boundaries of its own nature, becoming something that it was not created to be, and changing into something that it was not, and what could possibly be more absurd than this? But let us return to the subject at hand.

{42.10} [1324C] As the teacher expressly states, the soul does not originate from underlying matter, as bodies do, but by the will of God, through the *vital inbreathing* in a manner which is ineffable and hidden, known only to the soul's Creator.<sup>397</sup> Receiving its existence at the moment of conception simultaneously with the body, the soul contributes to the completion of a single human being, whereas the body is created from the underlying matter of another body at the moment of conception, and is synthesized together with the soul into a single form with it. The teacher makes this point even more clearly elsewhere when he says, “in accordance with the twofold

<sup>394</sup> This digression is indebted to Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 28-29 (PG 44:229B-240B). Sherwood *Earlier Ambigua*, 60-61, notes the influence of Leontios of Jerusalem, *Against the Nestorians* 1.1-19; and id., *Against the Monophysites* 48 (PG 86:1401B-1485A; 1797A). Maximos's position on this question is briefly summarized by Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina* 59 (ed. Westerink 1948, 41); cf. id., *Philosophica minora, opusc.* 19 (ed. Duffy and O'Meara 1989, 89, lines 29-33).

<sup>395</sup> See above, Amb 7.40-43; cf. Letter 12 (PG 91:488D); and Letter 13 (PG 91:517A, 525D).

<sup>396</sup> See above, Amb 7.40, n. 98.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.7 (PG 36:632AB); id., Or. 38.11 (SC 358:124-26); Justinian, *Edict Against Origen* (ACO 3:196, lines 3-14).

power of the inbreathing, we are all infused both with breath and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>398</sup> Thus in the moment of conception we must distinguish in thought two things: first, the vital inbreathing and [1324D] the Holy Spirit in relation to the intellectual substance of the soul, and second, the formation of flesh and breath in relation to the nature of the body, just as the Fathers say.<sup>399</sup> To be sure, the creation of our forefather Adam took place in a hidden, secret manner, and his soul had both a different principle of being and a different mode of generation, while his body obviously was formed on the basis of a different principle and mode, just as the Divine Scripture has so sublimely taught us, allowing us no room to lump together according to nature the creation of the soul and the body according to one and the same mode of origin, losing sight of each one’s distinctive principle of being and mode of origin.<sup>400</sup>

**{42.11}** [1325A] And if in the case of Adam the concurrence of the twofold power of the inbreathing accompanied the moment of his coming into being, what should one say about the presence of both—I mean of soul and body—in the humanity of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, a blending that preserves as much resemblance as is possible to the first Adam? For just as the teacher himself says, “God took the elements of the body from matter, which had itself only recently been created and given form, and imbued it with life from Himself (which according to Scripture is the rational *soul* and the *image of God*), and so He creates man.”<sup>401</sup> In the same way, God took a body from a pure virgin, as if from undefiled earth, “and imbued it with life from Himself (which according to Scripture is the rational *soul* and *image of God*), and so” He created His own humanity, or in assuming flesh [1325B] (ensouled with reason and intellect), He willingly for our sake and by virtue of His limitless power, fashioned Himself into man without undergoing change.

**{42.12}** I think that in this way, as the teacher says, our Lord and God has honored our three births, that is, the three general modes of our origin in being, in well-being, and in eternal-being.<sup>402</sup> The first of these is our birth from another body, which constitutes the single birth of both—I mean of soul and body—owing to their simultaneous and mutual coexistence, and yet they may be distinguished as two because of the different mode of origin characteristic of each. It is through this first birth that we receive being. The second birth, which is from baptism, is how we lavishly receive well-being, while the third birth, from resurrection, is how [1325C] we are transformed by grace unto eternal well-being. We must, then, scrutinize the teacher’s words with the utmost precision in order to respond to those who insolently defame what he has so admirably set forth. For by distinguishing (solely in thought) bodily birth for the reason I have explained, the teacher establishes that it was not at some moment after His conception, but in the very same moment of His conception, without any suggestion whatsoever of an antecedent temporal interval, that the Lord received the life-giving spirit—that is, the inbreathing according to His humanity, by which I mean a rational soul together with the body that was taken from the pure Virgin.

Digression 2

<sup>398</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 30.20 (SC 250:270, lines 35-36).

<sup>399</sup> Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus* (PG 75:584CD).

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Justinian, *Edict Against Origen* (ACO 3:193, lines 9-25; and p. 198, lines 26-30).

<sup>401</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 38.11 (SC 358:124, lines 10-13); a passage cited by Justinian, *Edict Against Origen* (ACO 3:195, lines 35-37; and p. 196, lines 4-6).

<sup>402</sup> Cf. Amb 7.10, 22; Amb 10.12; Amb 42.12, 15, 32; and Amb 65.2-3.

**To those who say that souls pre-exist bodies**<sup>403</sup>

{42.13} [1325D] For there are some who maintain, as I said a moment ago, that souls pre-exist bodies, whereas others maintain the opposite, namely, that bodies come into existence before souls. We, however, adhering to the middle course (which according to our fathers is the royal way), speak neither of pre-existence nor post-existence of either soul or body, but of co-existence,<sup>404</sup> guarding ourselves against the two deviations by *inclining neither to the right nor the left*, just as Holy Scripture says, *fearing greatly* [1328A] that of which no greater fear exists, for in granting that souls exist before their bodies, and that bodies were subsequently devised in order to punish these souls on account of some evil they had committed prior to their embodiment,<sup>405</sup> we might reasonably assume that the magnificent beauty of the visible world, through which God is proclaimed in silence, is purely the result of sin, to say nothing of imposing on God the necessity, contrary to His own purpose, of creating a being that He had no wish to create, and which, unlike other beings, would have seemingly lacked a principle hidden within Him before the ages. For to say that the principles according to which created beings receive their substances are contained within God contrary to His own intention does not strike me as the mark of a very keen intelligence, or of a mind that is highly conscious of the sublime majesty of God, who is not subject to change and who alone is true, [1328B] and who in no way contains any recent acquisitions among the principles of beings that pre-exist within Him, and certainly not any that are contrary to His own purposes. For all things that have come to exist substantially in any way whatever, or that will come into existence, have all been willed in advance by God, and have been conceived of in advance and foreknown by Him, and to each particular being He gives substance and subsistence at the fitting and appropriate time.<sup>406</sup>

{42.14} Therefore when we behold God fashioning something, we should not think that it was only then that He began to will it, or conceive of it, or know it. Such a notion is to be dismissed, since it is replete with absurdities, and will involve us in thinking that what God from the beginning, before the ages, had failed to conceive, or know, or will, He only now conceived of, and willed, and came to know. Or, to put it in more common terms, it would be as if God had changed His mind and created something because He recently decided that it was good—and I say this in order to avoid saying that it would be that God does not even know how to create beings, the principles of which He did not previously possess. [1328C] We, however, believe that God eternally contains and foreknows all things in His will, consistent with His infinite power, and that there is nothing at all, in any manner whatsoever, that was conceived of by Him at a later stage and then received being and substance. I am of the opinion that those of pious mind should not think that God knows particular things, the principles of which are eternally contained in His foreknowledge and infinite power, only when they are created and brought into being. For time and the ages show us each thing wisely being created at the proper, predetermined moment, at which point it is brought into being, just as the divine apostle says concerning Levi, namely, that *he was still in the loins of his ancestor* before he came into being. [1328D] When the perfect time arrived, the one who existed potentially in the patriarch Abraham was brought into actual being through conception, and thus in

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<sup>403</sup> That souls pre-existed bodies was an Origenist doctrine condemned by Justinian, Anathema 1 (ACO 3:213, lines 13-16).

<sup>404</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 28 (PG 44:233BC).

<sup>405</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.2.

<sup>406</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.16-17.

order and sequence, according to the ineffable wisdom of God, we have been led to understand and believe that all things are brought into being at a time that has been foreknown.<sup>407</sup>

**{42.15}** [1329A] The principles of all the beings that exist essentially—whether they exist now or will exist in the future, whether they have come to be or will come to be, or have appeared or will appear—pre-exist and are immovably fixed in God, and it is according to these that all things are, and have come to be, and remain always drawing closer to their own predetermined principles through natural motion, and ever more closely approximated to being by their particular kinds and degrees of motion and inclination of choice. They receive well-being through virtue and through their direct progress toward the principle according to which they exist; or they receive ill-being through vice and their movement contrary to the principle by which they exist. To put it concisely, they move in accordance with their possession or privation of the potential they have naturally to participate in Him who is by nature absolutely imparticipable, and who offers Himself wholly and simply to all—worthy and unworthy—by [1329B] grace through His infinite goodness, and who endows each with the permanence of eternal being, corresponding to the way that each disposes himself and is. And for those who participate or do not participate proportionately in Him who, in the truest sense, is and is well, and is forever, there is an intensification and increase of punishment for those who cannot participate, and of enjoyment for those who can participate. For there exists absolutely none among beings whose principle did not previously exist in God, and the principles of the substance of these beings likewise pre-exist in God, from which it follows that their creation in time unquestionably takes place according to the divine purpose. Now every essential existence created according to the divine purpose remains in being and cannot pass into non-being. But if whatever essentially exists cannot pass from being to non-being once it has been brought into existence, [1329C] then its principles must be solid and unchanging, having the sole origin of their being in divine Wisdom, from which they come and thanks to which they remain in existence, and by which they have the power to remain firmly anchored in being. But if the principles of things exist permanently in God, then the purpose of God, who created all things, must be changeless concerning them—for God’s purpose cannot be contained within the boundaries of time, nor does it admit of change relative to the changes that take place among the things that are subject to it—and thus the existences of these principles are clearly incorruptible.

**{42.16}** For either God willingly and purposefully created human bodies, and it is on account of Him that they do not pass into non-being, since He wills perpetual existence for that which he purposefully willed in accordance with His reason and wisdom, [1329D] and it is on account of these<sup>408</sup> there will be no complete and utter reduction of bodies to non-being—or God did not create them according to His purpose, but was constrained to do so against His will, being led by necessity to create things whose principles He would not seem to have originally possessed. And if God was necessitated, contrary to His purpose, and thus moved against His will to create bodies, it is obvious that their creation was not preceded by reason and wisdom, for whatever comes into being contrary to the divine purpose is completely devoid of and alien to reason and wisdom. [1332A] But only evil is absolutely devoid of reason and wisdom, the being of which is characterized by non-existence, and we must never

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<sup>407</sup> Cf. above, Amb 7.19.

<sup>408</sup> I.e., reason and wisdom.



think that the creator of non-existence is God, nor even utter such a thing in the hearing of others, nor be reckless enough to believe in such a harmful and destructive doctrine. And if indeed God was so forced—if it is even permitted to say that contrary to His purpose God created something that He did not wish to create—who was it that forced Him to do so? And how is it that God, being so forced by necessity, was led, contrary to His will, to call forth into being things marked for ultimate destruction? Let those who traffic in these opinions answer these questions, if they dare. For either they will say that God did indeed do these things and so utter the greatest blasphemy, imposing on God the necessity to create bodies contrary to His purpose, or they will say that God did not create bodies at all, in which case they will be exposed as necessarily introducing another principle behind the creation of bodies, in the manner of the Manichaeans.<sup>409</sup> [1332B] Clearly, the doctrine of pre-existence shares the same characteristic as those who posit two cosmic principles and then pit them against each other in battle. Yet by the grace of the all-merciful God, those men have been covered by the gloomy darkness of obscurity, and have been consigned to utter oblivion, for they were unable to bear the splendor of the truth as proclaimed by our holy Fathers. {42.17} I find it rather astonishing—to set aside for now all the other things that could possibly be said, so as to keep my remarks within certain limits—but it is astonishing, I say, that the mystery of Christ our true God [1332C] does not persuade these men to promptly disabuse themselves of such an opinion. For all the divine mysteries are surpassed by the mystery of Christ, and this mystery is definitive of every conceivable perfection in all things either present or to come, and it exists above and beyond every limit and boundary. Now this mystery teaches us that the body of God the Word—which was taken from us and which is consubstantial with us, and which was united to Him in a union according to hypostasis when He assumed flesh and perfectly became man—is the same body with which He ascended into the heavens, *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come*, [1332D] so that now and for infinite ages He is seated together with God the Father, *having passed through all the heavens and surpassing all things*, and He shall come again to refashion and transform the universe, and for the salvation of our souls and bodies, just as we have believed and believe and will continue to believe forever. These things being so, who would be so obstinate and reckless (as if he knew ought but to rush impetuously into battle against things that are perfectly clear and obvious) to entertain even the merest thought that [1333A] bodies will pass into non-being after rational beings will have completed their progress to perfection—for this is precisely what they argue<sup>410</sup>—but how, I wonder, could anyone think such a thing believing at the same time that our Lord Himself, the God of all, is now and will be forever embodied, for it is He who grants to others the power enabling them to make progress, and it is He who leads and calls everyone to His own glory (as much as this is possible for them) by the power of His Incarnation, inasmuch as He is the *pioneer of the salvation* of all, totally cleansing

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<sup>409</sup> Named after its founder, the Persian religious leader Mani (d. 277), Manichaeism was a system of metaphysical and ethical dualism in which eternal principles of good and evil were locked in perpetual conflict. The material world (including the human body) was seen as emanating from the principle of evil, encouraging the emperor Justinian to argue that the doctrines of Origen were derived from Manichaeism; cf. *Edict Against Origen* (PG 86:947B-949CD); id., *Letter to the Synod on Origen* (PG 86:991A).

<sup>410</sup> A reference to the “*henad* of rational beings” refuted in Amb 7; on the “progression” of the rational beings, see Origen, *On First Principles* 3.1.23 (SC 268:140-6).

them from their defilement? But it is not the case—even if they should dare to think such a thing—that the tokens of His perfection lead to the casting aside His body. {42.18} For He does not follow others to perfection, neither should it be thought that He has arrived at perfection through progress, for He alone by nature is absolutely perfect and the creator of every perfection, and He does not [1333B] wait to receive perfection together with others, for unlike the totality of beings He has no need of making any progress in anything, so that He should need to discard the nature of the body at the moment when, as they say, the consummation of progress among rational beings will signal the setting aside of their bodies. For if this is so, He is not the pioneer and savior of those who are being saved, since He did not show us in Himself, definitively and mystically, the goal of our perfection, but to the contrary He will appear to be simply one among many that are saved, and are ruled, and who require someone else to show them the meaning of perfection, to which hasten all those naturally endowed with reason.

{42.19} But this is not how it is—what nonsense!—neither does the word of truth endure those who espouse such doctrines. For the divine apostle says that Christ [1333C] is the *pioneer and perfecter of our salvation*, for He has assumed flesh for us in order to destroy our sin in Himself, and to give Himself to all those who believe in Him as the prototype and pattern of a virtuous life, that is, like a good and wise teacher, first showing us by His own example what we should say and do, dying and rising and ascending to heaven and sitting with the body at the right hand of God the Father, so that we too should have the sure hope that we shall rise after death and live a life completely separate from every form of death and all corruption, and that we shall ascend to heaven, where we will receive the honor and the glory of God the Father through the mediation of His Son, and shall abide with Him in eternal and blessed life. [1333D] But we do not expect any kind of putting off of the body, for the word of Holy Scripture does not teach us such a thing, neither do we see such a precedent for this in the *pioneer of our salvation*. If He would have been pleased for such a thing to have come about, He Himself would have done this first, along with everything else to which He submitted Himself for us, as the lover of mankind, and which He completed to perfection in relation to us, so that we might believe in this just as we do the other things.

{42.20} Moreover, if we allow them [1336A] to say such things, how will we be able to believe the holy teacher when he says in his letter to Kledonios: “Whatever has been united to God is saved”?<sup>411</sup> For the body was united to the Word of God together with the soul, and so the body is saved together with the soul. Again, if this is why the Word of God became flesh, according to the godly-minded teacher, namely, “to save the image and grant immortality to the flesh,”<sup>412</sup> how can what was saved be lost, or how can what was made immortal, die? Or to speak more precisely, not what was made immortal, but what was wholly divinized “by virtue of the rational soul mediating between divinity,”<sup>413</sup> and the body, which ineffably and essentially received the whole hypostasis of God the Word who became flesh, who made and proclaimed that body His very own—indeed, [1336B] I know not how, in light of this, we will be able to believe the words of the teacher. And why exactly this doctrine, if it falls within the mystery of the faith of the Church, was not included with the other articles in the Creed expressing the spotless faith of Christians (which was established by our holy and blessed fathers, who at different times convened in order to affirm the

<sup>411</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Letter 101.32 (SC 208: 50, line 3).

<sup>412</sup> Id., Or 38.13 (SC 358:134, line 37).

<sup>413</sup> Ibid. (SC 358:134, lines 29-30).

sacred doctrines of the Holy and Apostolic Church of God), is a question that we will leave for those sages to explain. But I think that, for the time being, what has been said here by way of a digression suffices as a response to them. Let us now turn to the others.

Digression 3

[1336C] **To those who say that bodies pre-exist souls**<sup>414</sup>

{42.21} That souls come into existence after bodies—my good sirs—is easy enough for someone to say, but to support this with logical arguments is extremely difficult and demanding, and the diligence required for such a proof is no light matter. For if, as you say, what is sown in the initial phase of human reproduction is completely devoid of soul, then it is quite obvious that it is also devoid of the power to give life, since that which is completely devoid of any kind of soul is also bereft of all vital activity. But that which is devoid of soul, and which is completely devoid of every vital power and activity, is clearly dead. And if we grant that it is dead, it can neither be nourished nor grow, [1336D] nor will it be able in any way to stand on its own, and it will remain completely inert and unmoving. This is proven by the method used to heal those parts of the body that have been wounded. For should physicians, in treating such wounds, find any areas that have suffered necrosis, they remove them by means of drugs that consume dead tissue, after which they apply what is necessary for the regeneration and restoration of the wounded area, since the living [1337A] body possesses a nature capable of regenerating itself, along with the capacity to restore and stabilize its proper state, whereas a dead body is incapable of doing any such thing, for once it is dead it completely loses its vital power, and for this reason is devoid of activity. How then can the body, which by nature easily dissipates and dissolves, stand on its own if it lacks the foundation, as it were, of a logically prior underlying life-giving power, which will naturally unite and hold its dissipative nature together, and from which it acquires its being and form, thanks to that power that has wisely fashioned all things by its art? For by virtue of whatever thing truly remains with the body after birth, one could rightly say that, in that same thing there unquestionably resides the beginning of the body's existence. And with respect to any kind of [1337B] body that by nature is dissolved upon its separation from this element, it is obvious that this very same thing co-existed with that body when it first came into being.

{42.22} Now if, my dear sirs, you feel yourselves at a loss in the face of these arguments, and consequently should assert that what is sown in the initial phase of human reproduction is not absolutely dead, but in some way has a share of vital power, so that it has a soul by virtue of this sharing, for without a soul there could never exist, not even once, any form of life found within nature or under the perpetually revolving vault of heaven, and if without exception there is no form of life without a soul, as logic dictates,<sup>415</sup> then whatever form of life you should choose to assign to that which is sown during conception, you will invariably be speaking only of a property of the soul, [1337C] which constitutes the substance of that in which it is found, and which also marks it off as being different from what is not like it. And if, being forced by the power of the truth to accept what is only right, you should say that the embryo has a soul, then what kind of soul this is, and how you understand it, and what you call it, is something you need to explain. And if you were to assure us that

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<sup>414</sup> A view defended by Porphyry, *To Gaurus, On the Animation of the Embryo* (ed. Kalbfleish 1895).

<sup>415</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 29 (PG 44:236CD). "Soul" here does not mean the rational soul found in human beings, but the vital, animating force found in plants and irrational animals.

the embryo has a soul which possesses merely the faculty of nutrition and growth, then on your terms the body that receives nourishment and grows will obviously be the body of a kind of plant and not, as it seems to me, that of a human being. And how a man can become the father of a plant is not something I am able to understand, no matter how many different ways I think about it, since a plant does not derive its being naturally from a man.

{42.23} And if you should assign to the embryo a soul having only the power of sensation, such an embryo, at the moment of its conception, will turn out to have nothing more than the soul of a horse, or a cow, [1337D] or some other land animal or winged creature, and on your terms a man will not by nature be the father of another man in the latter's initial constitution, but rather of a plant, as I have already said, or of some terrestrial animal, and what could be more absurd or deranged than this? For to contend that the proper definitions of beings, as these pertain to their very existence and to their natural differences, are not all mutually present at the initial formation of beings, is to confuse everything with everything else, and to champion the view that, strictly speaking, no being is what it is, or is what it is said to be. And the greater evil is that [1340A] such a theory will be found to contain the greatest slander against God's wisdom and power. For if all beings prior to their actual creation, in God's foreknowledge of them, possess perfection in terms of their proper principle it is obvious that when they are created and brought into being they will not be lacking anything in relation to this same principle, but will possess perfection by virtue of their actuality. And if beings possess perfection by divine foreknowledge, but emerge as imperfect when they enter existence by means of creation, then either they are not that which was foreknown, but something other, or else the difference between the two constitutes a clear weakness on the part of the Creator, who was not able to realize fully in creation what He had envisioned in His foreknowledge, so that its nature might have more closely approximated its essence.

{42.24} [1340B] And if these refutations raise doubts in your minds, and cause you to take refuge in this final argument, saying that it is not right that the image of God and "divine element" (for this is what you call the rational soul) should co-exist with sordid pleasure and bodily secretions, so that you think it more seemly to introduce the soul into the body forty days after conception, you will clearly be seen to be indicting the Creator, and rightly be subject to the frightful danger provoked by such blasphemy. For if marriage is evil, then it is obvious that the natural law of creation is also evil. And if the natural law of creation is evil, it is equally obvious that the One who created nature, and who gave it this law, should justly fall under your indictment. But why, then, should we reject the disciples of Mani, and the heretics who preceded him, [1340C] who for the same reason posited two principles and so denied the God of all, that is, for saying the very same thing that *you* say, if not with the same words? And if, for the reason stated a moment ago, you refuse, out of shame and piety, to say that the rational and intellective soul co-exists with the body at the very moment of conception, I suspect that you will not have the courage to grant such co-existence, not simply after forty days, or even after nine months of pregnancy, nor indeed even after birth, but not a moment before the rite of purification on the fortieth day after birth,<sup>416</sup> when you will finally muster the courage to say that what has been born has a

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<sup>416</sup> This is a rite associated with the larger process of Christian initiation. Following Jewish liturgical tradition and the example of Christ (Lv 12:1-8; Lk 2:22-32), infants born to Christian parents are not brought to church until the fortieth day after their birth, at which point the rite in question is conducted, with prayers of purification being read for both the infant and its mother; cf. Jeanlin, "Les prières du purification."

rational and intellective soul—because a newborn may not enter the temple of God, since the law deems it to be *unclean*. Thus, until the days of purification are completed, [1340D] logic compels us to infer that what has been born does not possess a rational or intellective soul, but rather—as I said a moment ago—the soul of a plant, or of an irrational beast of one kind or another found among animals. And if your basis for such a view is what the great Moses has written, namely, that criminal charges should not be brought against a man who strikes a pregnant woman during her first forty days of pregnancy, if the blow rendered causes her to miscarry the embryo, you should know that the wise Moses, who was addressing the matter that was immediately before him, was not saying that the rational soul enters the body on the fortieth day, but that on the fortieth day the embryo attains its complete formation.<sup>417</sup> [1341A]

{42.25} In addition to all these things, I am extremely apprehensive about admitting this particular argument, since the logical implications of it might justly make me subject to dreadful accusations, since it will lead me to utter what is not lawful, being constrained by the sequence of the argument to say that our Lord and God, who truly deigned to become man like us but *without sin*, became, at the moment of His conception, a human being without a soul or intellect, and that He remained in this condition for forty days. Against such a view our holy fathers and teachers—or rather the Truth speaking through them—explicitly proclaim that simultaneously with the Word of God’s descent, at the very moment of conception, without any intervening temporal interval, through the medium of the rational soul, the same Lord and Word of God was united to the flesh. [1341B] That is, the Word did not assume a rational soul through the medium of inanimate flesh, neither did He assume a body utterly devoid of soul, nor a soul devoid of intellect and reason, but He ineffably united to Himself, according to hypostasis, a perfect human nature lacking nothing, consisting of a rational soul and body. And this is why, before everything else, I espouse the doctrine of co-existence, rejecting each of the other views that are at variance both with each other and with the middle position, to which I adhere, having for my argument’s advocate and unerring teacher the very same Creator of nature, in the mystery of His embodiment, who truly became man, and who confirmed in Himself that His human nature subsists in its full perfection simultaneously with its coming into being at the moment of its creation, so that the only novel thing He introduced was [1341C] the innovation of nature, by which I mean His conception without seed and His birth without corruption, from which very things nature was separated after the fall, having fallen away from the divine and spiritual mode of increase into multiplicity—but not from the inner principle of its nature, according to which it naturally is and exists, subsisting from the very moment it comes into being as a unity of rational soul and body.

**How innovation takes place even as the things innovated remain unchanged in their nature**

{42.26} [1341D] Every innovation, generally speaking, takes place in relation to the mode of whatever is being innovated, not in relation to its principle of nature, because when a principle is innovated it effectively results in the destruction of nature, since the nature in question no longer possesses inviolate the principle according to which it exists. When, however, the mode is innovated—so that the principle of nature is preserved inviolate—it manifests a wondrous power, for it displays nature being acted

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<sup>417</sup> Cf. Hippocrates, *Concerning an Eight-Month Birth* 9.5 (ed. Joly 1970, 172, lines 10-16); Aristotle, *HA* 583b3-20; and Mansfeld 1971, 167 n. 59; 179 n. 134; 191 n. 198.

on and acting outside the limits of its own laws. Now the principle of human nature is that it consists of soul and body, and this nature consists of a rational soul and body, whereas its mode is the order whereby it naturally acts and is acted upon, frequently alternating and changing, without however in any way changing nature along with it. [1344A] And this is exactly what happens in the case of every other thing, whenever God—in His providence for all that is subject to His care, and to demonstrate His power that is over all and through all things—wishes to manifest something new in His creation.

{42.27} Indeed this is exactly what He did from the very beginning, when, in the course of bringing about the unexpected, he wrought magnificent signs and wonders, all by this principle of innovation. Thus He translated the blessed Enoch and Elijah from life in corruptible flesh to another form of life, not by altering their human nature, but by an alteration of its condition and conduct. He poured out much greater quantities of water<sup>418</sup> in order to drown the wicked men on earth, while He enabled Noah, the first navigator, to live unharmed amidst wild animals in the ark. He honored his great servants, [1344B] Abraham and Sarah, with a child, despite the fact that they were long past the age and ordinary limit and time of natural childbearing. He prepared fire to be rained down on the earth and consume the impious, without in any way diminishing its natural principle. He set alight the burning bush with an unburning fire in order to summon His servant. In Egypt, He transformed water into the quality of blood, without in any way suppressing its nature, since the water remained water by nature even after it turned red.

{42.28} And God performed the rest of the signs and wonders there in order to give the faithful the hope of freedom from the terrible woes that beset them, and also to bring the faithless to awareness of His power to punish, so that they might put away their hardness of heart toward God, which held them in its grip. Thus He divided the [1344C] sea by means of the rod and kept the water from flowing together, without it going outside its nature, creating a passage for those who for His sake were being pursued, and thwarting those who without cause persecute what is noble and free. He sweetened the water with a piece of wood, and from heaven rained down untilled bread that was strange and unknown. From the sea He suddenly cast up an abundance of edible birds, without the nature of one displacing the other, for the consolation of those who were suffering hardships in the desert. He showed forth the driest of rocks to be a mother of living water, without the rock being altered into another nature, on account of the water, for the strengthening of the faith of those who were abandoning their struggles. He stopped the flow of the river so that the godly people might pass dry-shod. He miraculously halted the unimpeded course of the sun and the moon, arresting the perpetually moving nature of the encircling sphere, [1344D] in order to destroy impious tyranny which had ignorantly ranged itself against God, so that, before the power of these visible signs should cease, the people might take possession of the assured inheritance that had previously been promised to them.

{42.29} And the same is true with all the rest of the things that God is said to have done in *the land of possession*, and in the other lands through which the ancient Israelites wandered after they had transgressed—that is, when God innovated the nature of the things that were innovated, He accomplished this with respect to their mode of activity, not their principle of existence. Together with and after all these mysteries, He brought about the utterly and truly new mystery of His Incarnation for our sake (on account of which and through which all other mysteries occur), and thus

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<sup>418</sup> I.e., than was usual.

He innovated nature with respect to its mode, not to its principle, [1345A] assuming flesh through the medium of a rational soul, being ineffably conceived without seed, and being truly born perfect man without corruption, possessing a rational soul together with His body from the very moment of His ineffable conception.

**That every nature possesses its perfection by virtue of its proper principle**

{42.30} This is because no nature, to speak generally, whether intelligible or sensible—that is, whether simple or composite—ever receives in any way the origin of its coming into being from one of its parts, nor can it subsist with only half of its constitutive elements. If the nature in question is composite, [1345B] the absolute totality of it subsists together with the absolute totality of the parts proper to it, there being no temporal interval whatsoever dividing it either from itself or from the parts of which it is composed. If, on the other hand, the nature in question is simple, that is, intelligible, it subsists as an absolute totality simultaneously with all of its perfect principles, without any deficiency, so that no moment of time divides it from its proper principles. For in general there has never existed, nor is there now, nor will there ever be, any nature among created beings, subsisting according to its own principle, that is anything other than what it is at present; and it is not now nor will ever be in the future something it was not in the past. For consistent with their principles, which from God possess perfection simultaneously with being, the production [1345C] and substantiation of created beings admits of absolutely no increase or decrease in terms of what they essentially are. What has been said here by way of a digression should, I think, be sufficient for the individuals in question, so that they might not be so easily swept away into absurdities by those who reduce the faith to contrived theories decked out in refined language.

**Why the teacher connected the birth through baptism with the Incarnation**

{42.31} One question remains to be answered: to what end, and for what reason, did the teacher connect the birth through baptism with the Incarnation? [1345D] As I have been taught, I shall speak briefly and to the extent that I am able. Those who interpret the divine sayings mystically, and who honor them, as is right, with more lofty contemplations, say that man in the beginning was created *according to the image of God*, surely so that he might be born of the Spirit in the exercise of his own free choice, and to acquire in addition the *likeness* by the keeping of the divine commandment, so that the same man, being by nature a creation of God, might also be the son of God and God through the Spirit by grace. For there was no other way for man, being created, to become the son of God and God by the grace of divinization, without first being born of the Spirit, in the exercise of his own free choice, owing to the indomitable power of self-determination which naturally dwells within him. [1348A] This divinizing and divine and non-material birth was rejected by the first man insofar as he preferred what was superficially pleasing to his senses over spiritual blessings that were not yet fully evident to him, and thus he was justly condemned to a material, mortal, and corporeal birth, outside the power of his free choice. God therefore deservedly judged that, for willingly choosing inferior things over what was better, man should exchange his freedom and impassible, voluntary, and chaste birth for an impassioned, servile, coercive birth after the likeness of the irrational and *mindless beasts* of the earth, and in place of the divine and ineffable honor of being with God, man should be left with the dishonor of being relegated to the material level of *mindless beasts*.<sup>419</sup> [1348B] In His determination to free man from such dishonor and to restore him to his divine inheritance, the Word who created human

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<sup>419</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17-18 (PG 44:189D-192D).

nature truly became man, taking His human nature from men, and for our sake was bodily born *yet without sin*, and He who is God by essence and the Son of God by nature was baptized for our sake, voluntarily subjecting Himself to the spiritual birth of adoption, so that bodily birth might be abolished.

{42.32} Seeing then that the Son and Word of God, who created us, and who alone is one in divinity and glory with the Father and the Spirit, for our sake truly became man like us; and seeing that He who is God by nature was born bodily *yet without sin* and for our sake accepted the birth of baptism unto spiritual adoption, I believe that for this reason the teacher connected the birth of baptism with the Incarnation [1348C] so that baptism might be considered as the abolition and release from bodily birth. For the very thing which Adam freely rejected (I mean the birth by the Spirit leading to divinization), and for which he was condemned to bodily birth amidst corruption, is exactly what the Word assumed willingly out of His goodness and love for mankind, and, by becoming man in accordance with our fallen state, willingly subjecting Himself to our condemnation (though He alone is free and sinless), and consenting to a bodily birth, in which lay the power of our condemnation, He mystically restored birth in the Spirit; and so for our sake, having dissolved in Himself the bonds of bodily birth, *He granted, through birth in the Spirit, to those who believe in His name the power to become children of God instead of [1348D] flesh and blood.* On account of my condemnation, the Lord first submitted Himself to incarnation and bodily birth, after which came the birth of baptism received in the Spirit, to which He consented for the sake of my salvation and restoration by grace, or to put it more precisely, my re-creation. In this way God joined together in me the principle of my being and the principle of my well-being, and He closed the division and distance between them that I had opened up, and through them He wisely drew me to the principle of eternal being, according to which man is no longer subject to carrying or being carried along, since the sequence of visible realities in motion will reach its end in the great and general resurrection, through which man [1349A] will be born into immortality in an existence not subject to alteration—and because it was for the sake of man that the nature of these objects received its being through creation, it will, together with him, receive by grace the condition of essential incorruptibility.

{42.33} If it seems good to you at this point to recall the main force of what has been said, let us recapitulate. We have the bodily birth of our Savior, with respect to which was made a conceptual distinction between the prior principle of nature, and that according to which He now exists as we do, and in which He died; and again between the natural principle of creaturely origin and the mode of birth, as well as between the different modes of origin of soul and body according to their respective substances, and, finally, conception without seed and birth without corruption. Hereafter it falls to you, as a just judge, [1349B] to adopt what is best from the foregoing interpretations.

### Ambiguum 43

{43.1} From Saint Gregory's second oration On Baptism:

Why do you seek medications when these are of no avail? Why do you look for the critical sweat, when perhaps your departure is imminent?<sup>420</sup>

{43.2} This phrase, according to the blessed elder,<sup>421</sup> was addressed by the teacher to those who had postponed their baptism in the hope of living to indulge their love of pleasure, and thus he says to them: "Why do you need to learn from someone else

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### Ambiguum 43

<sup>420</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.12 (SC 358:222, lines 6-7).

<sup>421</sup> This is the sixth mention of the wise elder, cf. above, Amb 39.2, n. 366.



about your departure”—that is, from this life—“and fail to realize that it is already at hand? Why do you seek medications when these are of no avail? Why do you look for the critical sweat, when perhaps your departure is imminent?”<sup>422</sup> According to physicians, there are four days that are critical for those stricken with fever: the fourth day, the seventh, the ninth, [1349C] and the eleventh, and perhaps the thirteenth as well—for they say that if on any of these days they should find the patient drenched with sweat, they conclude from this that he will live.<sup>423</sup> Thus, so that the sick man might not postpone his baptism in the false expectation of such a sweat, mistakenly believing that he will live for several years to come, the teacher wisely counsels the sufferer not to be encouraged by a possible outbreak of this “critical sweat,” or vainly to place his hopes in it, since it is possible that the sweat of death will come instead, announcing the end of this present life. The teacher’s aim is that the sick man not be deceived, as I have said, by this sweat, and consequently be deprived of the divine life, which stands plainly before us and abides forever, and that he not be preoccupied with this human and mortal existence, which will inexorably melt away, since by its very nature it is unstable and beyond our control, [1349D] forever shifting in the tides of corruption and alteration, escaping more quickly from the hands of those who think they have grasped it than a fleeting dream escapes the mind of a dreamer.

#### **Ambiguum 44**

**{44.1}** From Saint Gregory’s same second oration On Baptism:

Christ does not like to be stolen from often, even though He is a great lover of mankind.<sup>424</sup>

**{44.2}** Some people, upon reading these words, have asked: “If God so greatly loves mankind, and is indeed the inexhaustible source of love, so that He cannot be even slightly diminished by those who draw from Him, why then does He ‘not like to be stolen from’? Is this not how He might better demonstrate His love of mankind, [1352A] which is not diminished by His granting others the possibility to rob Him, especially when the ‘robbery’ in question is their salvation, and to rob Him as often they wish”? To those who think this way, God grants me to state that it is precisely this reluctance on His part that is full of love for mankind, or rather that this reluctance is itself His love for mankind. With respect to those who wish to rob something from Christ, the clearest indication of His consideration for their welfare is not to allow them to do this frequently, lest they be moved to cast aside what they have robbed, which in this case is likely to happen, since salvation will always be readily accessible, and therefore easily re-appropriated. But those who appropriate God’s gift on terms such as these will never attain a state of unwavering fixity in the Good, since their capacity to choose between good and evil will always be prone to what is opposed to the good, owing to the facility with which the good may be acquired, and consequently deemed by them to be a thing of little value.

#### **Ambiguum 45**

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<sup>422</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.12 (SC 358:222, lines 5-7).

<sup>423</sup> Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates’s Predictions* 3.100 (ed. Kühn 1829, 16:719, lines 2-4); cf. Hippocrates, *Prognostics* 6 (ed. Littré 1840, 122-24); id., *Aphorisms* 4.36; 7.85 (ed. Littré 1844, 514-16, 606); Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates’s Aphorisms* 4.36 (ed. Kühn 1829, 17/2:711-15); id., *Commentary on Hippocrates’s Prognostics* 1.26 (ed. Kühn 1830, 18/2:81-85).

#### **Ambiguum 44**

<sup>424</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 40.33 (SC 358:274, lines 11-12). Gregory’s words are in reference to the Gospel story of the woman with the flow of blood (Mk 5:25-34), who “robbed” Christ of a cure by grasping the hem of his garment.

{45.1} [1352B] From Saint Gregory's oration On Pascha:

He (i.e., Adam) was naked in his simplicity and in a life devoid of artifice, and without any kind of covering or barrier. For such was fitting for the primal man.<sup>425</sup>

{45.2} What the great teacher secretly reveals through these words is known, I believe, only to those who have received his same gift of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>426</sup> For having removed all the dark fluid of passions and every material attachment from their intellectual eyes, they were able to perceive in all things the ray of true knowledge, and in the light of its simple, unitary principle, they withdrew their intellect from multiplicity (as much as was possible), and through simplicity of mind received the whole scientific knowledge [1352C] of beings. But to men like me, the "gloom of ignorance continues to eclipse the observation of the truth,"<sup>427</sup> because my intellect, like a whirlwind, spins solely around things that are shaken to and fro—yet like a blind man with outstretched hands, who, groping his way through the confusion of the material world, often stumbles upon something of value, I too shall endeavor, with my feeble powers, to say something about the question that is before us. And I will say nothing beyond what God *puts into my hands*, just as it is written, so that I might provide nourishment, as far as I can, to you, my good fathers.<sup>428</sup> I mean that through my tentative discourse I hope to offer you the plain and frugal contemplation of my intellectual power, receiving in return the equal measure of your paternal blessing—lest [1352] like Esau I do naught but circle ineptly around the field of sensible things in a sensory way, and by such dawdling be deprived of the ready blessing of the father for whom I have prepared a repast; or lest, through intellectual arrogance, I attempt what is beyond my abilities and am wounded by those who still dwell on the mountain of my contemplation, like those men of Israel, who the law says *forced their way and went up into the mountain*, and *the Amorite who dwelt there came out and wounded them*.

{45.3} I therefore hazard the conjecture that [1353A] the teacher said these things wishing to point out the difference between the temperament of the human body in our forefather Adam before the fall, and that which is now observed within us and predominates, because then the temperament of man's body was obviously not torn apart by mutually opposed and corrupting qualities, but was in a state of equilibrium devoid of flux and reflux,<sup>429</sup> being free of the continuous alteration between each of these two, depending on the predominance of one quality or another, for surely man was not without a share in immortality by grace, nor was he suffering, as he is now, from the blows rained down on him by the scourge of corruption, since his body had a different temperament, obviously suited to him, and held together by simple, non-contradictory qualities. Consistent with this temperament, the first [1353B] man was naked, not because he was fleshless or bodiless, but because he did not possess the temperament which "thickens the flesh and makes it mortal and obtuse."<sup>430</sup> According

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#### Ambiguum 45

<sup>425</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.8 (PG 36:632C); cf. Or. 38.12 (SC 358:128, lines 5-8). This Ambiguum begins the longest series of excerpts taken from any one oration by Gregory (Amb 45-60).

<sup>426</sup> Cf. above, Amb 42.3, n. 389.

<sup>427</sup> Id., Or. 28.4 (SC 250:108, lines 12-14); cf. id., *Carmina moralia* (PG 37:687A); and Philo, *On Husbandry* 162 (LCL 3:192, lines 5-7).

<sup>428</sup> On the plural usage, cf. above, Amb 5.27, n. 41.

<sup>429</sup> A phrase with both physiological and philosophical meanings, so that bodily flux and imbalance (including an imbalance in the body's four "humors") becomes a metaphor for disorder in the mind as well as conflict in the body politic; cf. Lackner 1962, 81.

<sup>430</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.8 (PG 36:633A).

to that great teacher, the first man lived “a life devoid of artifice,” without dissipating the natural condition of good health that had originally been imparted to his essential being, and thus he had no need of clothing; and because of his innate dispassion he was not troubled by any sense of shame, neither was he affected by cold or heat, for which men most certainly devised the habit of wearing garments and living in houses.<sup>431</sup>

**Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

{45.4} Or perhaps the teacher is delineating man’s [1353C] attributes as they were then by stripping away those that are observed around him now. For now man is moved either by the irrational fantasies of passions, being deceived by his love of pleasure; or because he is engrossed in the principles of technical skills, on account of circumstances, and to meet his needs; or because he is investigating natural principles derived from the law of nature in order to acquire knowledge. But it seems fair to say that, in the beginning, none of these motivating factors held any necessary sway over man, who was superior to them all. “For it was fitting for the primal man” to be wholly undistracted by any of the things that were beneath him, or around him, or oriented to him, but to have need of one thing alone for his perfection, namely, the unconditioned motion of the whole power of his love for what was above him, by which I mean God. For being dispassionate by grace, he was not by pleasure moved to accept the deception of passions in his imagination; [1353D] and being without any needs he was free of the necessity, imposed by circumstances, to make use of arts and skills; and being wise, his knowledge placed him beyond the contemplation of nature. Thus the first man possessed no barrier between himself and God, which might have veiled his knowledge, or hindered his kinship with God, which was to have been realized as a freely chosen movement to Him in love, and this is the reason why the teacher describes him as “naked in simplicity,” since he was beyond every form of inquiry into nature, and why he says that his “life was devoid of artifice,” since his life was pure of any need for arts and skills; and that he was “without any kind of covering or veil,” since his senses were free of passionate entanglements with objects of sense perception, to which he was later justly subjected, after he found himself facing a deprivation of things for which he originally had no need, [1356A] having freely chosen to become bereft of all things, rather than be complete, and to become the lowest of all beings though he was created to be the highest.

**Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

{45.5} Or perhaps he was “naked,” as the teacher says, of the multiform contemplation and knowledge of nature, and his “life was devoid of artifice,” subsisting outside the various pursuits concerning the practical life and the acquisition of virtue, since he possessed by integral habit the untainted principles of the virtues, and he was “without any kind of covering or veil” since he originally had no need to rely on ideas discursively drawn from sensible objects in order to understand divine realities, but had solely the simple provision of the unitary, simple, all-embracing virtue and knowledge of things after God, [1356B] which needs only to actualize its own movement in order to be voluntarily manifested. Thus it cannot be doubted that those who, by means of a philosophical principle, wish to raise themselves up from the forefather’s fall, begin by completely negating the passions, after which they cease busying themselves with the principles of technical skills, and finally, peering beyond natural contemplation, they catch a glimpse of immaterial knowledge, which

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<sup>431</sup> The major ideas of this paragraph find parallels in Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Making of Man* 1 (ed. Morani 1987, 8-10).

has absolutely no form susceptible to sense perception or any meaning that can be contained by spoken words. Then, just as God in the beginning created the first man, they too will be naked in the simplicity of their knowledge, in their life free of distractions, and in their mortification of the law of the flesh. It would have been possible to venture a contemplation of this particular difficulty by means of another, more sublime mode of interpretation, but for now let us leave that aside [1356C] for the reason I gave at the outset of my remarks.

#### Ambiguum 46

{46.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Pascha:

A yearling, like the *sun of righteousness*, or rushing forth from there, or circumscribed in the one whom we see.<sup>432</sup>

{46.2} Many are the appellatives<sup>433</sup> of our Savior, and manifold is the mode pertaining to the meaning of each when understood by contemplative anagogy, because according to natural contemplation any particular thing used illustratively as an appellation of the Lord potentially admits of many interpretations. This is precisely the case with the difficulty now before us, for, although there are many [1356D] modes of contemplation concerning the sun—far more than ordinary discourse can set forth—let us, for the sake of brevity, consider the difficulty at hand in the way the teacher considered it, unfolding his compressed language to the extent we are able.<sup>434</sup>

{46.3} In the first place, a “year,” according to our holy and wise teachers, is the periodic return of the sun to the same point from which it began, a circuit which contains the distinctive fivefold characteristic of time.<sup>435</sup> For time is divided and drawn together by units of day, [1357A] week, month, season, and year. The same is true of the year itself, which is divided into units of hour, day, week, month, and season, yet its movement remains continuous and uninterrupted by intervals, so that the divisions perceived in light of its alterations are merely the measurement of time's continuous and uninterrupted movement.

{46.4} If in such manner, then, the year unfolds for us according to the movement of the sun, it follows that the *year acceptable to the Lord* (as Scripture calls it), when understood allegorically, is the entire extension of the ages, beginning from the moment when God was pleased to give substance to beings, and existence to what did not exist, and, through His providence—like an intelligible sun whose power holds the universe together in stability and graciously consents to emit its [1357B] rays<sup>436</sup>—He deigned to vary the modes of His presence so that the good things He planted in beings might ripen to full maturity, until all the ages will have reached their appointed limit. At that point He will *gather together* the fruits of His own sowing—unmixed

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#### Ambiguum 46

<sup>432</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.13 (PG 36:641A).

<sup>433</sup> “Appellatives” (*prosegoriai*) were distinguished from “names” (*onomata*) by the Stoics as separate parts of language; cf. Chrysippos, SVF 2.147; Diogenes of Babylon: “An ‘appellative’ is . . . a part of language which signifies a common quality, such as ‘man’ or ‘horse,’ whereas a ‘name’ is a part of language which indicates a peculiar quality” (cited in Brunschwig, “Stoic Theory,” 44-5); and Origen, *On Prayer* 24.2 (GCS 2:353-54), who applies this distinction to his exegesis of Mt 6:9.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. above, Amb 37.3, n. 355.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Plato, *Tim* 39c. In QThal 65 (CCSG 22:263, lines 200-6), Maximos connects the “fivefold” division of time with the “five senses.”

<sup>436</sup> The image of God as an “intelligible sun” was made famous by Plato, *Rep* 508c; cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 28.30 (SC 250:168, lines 1-5); Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.1 (143-44, lines 9-5; 693B); *ibid.*, 4.4 (147, lines 2-4; 149, lines 6-8; 697BC, 700C); *ibid.*, 5.8 (187-88, lines 17-6; 824BC); and John of Skythopolis, *Scholia* on DN 4.1 (PG 4:240AB); DN 5.8 (PG 4:328D-329A); and CH 2.5 (PG 4:45D-48A).

with *tares*, and having not so much as even a trace of dust from any *chaff*—and the whole reason for the movement of things in motion will reach its completion; and the worthy will receive the promised, ultimate beatitude of divinization, and, being gathered to God by suitability *according to likeness*, every motion in them with respect to everything will attain its immediate limit and rest in the permanence that is in God Himself. Thus the Lord is called the *sun of righteousness*, insofar as He is the maker and perfecter of the ages, and *the beginning and end* of all things, and the Creator of the wise, fivefold order of things foreknown in His providence; and because He fills all things with eternal light through the inexhaustible rays of His goodness, and ripens and makes delectable for God the Father all those who open the furrows of their mind to receive [1357C] His blessed ray. And He himself is the *year acceptable to the Lord*, filled with all those who are being saved in conjunction with the fivefold motion He intelligibly generates as the *sun of righteousness*, a motion which will be completely understood by the person who, through the natural contemplation of visible things, in strict accordance with reason, gathers together spiritual science from intelligible realities. And He “rushes forth from there,” as the teacher says, “or is circumscribed in the one whom we see,” either because He rushes forth like “light from light, and true God from true God,”<sup>437</sup> since He is begotten of Him who in essence is the true Father, or because He Himself as man is circumscribed in the visible form of our nature, just like [1357D] a sun that, rushing forth from heaven, is circumscribed in a body with disc-like form.<sup>438</sup>

#### **Ambiguum 47**

{47.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

We need not be surprised that, first and foremost, a lamb is required in each and every house.<sup>439</sup>

{47.2} Someone perhaps might ask (and with good reason, as it seems to me), that if Christ—who through the law and the prophets, and by the magnificence of creation, is mystically [1360A] proclaimed to those with spiritual ears and eyes—is one, how is it that the law, when ritually celebrating the type of Christ, commands that a multiplicity of lambs be slain in the *houses of the families*? To him we say that, if we wish to receive the Word intelligibly *touching the ears and eyes* of our souls, and *opening them*, on the one hand, to the reception and contemplation of His mysteries, and, on the other, to the *avenging of every disobedience* and the *rejection of all futility*—we can surely learn the hidden intention of Holy Scripture by joining the present passage to a similar one from the holy apostle, who says: *I decided to know nothing in you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. For inasmuch as each of those who have believed in Christ according to his own power, and according to the [1360B] state and quality of virtue existing within him, he is crucified and crucifies Christ together with himself, that is, he is spiritually *crucified together with Christ*. For each person brings about his own crucifixion according to the mode of virtue that is appropriate to him: one person is crucified solely in the sense that he does not actively sin, having put sin

<sup>437</sup> These words allude to a passage in the Nicene Creed; my translation renders the allusion more literal.

<sup>438</sup> The whole of this last sentence, along with additional phrases taken from this paragraph, are cited by Nikephoros of Constantinople, *Refutation and Overthrow of the Definition of the Iconoclast Synod of 815* (CCSG 33:96); and id., *Testimonia patrum* (ed. Pitra 1852, 344-5). In both works, the citation is followed by a supporting passage from Maximos, Letter 12 (PG 91:468BC).

**Ambiguum 47**

<sup>439</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.14 (PG 36:641CD).

to death by nailing it to the cross through the fear of God; another is crucified with respect to the passions themselves and so heals the powers of the soul. Another is crucified with respect to the fantasies that arise from the passions, not leaving his senses free to admit any of the rising waves of their distractions. Another is crucified with respect to the sinful thoughts and memories that follow in their wake. Still another is crucified with respect to the deception that arises from sensation; while someone else is crucified through his rejection of the relation of natural intimacy between the senses and the objects of sensation. Another, by means of the cross, quells every movement [1360C] of sense perception in general, so that he possesses absolutely nothing within himself operating solely on the level of nature—while another completely ceases even from intellectual activity itself.<sup>440</sup> And there is something greater than this: he who through dispassion is crucified by means of practical philosophy, passes over to natural contemplation in the spirit, just as if he had passed over from a flesh of Christ to His soul.<sup>441</sup> And he who is put to death by natural contemplation, having cast off the intellect's symbolic contemplation of beings, is transferred to the uniform, simple initiation into theological science, just as if he had been raised up from a soul of Christ to *the mind of Christ*. But he who completely negates this initiation ascends beyond it to the ineffable, [1360D] apophatic indeterminateness, just as if he had mystically ascended from a *mind of Christ* to His divinity.

{47.3} Each person, then, as I have said—according to his own power, and according to the grace of the Spirit that is granted to him in respect of his worthiness—has Christ present in him, and in proportion to him, leading him through increasing mortification to ever more sublime ascents. Thus it happens that *each of us in his own rank*—as if in a kind of house, built on the level of virtue that is appropriate to him—sacrifices the Divine Lamb, partakes of its flesh,<sup>442</sup> and takes his fill of Jesus. For to each person Christ Jesus becomes his own proper lamb, to the extent that each is able to contain and consume Him. He becomes something proper to Paul, the great preacher [1361A] of the truth, and, again, something distinctively proper to Peter, the leader of the apostles, and something distinctively proper for each of the saints, according to the measure of each one's faith, and the grace granted to him by the Spirit, to one in this way, and to another in that, so that Christ is found to be wholly present throughout the whole of each, *becoming all things to everyone*.

## Ambiguum 48

{48.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Pascha:

Whatever is a fleshly and nourishing part of the Word, together with the intestines and hidden recesses of the intellect, will be eaten and given up to spiritual digestion.<sup>443</sup>

{48.2} Having wisely given every nature subsistence, and having concealed the knowledge of Himself in each of the rational substances as the first of their potentials, God gave to us lowly human beings, as a generous master, a natural longing and desire for Him, combining this naturally with the power of reason, so [1361B] that we might easily be able to know the ways by which this longing might be satisfied, and

<sup>440</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 1.4 (115, lines 8-10; 592D-593A); *ibid.*, 1.5 (116, lines 14-15; 593BC).

<sup>441</sup> Cf. above, Amb 10.36.

<sup>442</sup> On the plural usage, see above, Amb 10.31, n. 139.

## Ambiguum 48

<sup>443</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.16 (PG 36:645A).

not fail to attain what we are striving for due to some mistake on our part. Being moved, therefore, by this longing for the truth itself and for the wisdom that is manifested in the orderly governance of all things, we are urged on to our goal, striving all the more because of these things, to attain that for the sake of which we have received this longing. Having secretly come to learn this, those who are studious and zealous lovers of truth set before themselves one sole task and activity, namely, arduous labor in the service of this desire, for from the actual observation and orderly sequence of things itself they have correctly realized that, if in this present age, they should, through sacred visions, sketch out to a certain extent the image of the truth of the age to come, and satisfy their longing for it, [1361C] they would thereby prepare their souls and make them more eager still, so that after this life they would pass over effortlessly to the truth of the life to come, since it would already have been clearly sketched out within them by the more divine intellections. Guiding them to this truth is our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who reveals it to them as simple, and clear, and free of every ambiguity, symbolic complexity, and enigmatic obscurity, for just as “pain, sorrow, and sighing flee”<sup>444</sup> from the life of practical virtue, on account of perfect dispassion, so too does all obscurity and ambiguity flee from contemplative knowledge, on account of wisdom—for what will be given to them will be the naked truth, the adumbrations of which they had already received here on earth. [1361D] For *to everyone who has*—the desire, quite clearly, for the things of the life to come—will certainly *be added* the enjoyment of these good things for all eternity.

**{48.3}** *For our God is rich*, and He never ceases distributing the divine gifts of knowledge to those who love Him, gifts which, in this present age, we are not able even to name, on account of their sublimity and magnitude—if indeed what the great apostle says is true, namely, that the ultimate blessedness is *far above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come*, alluding here to the highest summit of good things—which will appear after the distribution of every gift, and [1364A] after every ascent, and which cannot be uttered by any word or known by any mind—things, I say, that are attainable by us in this age and of the things that will be revealed to us in the age to come and which we will perhaps name and know. For Jesus, the Word of God, who *has passed through the heavens*, and who is *beyond all of the heavens*, always raises up those who follow Him in their practice and contemplation, so that they are taken from inferior things to superior ones, and again from these to what is still higher than these, and, to put it simply, *time would fail me to tell* of the divine ascents and revelations of the saints, in their transformation *from glory to glory*, through the moment when *each one* of them receives the divinization that is most fitting *to his proper order*.

**{48.4}** Knowing, [1364B] then, that we have this natural longing for God, that great teacher exhorts and invites all through his teaching to partake of the spiritual food of the Lamb that was slain on our behalf, counseling us to maintain the Lamb’s members distinctly and usefully in their unbroken and unconfused organization, lest we be condemned for breaking and tearing asunder the harmonious arrangement of the divine body—either because we eat of the flesh of the Lamb and Word overconfidently, if such eating be beyond our ability, or profanely, if it be averse to our ability—but let each of us, according to his ability, rank, and the grace of the Spirit that has been given to him, partake of the Divine Word in conformity with the meaning of each of His parts. [1364C]

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<sup>444</sup> Cf. id., Or. 23.14 (SC 270:310).

{48.5} For example, the head shall be partaken of by whosoever possesses faith, a faith whose rational principles of theology are entirely free from indemonstrable first principles, for it is on the basis of such faith that the whole body of the virtues and knowledge *is knitted together and grows with spiritual growth*. The ears shall be partaken of by whosoever spiritually receives the divine words with knowledge, and because of these words becomes in actual deeds submissive and *obedient to God unto death*. The eyes shall be partaken of by whosoever beholds creation spiritually, and blamelessly gathers together all the principles pertaining to sensation and intellect for the singular fulfillment of the glory of God. The breast shall be partaken of by whosoever has filled his heart with theological contemplations, like the great Evangelist John, and like an inexhaustible source he piously [1364D] pours forth, for the benefit of those eager to learn, the reason and mode in which the providence of the universe is comprehended. The hands shall be fittingly partaken of by whosoever does not carry out the work of the commandments carelessly or indifferently, but has the whole of his soul's energy for practical exercise ready and resolute for fulfilling the divine laws. The stomach shall be partaken of by him whose fecundity of soul is ceaselessly productive, and so he abounds with spiritual contemplations, and never quenches the burning desire of his dispassionate appetite for intercourse with the Divine. The intestines shall be appropriately partaken of by whosoever *shall probe into*, by means of a more hidden inquiry and knowledge, *the depths of the mind of God*, taking his fill of ineffable mysteries.

{48.6} [1365A] My discourse will dare to venture something even greater. Of the lower members of the Word let him partake chastely who stands in the strength of his reason when confronting matter, and who together with his soul keeps his flesh perfectly undefiled, and who by means of the virtues completely forms within it the whole Word who became flesh. Of the thighs let him partake who has reason set in authority over the passionate part of his soul, and who has completely uprooted its propensity toward matter. Of the knees let him partake who providentially bends down in compassion to those who have fallen and are weak in faith, thereby imitating the gracious condescension to us of the Word. Of the shanks and feet, moreover, let him partake whose soul has unshakeable and immovable footings in faith, virtue, and knowledge, and whose aim is to hasten [1365B] *to the prize of his higher calling*, and who together with the Word *leaps over the hills of ignorance and bounds over the mountains of evil*.

{48.7} But who would be able to enumerate all the aspects of God our Savior, which exist for our sake, and according to which He has made Himself edible and participable to all in proportion to the measure of each? For in addition to all these, the Lord has locks of hair, a nose, lips, throat, shoulders, fingers, and whatever else belongs to our human frame that may be applied to Him metaphorically. Proper and profitable communion in these is attained by those who assimilate each member in light of the spiritual meaning signified by each. In this manner, according to that holy and great teacher, the Lamb of God “is eaten, and given up to spiritual digestion,” [1365C] assimilating to Himself, through the Spirit, those who partake of Him, for He guides and transposes each one to the place in the body that corresponds to the member that was spiritually eaten by him, so that in a way befitting His love of mankind, the Word, who is in all things, might take on substance, though He alone transcends nature and mind.

## **Ambiguum 49**

{49.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Pascha:



Having *put to death the members that are on the earth*, and imitating the *cincture* of John, the desert-dweller and forerunner and great herald of the truth.<sup>445</sup>

{49.2} The one who imitates the “cincture” of John is he who by the power of reason tightly binds the fecundity of his soul in actual practice informed by knowledge, thereby preserving it from diffusion in matter. A “desert-dweller” is he [1365D] whose habit of mind is purified of the passions. A “forerunner” is he who through his genuine repentance heralds the righteousness that follows it, and through his outward virtue heralds the knowledge that eventually will descend upon both.<sup>446</sup> A “great herald of the truth” is the man whose own life confirms the word of teaching spoken by his mouth.

### **Ambiguum 50**

{50.1} [1368A] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

And if any disciple is sent to preach the Gospel, let him do so in a spirit of philosophy and without excess. In addition to the fact that he must be without either money or staff and possess but a single tunic, he must also go about barefooted, so that *the feet of those who preach the Gospel* of peace might be seen to be *beautiful*.<sup>447</sup>

{50.2} The “Gospel” is the higher principle concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the state of rest that is pure of all matter and its attendant fantasies. A “disciple sent to preach” is undoubtedly someone whose manner of life gives testimony to his complete separation from this world. To be “without money or staff and possessing but a single tunic” indicates either the renunciation of avarice and anger or reluctance to assume any kind of authority. [1368B] Such a disciple takes to himself the “single tunic,” as it were, of guileless, unfeigned, single-minded ethical philosophy completely free of all duplicity. To the foot of his soul he ties no symbol of deadness, figured here as a sandal. Seeing that he is like an angelic messenger of great peace—a herald of a state of mind which no longer fears the war of the passions, nor cringes before the death of the body—those who look to him with understanding, and who behold his unchanging, virtuous way of life, are able to produce an image of the most beautiful life and stability of the angels around God.

### **Another contemplation of the same**

{50.3} Or, perhaps, for the sake of speaking simply, and in “imitation [1368C] of the cincture of John,”<sup>448</sup> and because the Pasch may yet again be eaten in a manner consistent with the Gospel, our father Gregory was, for pedagogical purposes, alluding to the differences between the partakers of the Pasch and the modes of the Pasch itself. For the word of the Old Testament describes three Paschs: one celebrated in Egypt, another in the wilderness, and the other in the promised land. Now Egypt, according to one of its allegorical interpretations, signifies this world, whereas the wilderness, according to one of the ways it may be contemplated, allegorically points to the state of the soul after death, whereas the promised land prefigures the age to

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### **Ambiguum 49**

<sup>445</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.18 (PG 36:648C). Passages from this, and from the following eleven Ambigua (i.e., Amb 49-60.1), are cited by Psellos, “On the hidden allegories in Gregory the Theologian’s oration On Pascha” (ed. Gautier 1989, 1:162-65, lines 1-94).

<sup>446</sup> Cf. above, Amb 21.3.

### **Ambiguum 50**

<sup>447</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.19 (PG 36:649B).

<sup>448</sup> Cf. above, Amb 49.

come. For there are three places and states in which we human beings find ourselves: this present world, in which we receive our being and are born; [1368D] the place in which we find ourselves after death, after we leave this world; and the future age, in which we will be contained together with our souls and bodies. As long a time as we are in this present world, we celebrate the Pasch in Egypt, being purified of the stains of sin; when, however, we depart from this life through death, we will again celebrate the Pasch, but a different one, as if in the wilderness, for then, intelligibly and apart from the body, we will have understood the principles of beings more clearly, [1369A] without symbols or figures, and without the complexity produced by sensation; and again we will celebrate the Pasch in the future age of the divine promises, where without any mediation we will partake of the most sublime Word of Wisdom—and being transformed in accordance with Him, we will become Gods by grace. Beyond this, we have no other passage to any other kind of Pasch, although it is possible for us, who are present even here, to create an image of each of the states characteristic of the places just mentioned. For the life of every man is characteristic of the place in which he exists.

{50.4} For example, when we courageously pursue practical philosophy, we celebrate the Pasch auspiciously in Egypt, living in the midst of Egyptians, without being Egyptians ourselves, for though we are *in the flesh*, we are *not waging a carnal* [1369B] *war*. But if we piously practice natural contemplation in spirit, transforming the powers of the soul into *powerful weapons of God, for the destruction of strongholds and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God*, as well as for contemplation of the spiritual principles in beings—just as if we were naked of the body and free of the deceitful fantasies of the senses—making our way cognitively to the divine promises, then we are in the wilderness, by which I mean that state which has been cleansed of the passions and of every fantasy related to matter. If, on the other hand, we give form to theological mystagogy by the ineffable movements of the intellect, no longer being ignorant (to the extent that this is possible for human beings) of *what is the breadth and length and depth and the surpassing* magnitude of the wisdom of God, we are [1369C] in the promised land. Thus I think that the teacher, by distinguishing the three persons, was alluding to practical, natural, and theological philosophy, through which each one of us, in proportion to his inherent potential, partakes of the intelligible Pasch.

## Ambiguum 51

{51.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Pascha:

If you are a Rachel or a Leah, a patriarchal and great soul, steal whatever idols of your father you might find, not, however, so that you may keep them, but so that you may destroy them. If, however, you are a wise Israelite, take them to the promised land.<sup>449</sup>

{51.2} Rachel, as they say, means "lamb" or "shepherdess," whereas Leah means "weary" or "weariness." [1369D] Thus Rachel is both shepherded and shepherds; she both leads and is led, consistent with the meaning of her name. From this it follows that Rachel is every contemplative soul who like a lamb is shepherded and led by the law of God, and who, according to the law of God, shepherds and leads her impulses and thoughts in the established ways of ascetical practice—and, having hitherto subordinated the passions of the flesh to the fecundity of virtue, she utterly destroys

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## Ambiguum 51

<sup>449</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.21 (PG 36:652B).

them after her entrance into knowledge. Leah, on the other hand, is every soul engaged in ascetical practice, suffering weariness for the sake of virtue, for virtue is indeed the first thing that those who pursue divine philosophy [1372A] wish to take to themselves, as if through marriage. The “wise Israelite” is the contemplative intellect, which transposes the intellections of this age to the realm of knowledge, in the manner of the great Jacob, who removed all the property of Laban to the land of the fathers. For just as that wondrous Jacob, according to the literal account, *peeled off the bark from the rods* and laid them *in the hollows of the watering troughs*, so that *the sheep who drank* at them *would conceive* at the sight of them, so too does every intellect that is supremely wise in spirit, by stripping away the surrounding matter from the more divine principles of beings, and submitting them to the contemplative modes of knowledge, teach all its disciples (as well as the motions of its own soul) to be conformed to the condition of the incorporeal angels.<sup>450</sup> In this way, Leah is the patriarch of those who are acquiring virtue through the labors and weariness of the practical life, [1372B] whereas Rachel is the patriarch of those rationally pursuing virtue through natural contemplation, for she is led obediently by the law of God, and she meekly leads others in accordance with it. But the renowned Jacob is the patriarch of those who pursue the height of knowledge through spiritual contemplation, those, I mean, who behold and know visible objects, not at all as they appear to sight, but as they are understood by the intellect, and who abundantly transpose them, together with their inner meanings, to knowledge that is immaterial and incorporeal.<sup>451</sup>

### **Ambiguum 52**

{52.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up the cross and follow.<sup>452</sup>

{52.2} Simon means “obedience,” while Cyrene, they [1372C] say, means “readiness.” Thus anyone who is ready for obedience to the Gospel, and who, through the *mortification of his earthly members*, eagerly endures the affliction of practical philosophy for the sake of virtue, has become Simon of Cyrene; voluntarily practicing virtue, bearing the cross on his shoulders, and following Christ, he shows that his way of life according to God is completely removed from the earth.

### **Ambiguum 53**

{53.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

If as a thief you should be crucified with Him, then as one who is grateful you should acknowledge God.<sup>453</sup>

{53.2} A grateful thief crucified together with [1372D] Christ is every man who, in suffering ill treatment because of sins for which he is to blame, suffers ill-treatment together with the Word (who blamelessly suffered ill treatment for his sake), and endures this with gratitude. Recognizing that the Word is present with him according to the providence of just judgment, and acknowledging his responsibility for the ill treatment that he suffers, he asks that, just as the Word, who is blameless, shared in his suffering, He Himself might also impart to him his own benefaction, even though

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<sup>450</sup> Cf. QD 30 (CCSG 10:25-26).

<sup>451</sup> Cf. Evagrius, Prologue to *On Prayer*, where Rachel symbolizes contemplation and Leah the practice of the virtues (PG 79:1165A).

### **Ambiguum 52**

<sup>452</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:656C).

### **Ambiguum 53**

<sup>453</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:656C).

he is unworthy, and that, when the wise veils are removed from the providential workings of the Word, and the *unapproachable light* of His [1373A] kingdom will shine forth, the death imposed on him by circumstances might, on account of his gratitude, be reckoned as a virtue he had freely chosen. This is how the mortification of the body's members, brought about by circumstances, comes full circle for someone suffering through sin: through grateful thanksgiving it is transformed into voluntary virtue, absolving him of his many debts incurred by sin, so that he lawfully enters with the Word into the realm of knowledge, by which I mean paradise, in which he will know the reason for the condemnation and ill treatment to which we are now subjected.

**53a.**

**{53.3}** The ungrateful thief is one who, suffering ill treatment because of sin, for which he is to blame, fails to recognize, because of his contentious frame of mind, the Word of righteousness, who in His love for mankind is blamelessly suffering together with him. Instead, such a man blasphemously repudiates the reason for his punishment,<sup>454</sup> which by providence was justly ordained for him. [1373B] And because he failed to recognize the Word, who of His own will was dishonorably condemned together with him, and, because he did not ask forgiveness for his faults, he is sent away estranged from the kingdom, receiving no promise from the Word that at some point he might attain it.

**53b.**

**Another contemplation of the same passage**

**{53.4}** And, again, the grateful thief is someone who comes to consciousness of his faults, even if this happens only at the very final moment of this present life of his, and who recognizes with understanding the reason of divine judgment pertaining to his life on earth, which was justly ordained and carried out, and who sincerely asks forgiveness from the depth of his soul for his sins. But the ungrateful thief is someone who reaches the very final moment of his time on earth, [1373C] and, clinging ignobly to life, casts blame on the law and limit of the soul's separation from the body (which were wisely established by God's just judgment), contending that they were wrongfully legislated.

**53c.**

**Another contemplation of the same passage**

**{53.5}** And, again, inasmuch as each of us is twofold in nature, constituted of soul and body, the thief is anyone who, for the sake of virtue, is secretly crucified with the Word in either of the elements of which he is constituted, consistent with the natural law of each. He is like the ungrateful thief when he holds the law of the flesh in opposition to the principle of virtue, but when, like the good thief, he lays hold of the *law of the spirit*, he receives the Savior Word through the modes of ascetical practice (even if these be arduous), [1373D] and being completely released from *the mind of flesh*, he joyfully enters with Him into the place of abundant feasting, lavishly laden with every form of knowledge.

**53d.**

**Another contemplation of the same passage**

**{53.6}** And, once again, the grateful thief is he who has been deemed worthy to be crucified together with Christ through complete and total mortification of the passions, and to be crucified to the right of Him, that is, who goes through every virtue with reason and knowledge, [1376A] keeping his life void of offense in the

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<sup>454</sup> Or, "repudiates the principle of judgment."

eyes of all men, and possesses absolutely no motion which by its harshness would be at variance with the meekness of the Word. The ungrateful thief, on the other hand, is he, who for the sake of glory or material gain, superficially feigns the life of virtue by a show of external mannerisms, comporting himself before strangers not with any virtue or knowledge but solely with words of flattery, whereas among those he knows he is completely perverse in his thinking and difficult in his exchanges—such a one *must be silenced* with intelligence, since he greatly *blasphemes the way of God*. For it may happen that the exhortation of one who rebukes him might make him cease slandering the Word through his manner of life, just as it happened to the thief on the cross, who impetuously uttered blasphemy. For he did not respond to the one who rebuked him, [1376B] and such silence is a sign that the word of rebuke has been accepted.

{53.7} In accordance, then, with one of the aforementioned contemplations, whereby we are crucified together with Christ, let us endeavor, for as long as we are in this world, to propitiate the Word who is crucified together with us—and with our conscience cleansed by the thoughts that rebuke it, let us receive the truthful promise of rest, since the word “today” indicates the present day of this age (for *today*, He says, *you will be with me in paradise*), whereas “tomorrow” is the day of the age to come, when we should not expect to receive any remission of our sins, but only the rendering of the just recompense for whatever we have done with our lives.

#### Ambiguum 54

{54.1} [1376C] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

And if you are a Joseph from Arimathea, ask for the body from him who crucified it.<sup>455</sup>

{54.2} The “body” of Christ is either the soul, or its powers, or senses, or the body of each human being, or the members of the body, or the commandments, or the virtues, or the inner principles of created beings, or, to put it simply and more truthfully, each and all of these things, both individually and collectively, are the body of Christ. The one who crucifies this body—that is, who crucifies all of these things—is the devil, who does this through the man who consents to their crucifixion, not allowing them to function according to their nature. Joseph, in Hebrew, means “addition,” while Arimathea means, “raise that up.” Thus every man who possesses an addition of faith and knowledge, and who is augmented by the modes of virtue, and who has stripped away from himself every [1376D] deception arising from material things, is a spiritual Joseph, able to receive the body of Christ and bury it properly, placing it in the niche that faith has hewn in his heart, by grace making his own body like the body of Christ, and *the members of his body as instruments of righteousness to God* for sanctification, placing the body’s senses in service to the soul, according to the innate law of natural contemplation in the spirit. As for the soul itself, he balances its powers [1377A] for the fulfillment of virtue, and, having subjected both the soul and its powers to the commandments of God, he demonstrates that these commandments are the natural activities of the soul. And through his fixed and immovable habit of virtue, he is raised up to understand and receive the more divine principles hidden in the commandments; and, as if in a kind of shroud, he places, together with the spiritual principles of this present age, the Primal Word, *from whom, and through whom, and*

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#### Ambiguum 54

<sup>455</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:656C).

to whom are all things. The one who so maintains this beautiful and good order of things is a Joseph, secretly burying the mystical body of Christ.

**Another contemplation of the same passage**

{54.3} And, again, to speak concisely, the one who by practice and contemplation [1377B] wondrously transmits to his listeners the principles concerning the cross, has become another Joseph, augmenting his spiritual knowledge by the addition of the good things acquired from contemplation. And he will be “of Arimathea” when, through genuine familiarity with the virtues actualized in practice, he cuts away from himself every attachment to material things.

**Another contemplation of the same passage**

{54.4} On the other hand, those who blasphemously teach the principles concerning God’s embodiment crucify Christ, but whosoever proclaims the principles of God’s incarnation with boldness and piety to all, places Christ in the tomb.

**Ambiguum 55**

{55.1} [1377C] From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha, on the words:

And if you are a Nikodemos, pious by night, bury Him with perfumed oils.<sup>456</sup>

{55.2} A Nikodemos, pious by night, and preparing Christ’s body for burial with perfumed oils, is he who has great strength of mind to recognize Christ, but who shows undue consideration for the flesh through cowardly fear of the Jews (by which I mean the assaults of the passions or the demons), and loses his resolve to practice the commandments. For such a one it must be reckoned a great thing simply that he thinks good thoughts about Christ, and does not utter blasphemous words.

**Ambiguum 56**

{56.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

And if you are a Mary, or the other Mary, or a Salome, [1377D] or a Joanna, shed tears at dawn. Be first to cast your eyes on the stone taken away, and perchance you will see the angels and Jesus Himself.<sup>457</sup>

{56.2} The first Mary, from whom the Word *cast out seven demons*, is every soul engaged in ascetic practice, having been cleansed from the disquiet of this age through the word of the Gospel’s commandments. For this age is divided into seven periods, being completed when time winds its way back to itself,<sup>458</sup> [1380A] and it is from this that the Word delivers His disciples, placing them above all things subject to time. *The other Mary* is every contemplative soul, which in true knowledge has acquired kinship with the Word through grace. Salome, which means “peace” or “plenitude,” is every soul that has attained peace through the rejection of the passions, and which through its abundance of practical virtues has subjected *the mind of the flesh to the law* of the Spirit; and being filled with the spiritual intellections of contemplation, it wisely comprehends, as much as possible, the knowledge of beings. Joanna, which means “dove”—a meek, guileless, and fecund creature<sup>459</sup>—is every soul that through meekness has expelled the passions, [1380B] and the fecundity of whose spirit is ablaze with knowledge. It is such as these who shed tears at dawn, that

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**Ambiguum 55**

<sup>456</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:656CD).

**Ambiguum 56**

<sup>457</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:656D).

<sup>458</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 7.5 (202, lines 12-14; 892D).

<sup>459</sup> Origen, *Homily on Luke* 27.5, describes the dove as a “meek creature” (SC 87:348, lines 18-21); that it is “fecund” is the opinion of Aristotle, *HA* VI.1 558b.

is, who pour forth tears of knowledge as they seek the Word, who is the supreme sovereign of all virtue and knowledge. And they are the first to see *the stone removed from the entrance of the tomb*, that is, the *hardness*<sup>460</sup> that lies heavily *on the heart* and which obscures the Word; and they see angels, that is, they see in spirit the natural principles of beings, which silently proclaim the Word who is the cause of all.

#### **Another contemplation of the angels**

{56.3} Or they are the words<sup>461</sup> of Sacred Scripture, furnishing the women with a clearer notion concerning Christ as God and man, that is, concerning theology and economy. [1380C] For Scripture says that the women saw one angel *at the head*, and another *at the feet*—“at the head” signifies the principle of theology concerning the divinity of Christ, and “at the feet” signifies the principle of the economy pertaining to the Incarnation; and if someone were to say that the “head” of Christ is His divinity, whereas the “feet” are His humanity, he would not be wide of the mark.<sup>462</sup>

#### **Another contemplation of the same**

{56.4} Or perhaps the angels are the stirrings within the conscience concerning the principle of piety, owing to the complete rejection of evil and ignorance—stirrings that intelligibly proclaim to the women the resurrection of the Word, who because of evil had once lain dead within them. And [1380D] finally they see the Word Himself clearly appearing to them, without symbols or figures, and filling the receptive capacities of their intellect with spiritual joy.

### **Ambiguum 57**

{57.1} From Saint Gregory’s same oration On Pascha:

Become a Peter or a John, and hasten to the tomb, running in rivalry, running in tandem, contesting for superiority in this beautiful contest.<sup>463</sup>

{57.2} Peter is every man who has acquired the foundation of faith in Christ throughout the course of his life. John, on the other hand, is he who is beloved by the Word for his great meekness, [1381A] and for the unmixed purity of heart that this produces. This is why he is entrusted with *the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and by *reclining on the breast* obtains from the hidden divinity of the Word the power to speak theologically.<sup>464</sup> And these two “run in rivalry” with each other—the former, with his virtuous practice striving to triumph over the latter’s contemplation, while the latter, with his cognitive contemplation, hastens to overtake the practice of the former. Yet “they run in tandem” according to their common aim and purpose, each man advancing equally well in accordance with the good that is proper to him.

#### **Another contemplation of Peter and John**

{57.3} Again, Peter and John signify any [1381B] person who has been found worthy to draw near to God, running in tandem with reason, either through the soul’s capacity for practical activity, like a kind of Peter, or through the contemplative part, like John, without either one being excessive or deficient with respect to the other. And, again, they are seen to run as rivals with respect to their aim and purpose, so that each one seeks to surpass the farthest point attained by the other.

### **Ambiguum 58**

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<sup>460</sup> Or “blindness.”

<sup>461</sup> Or “principles.”

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.16 (PG 36:645A).

#### **Ambiguum 57**

<sup>463</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:657A); cf. id., Or. 40.25 (SC 358:252, lines 17-19).

<sup>464</sup> Cf. QD 191 (CCSG 10:133-134).

{58.1} From Saint Gregory's same oration On Pascha, on the words:

And even if, like Thomas, you should happen to be absent from the group of disciples to whom Christ appears, do not doubt Him when at last you see Him. And should you doubt, believe in those who speak to you of Him. And if not them, then believe the marks of the nails.<sup>465</sup>

{58.2} [1381C] Thomas means *double*, which signifies "doubt," or a person who is of "doubtful mind," which is why he would not believe in the resurrection of the Word until he had touched the marks of the nails. Thomas therefore is every doubting man who finds it difficult to believe that the resurrection of virtue and knowledge of the Word takes place within him. For such a man, only the memories of *his former sins*, imprinted in his mind without any trace of passion, can persuade him to accept the resurrection of the divine Word within him, and to confess Him as *Lord and God*. As Lord, because He establishes the law of perfection through the practical life; and as God, because He is the guide to complete initiation into contemplation. A dispassionate memory is the imprint of what took place in the past; it is the soul's awareness of its own deeds and thoughts, experienced without any sensation of either pleasure or pain with respect to its activity or motivation; as such it preserves the marks of the wounds, but the wounds inflicted by the original blows have healed owing to the subsequent acquisition of dispassion.<sup>466</sup>

**Another contemplation of the same**

{58.3} Or, again, "nails" perchance are the modes of the virtues in practical philosophy, painfully nailing the soul's [1384A] disposition to the fear of God. These are superseded by the dispassionate, simple, and ineffable principles of knowledge, which piercingly proclaim the resurrection of the divine Word in the divinization of the soul, showing in advance that this resurrection faithfully bears witness to the dispassion of the deiform state of soul. Whoever has not himself experienced this will never believe another man's account of it, just as Thomas did not believe the resurrection that was experienced and recounted to him by the apostles until he had experienced it himself.

**Ambiguum 59**

{59.1} From the same oration On Pascha:

Should He descend into Hades, descend together with Him. Learn the mysteries of God that take place there, and what is the principle of the double descent.<sup>467</sup>

{59.2} [1384B] The spiritual man, knowing that the Word of God exists everywhere without suffering defilement, follows him by means of contemplation, intelligently gleaning the science of universal providence. Thus, when the Word descends into Hades, he descends together with Him, obviously not in pursuit of evil, but in order to search out and understand the mystery of the descent of God into Hades, and to be taught the transcendent principle of what takes place and is performed there.

**Another contemplation of the same**

{59.3} Or, again, since "Hades" is every sin—which darkens, disfigures, and corrupts every soul in its power—whoever [1384C] enters into dialogue concerning the passions descends into Hades together with the word of his teaching, vivifying through his word every virtue deadened by evil and leading it to resurrection, and,

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**Ambiguum 58**

<sup>465</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.24 (PG 36:657A).

<sup>466</sup> Cf. id., *Concerning his own life* (PG 37:1202A, lines 496-500).

<sup>467</sup> Cf. id., Or. 45.24 (PG 36:657A).



together with the Word, vigorously breaks the bonds of material attachment with which souls are shackled. The reason for the double descent, in its most basic sense, according to the first interpretation, is that the Word is able on earth to save embodied souls through their faith and purity of life, and when He descends below the earth, He is able to save the souls of the previously departed through their faith alone. According to the second interpretation, it means that the habitual propensity for vice and its actuality in the soul can be restored to [1384D] virtue and knowledge by the Word.

## Ambiguum 60

{60.1} From the same oration On Pascha:

Should He ascend into the heavens, ascend with Him. Join the angels who are accompanying or receiving Him; command the gates to be opened.<sup>468</sup>

{60.2} Whosoever, through plentiful abundance of knowledge and rich participation in the Holy Spirit, has adequately attained (to the extent that this is possible) the principle concerning providence, and has grasped the science of it, ascends from earth to the heavens together with the ascending Word, since cognitively [1385A] he has traversed the nature of all things that come under the care of providence, visible and invisible, together with the principles pertaining to that nature; and having ascended to the final state, which itself is absolutely devoid of any kind of carrying or motion (and to which he was moving through every principle and mode), he is lifted up by the accompanying principles of providence in beings, as if by escorting angels, to the realm of the ineffable principles and mysteries of theology that receive him, and by means of his various ascensions he enlarges the spiritual gates of his soul to receive the “most supremely divine Word.”<sup>469</sup>

### Another contemplation of the same passage

{60.3} And again, contemplating this differently, while the Word ascends, together with him ascends the man who is exalted together with the Word, who is lifting him upwards from the ways of practical philosophy, as if from a kind of earth, to something like [1385B] the heavens, that is, the spiritual heavens of contemplative knowledge.

### Another contemplation of the same passage

{60.4} And to disclose a greater secret about these things: whosoever is able to be lifted up from the knowledge concerning the dispensation, that is, from the Word's world of flesh made by the Father, to the intellection of the *glory* of the Word's flesh *with the Father before the world was made*, has truly ascended into the heavens together with God the Word, who for his sake descended to earth. Such a man has reached the limit of knowledge that human beings can contain in this present age, for he has become God to the degree that God has become man, for man has been guided by God, [1385C] through the stages of divine ascent, into the highest regions, to the same degree that God has descended down to the farthest reaches of our nature, emptying Himself without change.

## Ambiguum 61

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### Ambiguum 60

<sup>468</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.25 (PG 36:657B).

<sup>469</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, EH 3.12: “For the one, simple, and hidden Jesus, the most supremely divine Word, by His incarnation among us, came forth, out of goodness and love towards man, to the compound and visible” (92-93, lines 21-1; 444A); *ibid.*, 1.1 (63, line 12; 372A); and *ibid.*, 4.4 (98, line 26; 477C).

**{61.1}** From Saint Gregory's oration *On the New Sunday*:

The *tent of witness* is dedicated—and most magnificently—a tent that God revealed, Bezalel completed, and Moses securely pitched.<sup>470</sup>

**{61.2}** Seeing that the anagogical interpretation of the tent generates a wide range of meanings on the level of contemplation, let us consider it here as it was understood by the teacher. The tent of witness is the mysterious [1385D] dispensation of the Incarnation of God the Word, which God the Father was pleased to “reveal,” and which was “completed” with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit (of whom the wise Bezalel was a type), and which was built by the intelligible Moses, that is, the only-begotten Son of God the Father, who “pitched” human nature within Himself by a union according to hypostasis.<sup>471</sup>

**Another contemplation of the same**

**{61.3}** But the tent is also an image of the totality of creation, intelligible and sensible, which God the [1388A] Father as Intellect conceived, and which the Son as Word created, and which the Holy Spirit brought to completion. And, in turn, the tent also can be seen as an image solely of sense-perceptible nature, or solely of man as constituted of soul and body, or solely of the soul itself when seen in light of its inner principle, for the tent is an image of these things when it is contemplated in light of the inner principle that is proper to each.

**Ambiguum 62**

**{62.1}** From Saint Gregory's same oration *On the New Sunday*:

The kingship of David is inaugurated, and not once but twice, for first he is anointed, and afterwards he is proclaimed.<sup>472</sup>

**{62.2}** Here, too, the anagogical interpretation of the great David, who was a prophet and a [1388B] king, possesses many meanings, so let us attend to the one that the teacher here had in mind. Accordingly, “David” is the true, intelligible king of Israel (who *sees God*), that is, Jesus Christ, who, in His first coming, is anointed in the aspect of His humanity, just as the teacher says elsewhere: “He anointed humanity by His divinity—having created the very thing that He anointed.”<sup>473</sup> In His second and glorious manifestation, He is and is proclaimed to be the God, Lord, and King of all creation.

**Ambiguum 63**

**{63.1}** With respect to this same oration, some are puzzled, saying: “Why did the teacher say that [1388C] ‘the day of the Resurrection surpasses all the feasts celebrated on earth, and not simply human feasts, which are inspired by base motivations, but also those celebrated in the name of Christ Himself’—and then, as if he had forgotten his own pronouncement, proceed to rank the ‘New Sunday’ higher than the Resurrection, when he said: ‘This day is more sublime than that one, and more marvelous than it too’? From this, one would think that the teacher is contradicting himself.”<sup>474</sup>

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**Ambiguum 61**

<sup>470</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 44.2 (PG 36:608BC). Here “dedicated” also means “inaugurated,” cf. below, Amb 62.1.

<sup>471</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* 2.174 (GNO 7/1:91-92, lines 21-5).

**Ambiguum 62**

<sup>472</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 44.2 (PG 36:608BC).

<sup>473</sup> Id., Or. 10.4 (SC 405:324, lines 14-15). The second part of this citation appears to be an allusion to id., Or. 30.1 (SC 250:228, lines 24-26).

**Ambiguum 63**

**{63.2}** To these concerns it must be said that the teacher himself, a few lines later in the same oration, says: “These words do not mean that you should remain permanently in the same state, but that you should be constantly moving, improving, a completely new creation.”<sup>475</sup> [1388D] And just as we know that a person who has been renewed becomes more sublime and godlike than himself, beaming with joy from his progress in virtue, so too must we believe that every sacred feast established for our sake becomes—in us and through us—more sublime than itself, because through our faithful celebration the mystery signified through the feast acquires its proper power to lead us to perfection. It is therefore likely that the teacher said that the New Sunday was “more sublime than the sublime,”<sup>476</sup> since it is always attaining greater sublimity among us, and so surpasses itself. In other words, the Resurrection—by which I mean the First Sunday—through the mystery that it conceals, grants to those who spiritually celebrate this mystery [1389A] solely a life cleansed of all fantasies related to matter, whereas the New Sunday makes its celebrants participate in the complete enjoyment of divine blessings, to which the previous Sunday had led the way.

**Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

**{63.3}** If this interpretation should seem tenable to anyone, he should know that the First Sunday is also said to be a type of resurrection in virtue in accordance with our free choice, whereas the Second is a type of a permanent habit of mind acquired by free choice and leading to the knowledge of perfection.

[1389B] **Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

**{63.4}** Again, the First Sunday is a symbol of our future, natural resurrection and incorruptibility, whereas the Second conveys an image of the future divinization that we shall receive by grace. If, then, the enjoyment of blessings is more precious than a habit of mind cleansed of the vices; and if a habit of mind possessing perfection in true knowledge is more precious than the healthy exercise of free choice inclining to virtue; and if the transformation in grace to God in divinization is more precious than natural incorruptibility—and if, of these, the former are imaged by the First Sunday, whereas the latter are symbolized by the Second—then it stands to reason that the teacher, being guided by the Spirit, said that the New Sunday was “more sublime” than the “sublime” Sunday of the Resurrection.

**Ambiguum 64**

**{64.1}** [1389C] From the same oration On the New Sunday:

I loathe that intimacy which passes through the air.<sup>477</sup>

**{64.2}** Addressing himself to women, especially those who had taken up monastic life, and emphatically prolonging his remarks on the question of how they might amend their morals, the teacher recommends, rather gently, as it seems to me, that female ascetics should not gaze intently on someone from the windows of their houses, and certainly not on male passersby, lest through such inappropriate looking they be wounded by the *sting of death*.

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<sup>474</sup> The two internal citations are from Gregory the Theologian, Or. 45.2 (PG 36:624C); and id., Or. 44.5 (PG 36:612C). The context of the second is an elaborate comparison between the Sunday of the Resurrection and the Sunday that follows it, on which the Church celebrates the “renewal” of the Resurrection at the end of the “cosmic week” symbolized by the Octave of Easter.

<sup>475</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 44.8 (PG 36:616D).

<sup>476</sup> I.e., more sublime than the sublime Sunday of the Resurrection.

**Ambiguum 64**

<sup>477</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 44.8 (PG 36:616B).

## Ambiguum 65

{65.1} From Saint Gregory's oration On Holy Pentecost:

There was need of one day, which we received from the age to come, which was both the eighth day [1389D] and the first day, or rather a single and perpetual day—for it is necessary that the Sabbath of souls celebrated here should reach its end there.<sup>478</sup>

{65.2} According to sacred Scripture, the number seven, when taken simply as a number, by its nature contains within itself a wealth of mystical contemplation for those who love to labor for divine things. For it signifies time, the age, ages, motion, as well as containment, measure, limit, and providence, and many other things when it is properly contemplated according to the principle of each. But even when it is considered solely as “rest,” it contains [1392A] a wealth of knowledge initiated into mysteries. But so as not to render my discourse onerous by going through each of these points in detail, let us examine that which seems to be more sublime than the others. Those possessing perfect knowledge of divine realities say that there are three modes, inasmuch as the total principle of the whole coming into being of rational substances is seen to have the mode of being, of well-being, and eternal-being; and that of being is first given to beings by essence; that of well-being is granted to them second, by their power to choose, inasmuch as they are self-moved; and that of eternal-being is lavished on them third, by grace. And the first contains potential, the second activity, and the third, rest from activity. This means that the principle of being, which by nature possesses only the potential for actualization, cannot in any way possess this potential in its fullness without the faculty of free choice. [1392B] That of well-being, on the other hand, possesses the actualization of natural potential only by inclination of the will, for it does not possess this potential in its totality separately from nature. That of eternal-being, finally, which wholly contains those that precede it (that is, the potential of the one, and the activity of the other), absolutely does not exist as a natural potential within beings, nor does it at all follow by necessity from the willing of free choice (for how is it possible for things, which by nature have a beginning and which by their motion have an end, to possess as an innate part of themselves that which exists eternally and which has neither beginning nor end?) But eternal being is a limit, bringing a halt to nature in terms of its potential, and to free choice in terms of its activity, without in any way changing the principle according to which the one and the other exist, but establishing for all things the limit of all ages and times. And this, [1392C] as it seems to me, is perhaps the mystically blessed Sabbath, the great day of rest from divine works, which, according to the account of the world's creation in Scripture, appears to have neither beginning, nor end, nor created origin, since it is the manifestation of realities beyond limit and measure, sequent to the motion of whatever is limited by measure, and the infinite identity of realities that are uncontained and uncircumscribed, sequent to the quantity of things contained and circumscribed.<sup>479</sup>

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## Ambiguum 65

<sup>478</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.2 (SC 358:316-18, lines 33-36). Amb 65-67 speculate on the meaning of various numbers and mathematical relations. In contrast to the Origenists, for whom number and plurality were the result of a fall from a primordial unity, Maximus sees numbers as a positive expression of the created order, an affirmation of the ontological value of difference, particularity, and multiplicity; cf. above, Amb 37.5, n. 359.

<sup>479</sup> Cf. QThal 60, *scholion* 1 (CCSG 22:81, lines 1-5); and QThal 25 (CCSG 7:163, lines 72-80).

{65.3} If, then, voluntary activity makes use of the potential of nature, either according to nature or against nature, it will receive nature's limit of either well-being or ill-being—and this is eternal being, in which the souls celebrate their Sabbath, receiving cessation from all motion.<sup>480</sup> The eighth and the first, or rather, the one [1392D] and perpetual day, is the unalloyed, all-shining presence of God, which comes about after things in motion have come to rest; and, throughout the whole being of those who by their free choice have used the principle of being according to nature, the whole God suitably abides, bestowing on them eternal well-being by giving them a share in Himself, because He alone, properly speaking, is, and is good, and is eternal; but to those who have willfully used the principle of their being contrary to nature, He rightly renders not well-being but eternal ill-being, since well-being is no longer accessible to those who have placed themselves in opposition to it, and they have absolutely no motion after the manifestation of what was sought, by which<sup>481</sup> what is sought is naturally revealed to those who seek it.

[1393A] **Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

{65.4} And, again, the seventh day and Sabbath is the passage through all the modes pertaining to virtue and all the principles of knowledge pertaining to contemplation. But the eighth day is the true transformation by grace in relation to the beginning and cause of whatever has been accomplished by practice and understood by contemplation.

**Another contemplation of the same difficulty**

{65.5} Thus, in turn, the seventh day and Sabbath is the dispassion that in succession follows practical philosophy undertaken according to virtue. But the eighth and the first day, being single and perpetual, is the wisdom that comes about after cognitive contemplation. And through a variety of other modes, lovers of divine visions are able to apprehend the meaning of these things and discover many [1393B] beautiful and true contemplations.

## Ambiguum 66

{66.1} From the same oration On Holy Pentecost: How did the teacher understand the command to *do it a second time, and do it a third time* as signifying the mystery of the seventh day, saying:

Likewise the Prophet Elijah, who stretched himself out seven times on the son of the <widow> from Zarephath, a gesture that breathed life into him, and the equal number of times he drenched the *piles of cleft wood*?<sup>482</sup>

{66.2} When I asked the blessed elder about this,<sup>483</sup> he said that it is perhaps possible to assume that the teacher speaks of the number seven in the following manner: first, in accordance with those who are called mathematicians,<sup>484</sup> for they say that some numbers consist of other numbers that have been multiplied by two or three, with the final addition of the number one. For example, the number sixty-four [1393C] consists of numbers multiplied by two, since the first six numbers are multiplied by two, and with the addition of the number one, we employ seven figures. Thus,  $1 \times 2 =$

<sup>480</sup> Cf. QThal 65 (CCSG 22:279, lines 466-68).

<sup>481</sup> I.e., manifestation.

### Ambiguum 66

<sup>482</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.4 (SC 358:320, lines 13-16). According to the Septuagint, three, and not seven, is the number of times that Elijah is said to have covered the dead child, and poured water on the wood.

<sup>483</sup> This is the seventh and final mention of the wise elder, cf. above, Amb 43.2.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Nikomachos, *Introduction to Arithmetic* 2.17 (ed. Hoche, 1866, 108-9).

2,  $2 \times 2 = 4$ ,  $4 \times 2 = 8$ ,  $8 \times 2 = 16$ ,  $16 \times 2$  is 32, and  $32 \times 2 = 64$ . These being multiplied in this way, the sum appears to be composed of six units, but with the final addition of the number one, with which the process of multiplication began, the constituent units work out to seven.<sup>485</sup> Using this same general rule, we can derive the number seven from the passage cited above, for Scripture says: *Pour water on it, do it a second time, and do it a third time*—accordingly,  $1 \times 2 = 2$ ,  $2 \times 3 = 6$ , and by adding 1 to 6, the result is 7. They say, moreover, that the number three, when contemplated mystically, has a certain spiritual relation to the number seven, in the following manner. The all-sacred, worshipful, and all-holy Trinity [1393D] is signified by the number three, and again by the number seven, since this number is virgin. For among [1396A] the numbers one to ten, the number seven neither begets nor is begotten.<sup>486</sup> The teacher makes this quite clear in his book of poems on virginity, where he says that the “first virgin is the chaste Trinity.”<sup>487</sup>

### Another Contemplation of the Same Difficulty

{66.3} Or we may understand it like this: if together with the Holy Trinity your power of reason mystically observes its activity, by which I mean the Good, which very thing manifests the four general virtues, you will arrive at the number seven.<sup>488</sup> For by observing the Holy and all-hymned Trinity together with its activity, we reckon up the virginal number seven.

### Ambiguum 67

{67.1} [1396B] From the same oration On Holy Pentecost:

Jesus Himself, the pure perfection, knew how to feed *five thousand men in the desert with five loaves*; and again He knew how to feed *four thousand with seven*—and, in the former, after they were satisfied, there were *twelve baskets* left over, whereas in the latter there were *seven baskets*. None of these details, as it seems to me, is without a reason or unworthy of the Spirit.<sup>489</sup>

{67.2} Seeing that the preceding considerations have exercised the mind at length in the habit of contemplation, let us not, if you agree, overburden it with a multitude of words, since henceforth it should be able scientifically to receive the contemplation of divine realities with greater concision. Thus, the *five barley loaves* are an allusion to the principles of natural contemplation that are readily accessible to us. The *five thousand men* who were nourished by them indicate those who move closely around nature, [1396C] but who have not yet been completely purified of their tendency to be conditioned by the passionate and irrational part of the soul, which is the sense that these words present to those who contemplate them, inasmuch as the *loaves were made from barley*, which is a form of nourishment common to beasts and men, and the men *were with their women and children*, which plainly indicates that they were not completely estranged from the desire for pleasure and the infantile imperfection of

<sup>485</sup> Cf. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 30 (LCL 1:72-74).

<sup>486</sup> The number seven is “virginal” since it is neither produced by the multiplication of any two numbers in the decad, nor does it “reproduce” (through multiplication) any number within the decad; cf. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 30 (LCL 1:78-80); id., *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* 1.5 (LCL 1:154); and Ps.-Iamblichos, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 7.41 (ed. De Falco and Klein 1975, 54, line 11).

<sup>487</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *Carmina moralia* 1 (*In Praise of Virginity*) 20 (PG 37:523A, line 20).

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Didymos of Alexandria, *On the Trinity* 1.18.15-17 (ed. Hönscheid 1975, 110, lines 3-10).

### Ambiguum 67

<sup>489</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.4 (SC 358:322, lines 29-34). Maximus refers to this Ambiguum at the conclusion of QThal 39, where he says: “But you have a more extensive treatment of this subject in the *Ambigua*” (CCSG 7:261, lines 59).

their thoughts. The *desert* is this world, in which the Word of God, by spiritually distributing the principles of nature to those who through natural contemplation are in motion around the Divine, grants them to be completely satisfied with good things, which is indicated by the *baskets* of leftovers, which were twelve [1396D] in number.

#### **Contemplation of the number twelve**

{67.3} The number twelve indicates the intelligible principles pertaining to time and nature, since it is brought to completion by the addition of five and seven. For time is sevenfold, moving as it does in a cyclical manner, and possesses a natural affinity for motion, maintaining the extremes at an equal distance from the mean. [1397A]

Nature, on the other hand, is fivefold, a number to which it is naturally ordered, both on account of senses, which are divided into five, and because the form that nature takes from what is simply called matter is further divided into four.<sup>490</sup> For nature is nothing other than either matter with form, or informed matter, because when form is added to matter it produces nature.<sup>491</sup>

#### **Another contemplation of the same**

{67.4} Or the number twelve signifies the understanding of created beings and ages, insofar as they are subject to motion and circumscription, and are marked by attributes of quiddity, quality, and mode of existence. For everything that is in motion and has been created is subject to a beginning, and for this reason [1397B] is absolutely subject to time, even if it is a form of time not measurable by motion. For every created thing has a beginning of its being, since there was a time when it began to exist, and it is subject to extension in time, from the moment when it began to exist. If, then, every created thing exists and is in motion, then it is absolutely subject to nature and time: to the one on account of its existence, and to the other on account of its motion, and it is through the combination of these two, as explained above, that the reckoning of twelve is completed.

#### **Another contemplation**

{67.5} Or it signifies ethical, natural, and theological philosophy, since it is the yield of four, five, and three. For ethical philosophy, which is the correct form of moral conduct in one's deeds, is fourfold on account of [1397C] the four general virtues. Natural philosophy is fivefold, for the reason mentioned above, that is, the natural division of sense perception into five senses. Mystical theology, finally, is threefold, on account of the three, holy, consubstantial hypostases of the all-holy Monad, or in which three *is* the holy Monad, or to speak more strictly, which three *are* the holy Monad.

#### **Another contemplation**

{67.6} Or it signifies the universal and most general form of virtue and knowledge—the former, since in this life it is attained through the four virtues, and the latter, since it is indicated by the number eight, which mystically points to the more divine state of the things of the age to come, and from the combination of these the number twelve is attained.

#### **[1397D] Another contemplation**

{67.7} Or it signifies the things of the present and the things of the future, since things present naturally admit of the number four, which is elemental and material, whereas future things admit of the number eight, which is mystically contemplated among them—since it transcends the property of seven peculiar to time—and from these the number twelve is completed.

<sup>490</sup> Cf. QD 41 (CCSG 10:35, lines 20-22); Ps 59 (CCSG 23:5-7, lines 37-65); QThal 64 (CCSG 22:209, lines 360).

<sup>491</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Phys* 209b7-8; id., *GC* 321b; id., *An* 412a6-9.

[1400A] **Another contemplation**

{67.8} Or the number twelve clearly indicates the threefold principles of providence and judgment in respect of intelligible things and sensible things. For each of these in itself admits of three principles in order for it to be precisely what it is—which, after much study of the Scriptures, became quite clear to the highest initiates and initiators into divine realities. Thus when, by themselves, the threefold universal principles of beings multiply by three the four beings in which they are contemplated—or the opposite, namely, when they themselves are multiplied by four by the things in which they are found, they produce the number twelve. For if beings have substance, potency, and activity, it is obvious that the principle of their existence is threefold. And if providence binds these three principles together, clearly in order for beings to be what they are, then it follows that the principle of providence must itself be threefold. [1400B] But if any of these principles is damaged or perverted from things occurring in the past, the present, or the future, then judgment will act to redress and punish evil, for judgment itself possesses a threefold principle of contemplation, according to which it circumscribes the substance, potency, and activity of beings, while permanently preserving its own proper boundlessness.

**Another contemplation**

{67.9} Or, again, the number twelve signifies the perfect understanding, as far as this is possible for us, of the knowledge of a cause and its effects. For when [1400C] the dyad is added to the decad it produces twelve—but the “decad” is Jesus, the Lord and God of all, who, without going outside Himself in His processions from the Monad, returns to Himself in a manner befitting the Monad.<sup>492</sup> For the decad is also a monad, since it is the definition of things defined, the ambit of things in motion, and the limit of all arithmetical sums. And dyadic, again, is the structure of all beings after God, namely, all sensible beings, which, being combined of matter and form, constitute a dyad; and intelligible beings, too, since they are a combination of substance and substantial qualities that give their substance form. For there exists absolutely no created thing which strictly speaking is “simple,” since it is not simply “this” or “that,” but possesses a constitutive and determinative difference, which is considered with it, as in an underlying substance, constituting it as a particular thing, and clearly distinguishing it from every other thing. Thus, no thing, in any way at all, that substantially possesses something considered with it in the manifestation of its proper existence can strictly speaking be simple.<sup>493</sup>

[1400D] **Another contemplation**

{67.10} Or, again, the number twelve alludes in a rather hidden way to the divine essence and its active energy. The divine essence is manifested through the number three, since it is praised as a Trinity on account of its tri-hypostatic existence, for the Monad is a Trinity, [1401A] being perfect in perfect hypostases, that is, in the mode of its existence; and the Trinity is truly a Monad in the principle of its essence, that is, in the principle of its being. As for the active energy, it is indicated by the number six, for this is the only perfect and complete number within the decad, being constituted from its own parts, and containing both general and unequal numbers—by which I mean even and odd numbers—and thus it alone is perfect among perfect things (in respect of the principle according to which they exist), efficiently producing and

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<sup>492</sup> Cf. Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 2.11 (135-36, lines 13-1; 649B); DN 9.5 (210, lines 7-11; 912D); DN 13.2 (227, lines 6-7; 977C); see also DN 4.14 (160, line 15; 713A); and DN 4.8 (153, line 8; 705A). See also CT 1.79 (PG 90:1112D-1113B).

<sup>493</sup> Cf. above, Amb 2.5; Amb 5.2; Amb 5.11-12; and Opusc. 16 (PG 91:200BC).



protecting them, preserving their essences and maintaining their unequal qualities.<sup>494</sup> For the means that move midway between extremes are unequal when compared to the ever-moving repose of the extremes. Let me offer one example of what I mean, from which those who are assiduous in learning might understand the meaning of all the others. An “extreme” is: *And God said, Let us make man according to our image and [1401B] likeness*. A “mean” is: *And God made man, male and female He made them*. Again, an “extreme” is: *In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female*. That these extremes and means are unequal—since the latter have “male and female,” whereas the former do not—is due to the productive and containing power of the divine energy. I think that the supremely wise Moses, having mystically learned of this energy, in his goodness subtly disclosed it to the rest of mankind, when he wrote that God created the whole world in six days. Now if to this creative energy, following the sequence and order, we suitably reckon the providence and judgment of beings as part of creation (for they are contained within it), we arrive at the most complete number twelve.<sup>495</sup>

#### [1401C] **Contemplation of the baskets**

{67.11} By the *baskets* in which the *leftovers* were placed, Scripture is referring to the dispensation of divine discipline to those who are spiritually nourished on the intelligible principles mentioned above, for they have not yet advanced beyond disciplinary instruction, which fittingly establishes what is useful, and stipulates a rather painful regimen for those being disciplined, which we are given to understand by the material from which wicker baskets are constructed, which by its nature is hard-edged and sharp.

#### **Contemplation of the seven loaves**

{67.12} As for the *seven loaves* of the *four thousand men*, [1401D] I think they are a figure of initiation into the teaching of the law, that is, into the more divine principles inherent within this teaching, which are mystically distributed by the Word to those who abide with Him for three days, in other words, to those who patiently endure the toil that procures the light of knowledge surrounding ethical, natural, and theological philosophy.

#### **Another contemplation of the three days**

{67.13} Or the *three days* may perhaps be an allusion to the natural, written, and spiritual law, since [1404A] each of these grants the illumination of its more spiritual principle to those who love to labor zealously for it, who nobly and truly endure three days of hunger for divine things, abiding blamelessly with God the Word, and so receive mystical nourishment, which contains in a single identity the symbols of victory and dominion, evident in the excess that remains after satiety. For the *seven baskets* are woven of palm fronds—which are a symbol of victory and dominion, as well as of staunch resistance on behalf of the truth, when battered by gusts of violent winds—these baskets, I say, are a sign that those who have eaten from them are victors over all evil and ignorance, inasmuch as they have received from God the Word invincible power over passions and demons.<sup>496</sup>

#### **Contemplation of the number of the four thousand men**

<sup>494</sup> Cf. QThal 40 (CCSG 7:267, lines 25-29); Plato, *Tim* 17a; Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 3.13 (LCL 1:12); id., *On the Laws of Allegory* 1.2.3 (LCL 1:148); id., *On the Special Laws* 2.30.177 (LCL 7:416-18); Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.6.12 (ed. Willis 1963, 2:20, lines 22-28); Ps.-Iamblichos, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 6.33 (ed. De Falco and Klein 1975, 42, lines 19-20).

<sup>495</sup> Since providence and judgment are each “threefold,” cf. above, Amb 67.8.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. QThal 39 (CCSG 7:259-61), where these same “three days” are considered in detail.

{67.14} And the very number of those who were nourished by these [1404B] spiritual principles is itself a clear witness of their true perfection, since it contains the four general monads. Of these, the first is the primal monad, the second monad is the decad, the third monad is the century, and the fourth monad is the millenary.<sup>497</sup> For each of these, with the exception of the first monad, is both a monad and a decad.<sup>498</sup> It is a monad with respect to what comes after it, for it is added to itself, and by a tenfold multiplication it becomes a decad. And each is a decad, since it contains the sum of the units that precede it. And the millenary, when multiplied by four, yields 4,000. Thus the primal monad is a symbol of mystical theology, the second is a type of divine dispensation and goodness, the third is an image of virtue and [1404C] knowledge, and the fourth is the manifestation of the universal and more divine transformation of beings.

#### **Another contemplation of the number seven**

{67.15} The number seven, associated with the *baskets*, when contemplated in a manner different from the previous one, is said to be indicative of wisdom and prudence. Of wisdom, since it moves intelligibly in a threefold manner around its cause; and of prudence, since, on account of the cause, it moves rationally in a fourfold manner around the beings that come after the cause, and which are around it. According to that great teacher, neither of the two has been brought into being by the Lord “without a reason,” or in a “manner unworthy of the Spirit.”<sup>499</sup>

#### **Ambiguum 68**

{68.1} [1404D] From St. Gregory’s same oration On Holy Pentecost:

And there is a difference of gifts, which stands in need of yet another gift for the discernment of what is better.<sup>500</sup>

{68.2} The “difference of gifts, which stands in need of yet another gift for discernment,” according to that great teacher, is prophecy, I think, and speaking in tongues. For prophecy needs the gift of the discernment of spirits, so that it can be known which, and whence, and whereto, and to what end, [1405A] and of what sort of spirit, and for what reason the prophecy is being uttered—lest the speaker prove to be nothing more than a babbler, and the “prophecy” turn out to be nothing more than arbitrary noises emitted by a damaged mind, or some sort of deliberate effort on the part of the alleged prophet, who shrewdly prophesies about certain things by drawing conclusions from his variegated experience and in accordance with natural principles; or lest it be generated by the evil and demonic spirit, as in the case of Montanos and those like him, who tell absurd stories in the form of prophecies;<sup>501</sup> or lest it perhaps be someone moved by vainglory to arrogate to himself the utterances of others, speaking and propounding things which he himself did not bring forth, winning praise through his lies, a pseudo-sage shamelessly posing as the spurious father of orphaned words and ideas. This is why the holy apostle says: *Let two or three prophets* [1405B] *speak, and let the others discern what they say*. Who are these “others”? Obviously

<sup>497</sup> I.e., units of one, ten, one-hundred, and one-thousand, respectively.

<sup>498</sup> Cf. QD 146 (CCSG 10:103, lines 4-8); Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomios* 2 [428] (GNO 1:351, lines 13-22); Hippolytos, *Refutation of All Heresies* 4.43.5-6 (GCS 26:65, lines 19-23).

<sup>499</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.4 (SC 358:322, lines 33-34).

#### **Ambiguum 68**

<sup>500</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.16 (SC 358:350, lines 7-9).

<sup>501</sup> Montanos, who made extensive use of prophecy, was active in Phrygia in the years 155-160, claiming to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Paraclete promised in John 14:26. Montanist churches were established as far west as North Africa, although it is not likely that they were a significant presence during Maximus’s residence there.

those who possess the gift of discerning the spirits. For, as I said, prophecy needs discernment of spirit, so that the prophecy might be known, believed, and approved; and the gift of tongues needs the gift of interpretation, lest those listening deem the speaker a madman, since they are not able to follow what is being said. *For if, the great apostle says, you speak in tongues, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, will they not say that you are mad?* Consequently, if there is no one on hand to interpret, he orders them to keep silent rather than speak in tongues. As for the teacher's phrase, "for the discernment of what is better," those whose minds are enlightened by the sacred Scriptures say that [1405C] the gift of prophecy and speaking in tongues is superior to the gift that is needed to discern and explain them, that is, the discernment of spirits and interpretation. Knowing this, the teacher said: "for the discernment of what is better."

### Ambiguum 69

{69.1} From Saint Gregory's oration On Heron the Philosopher:

Complete predicates and incomplete predicates.<sup>502</sup>

{69.2} According to the grammarians, a complete predicate is a statement composed of a noun and a verb constituting a complete thought, such as, for example, "John walks." An incomplete predicate, on the other hand, is a statement composed of a noun and a verb that does not constitute a complete thought, such as, "John is concerned with." Thus if someone says, "John walks," [1405D] no additional clause is required, but when he says, "John is concerned with," he has neglected to say what it is that John is concerned with.<sup>503</sup>

### Ambiguum 70

{70.1} From Saint Gregory's Funeral Oration for Saint Basil:

In no thing, therefore, from all things, is it possible to fail to find in one such from all.<sup>504</sup>

{70.2} Whatever good<sup>505</sup> thing a person approves of, it is in respect of that same thing [1408A] that he assuredly also makes progress, that is, increase, by which one makes progress; and he obviously delights in, and is encouraged by the good things said about it. He is delighted, for he increases it in his soul, as a strongly desired object; and he is encouraged to progress still further, for hearing it praised gives him greater incitement. "For," the teacher says, "when I have learned the praises of men, I have a distinct idea of their progressions"<sup>506</sup>—which is to say, if I know the praises of things, I also know quite clearly the progressions, that is, the increases in virtue, of the men who approve of them. "In no thing, therefore"—obviously from all the things that are

### Ambiguum 69

<sup>502</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 25.6 (SC 284:170, line 25). The whole of Maximos's response was incorporated verbatim into the *Souda* (s.v., *sybama*), a famous Byzantine lexicon compiled around the year 1,000.

<sup>503</sup> Whereas traditional works on grammar would typically have said "Socrates," the use of the name "John" represents the transformation of such works by Christian editors (and in this instance may fairly be taken as a lighthearted gesture to John of Kyzikos). In the logical compendia ascribed to Maximos, the stock figure of Socrates is replaced by "Peter" and "Paul" (ed. Roueché 1974, 72, line 3; 73, lines 34-40).

### Ambiguum 70

<sup>504</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 43.1 (SC 384:118, lines 23-24). This phrase in itself does not make any sense, and may either be misplaced in its current position, or, more likely, a marginal gloss mistakenly introduced into the manuscript by a later scribe; cf. Bernardi's note in the apparatus of the SC edition.

<sup>505</sup> Or, "morally beautiful."

<sup>506</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 43.1 (SC 384:118, lines 21-22).

praised—“is it possible to fail to find” increase “in any one such person who from all such persons” takes delight in these things. Or, since the teacher had previously mentioned three things—himself, orations, and those who praise [1408B] virtue—he used these words to refer inclusively to all three, as is the habit of rhetors, and then proceeded to their unfolding, adapting his arguments to each of the three. He began the explanation first of all with himself, then worked his way through the middle by treating of those who praise virtue, and completed his argument by touching on orations themselves, because the exemplary subject of Saint Basil was also relevant to him, as a teacher and deliverer of the sermon; and it was desirable to those who love virtue, that is, to those who praise it, since they desire to know the modes of progress in virtue through imitation; and it was no less a fitting subject for orations themselves, since they manifest the beautiful things of virtue. Thus, every man, whose life is praiseworthy in the sight of God, and especially the life of the great Basil, whether orators are able to encompass the whole of his virtue, and set it forth as an image, living and inspiring [1408C] to those who are enamored of it, or whether the magnitude of his virtue is beyond their grasp, “it will not be possible to fail to find in one from all” (that is, from the oration, the orator, and the listener) something by which one might not suitably acquire something good, just as it has been earlier investigated with greater precision.

### Ambiguum 71

{71.1} From Saint Gregory’s poems, on the words:

The sublime Word plays in all kinds of forms, judging His world as He wishes, on this side and on that.<sup>507</sup>

{71.2} When the great David, by faith alone, spiritually thrust his intellect through the latches, as it were, of visible realities, and gazed upon intelligible realities, he received from the [1408D] Divine Wisdom a certain cognitive mark of the mysteries that are accessible to human beings—then, as it seems to me, he said: *Abyss calls to abyss at the sound of Your cataracts*. With these words he may perhaps be indicating that every intellect in a state of contemplation, on account of its invisible nature and the depth and multitude of its thoughts, is like an abyss, for after it has passed through the whole orderly arrangement of visible things and finds itself in the region of intelligible realities, and when, again by faith, it transcends even the majesty of these things by means of a forceful motion, so that it comes to stand still in itself, [1409A] utterly fixed and immobile (on account of its passage beyond all things), it is then that, as is fitting, it *calls to* the Divine Wisdom—which to our knowledge is really and truly an unfathomable *abyss*—and asks that it might be given, not of course the divine *cataracts* themselves, but their *sound*, which means that it asks to receive a certain cognitive mark of faith concerning the modes and principles of divine providence governing the universe. Through this gift, the intellect will be able to *remember* God *from the land of Jordan and Hermon*, where the great and awesome mystery of the divine descent of God the Word was accomplished through the flesh, a mystery in

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### Ambiguum 71

<sup>507</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *Carmina moralia* 2 (*Instructions to Virgins*) (PG 37:624A-625A, lines 589-90); cf. id., *Carmina quae spectant ad alios* (PG 37:1454A, lines 33-34). “Play” renders the Greek *paizein*, but in what follows, Maximos uses this word only when directly citing from Gregory’s poem (which he does four times); otherwise he uses the word *paignion* (ten times in all), which denotes, not “play,” but a game, a toy, a plaything, or child’s play, as well as a comic performance or a cheating trick. The shift is undoubtedly prompted by Gregory’s own use of *paignion* in Or. 7.19, cited below, Amb 71.10, n. 514.

which the truth of right faith in God was given to human beings, and which, insofar as it utterly transcends the whole order and power of nature, was called the *foolishness and weakness of God* by [1409B] the divine Paul, the great apostle, who is both an initiate and initiates others in the divine and secretly-known wisdom—and I believe that he called it such on account of its surpassing wisdom and power, whereas the great and God-minded Gregory characterized this mystery as a kind of “game,” on account of its surpassing prudence.<sup>508</sup>

{71.3} For the one says that *the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*, and the other that “the sublime Word plays in all kinds of forms, judging His world as He wishes, on this side and on that.” Each one indicates a divine possession by the privation of what among us are the greatest affirmations; and each, by the negations of our realities, makes a positive affirmation of divine realities. For among us foolishness, weakness, and childish play are privations—the first of wisdom, the second of power, and the latter of prudence—but when they are predicated of God they clearly imply His surpassing excess of wisdom, [1409C] power, and prudence. Thus, if something is said of us by way of privation, in the case of God it is rightly understood as indicating possession, and vice versa, so that if something is said of us by way of possession, it is most fitting in the case of God to understand it as indicating privation through excess. For the surpassing excess of divine realities, expressed by us apophatically as privations, are but remote approximations to their true meaning and form. But if this is true, as indeed it seems quite likely to be (for divine things never coincide with human things), it follows that the “foolishness” and “weakness” of God, according to the holy Apostle Paul, and the “play” of God, according to Gregory the wondrous and great teacher, signify the mystery of the divine [1409D] Incarnation, since in a manner beyond being it transcends the whole order and arrangement of every nature, power, possession, and activity—and it was this very same mystery that the most divine David beheld in his intellect from afar, and was instructed in by the divine Spirit, and so, as if explaining in advance the surpassing possession of God (expressed by the apostle through privation), he said (to the Judeans, as I distinctly recall), crying out: *Because of the multitude of Your power, Your enemies shall lie to You*. For every man is surely God’s enemy and obviously a liar who ignorantly and impiously confines God within the law of nature, and who cannot bear to believe that God, while remaining impassibly beyond nature, essentially came to be among things subject to nature, and worked things according to nature, since *He is able to do all things*. [1412A]

{71.4} In this way, then, pursuing one line of thought, my discourse has ventured to interpret conjecturally the “foolishness” of God, and His “weakness” and “play.” Together with these, by way of a digression, examples were brought forward in a preliminary exposition of the difficult passage cited at the outset, so that we understood the phrase, *abyss calls to abyss at the sound of the divine cataracts*, as signifying the cognitive intellect calling to wisdom, and alluding to a certain small informing mark of the mysteries of the divine and ineffable descent of God. For the name “abyss” is also given to the place of the abyss, and the “place” of divine wisdom is the purified intellect. Thus, owing to its receptive capacity, the intellect is given the name “abyss,” but only by convention, since the same name is also given to Wisdom, to whom it belongs by nature. [1412B]

#### **Another contemplation of the same**

<sup>508</sup> John of Skythopolis, *Scholion* on DN 3.2 (PG 4:236C-237B), offers a similar interpretation of 1 Cor 1:25 in a discussion of Dionysios’s apophatic theology.

{71.5} Considering the proposed difficulty in a different manner, with the help of divine grace, by means of conjectures and not categorical assertions (for by the one we remain within due limits, but the other is impetuous), we make bold to treat of the words under consideration, saying that what the great teacher called the “play” of God is perhaps the conspicuous position of the mean terms, which maintains an equal distance from the extremes on account of its fluid and mutable state of rest, or better, on account of it being a flowing that remains at rest, to put it more suitably. And this is a paradox: to behold a state of rest that is forever flowing and being carried away, and a flowing that is unmoved, which has been [1412C] providentially devised by God for the betterment of the things that come under His dispensation, since it has the power to make wise those who are taught by it, inspiring them to hope that they will depart from here for another place entirely,<sup>509</sup> and to believe that the end of the mystery concerning this motion that affects them is that through their inclination to God they will certainly be divinized by grace. By “mean terms” I mean the plenitude of visible realities that are now around man, or within which man finds himself, while by the “extremes” I mean *the substance of future realities that are not visible* but will without fail come to be around man—realities that have properly and truly been created and have come into being in accordance with the ineffable and primal purpose and rationale of the divine goodness. In the same way, when the wise Ecclesiastes, with the great and clear eye of his soul, looked beyond the coming into being of visible and transitory things, [1412D] and beheld, as it were, the vision of what had been truly created and brought into being, he said: *What is this that has been brought into being? It is the same as that which will come into being. And what is this that has been created? It is the same as that which will be created.* He clearly had in mind the first things and the last things, inasmuch as they are the same things and truly exist, but of the things in the middle,<sup>510</sup> which pass away, he makes no mention here whatsoever.

{71.6} Indeed it was after the teacher had spoken rather brilliantly about the natures of various animals and minerals, and, to speak briefly, about the many things that are observed among beings more generally, that he said, “The sublime Word plays in [1413A] all kinds of forms, judging His world as he wishes, on this side and on that.” Is this not then the same thing that he says in his oration “On Holy Pentecost,” when he speaks about divinity and created nature? “As long as each nature remains in its proper domain, the one atop its lofty height, the other in its lowliness, God’s goodness remains unmixed, and His love for mankind is not communicated, and there is *a great chasm in the middle that cannot be crossed*, which not only separates the rich man from Lazarus and the longed-for bosoms of Abraham, but also separates the whole of nature that has come into being and is in a state of flux from that which is uncreated and at rest.”<sup>511</sup> The same and similar things are said by the great and divinely inspired Dionysios the Areopagite: “One must make bold to say even this, on behalf of truth, that the very Author of all things, through the beauty, goodness, and overflow of His intense love for all things, goes out of Himself [1413B] in His providences for all beings, and is, as it were, spellbound by goodness, love, and longing, and is led down from His position above all and beyond all, to be in all according to an ecstatic and supraessential power which is yet inseparable from Himself.”<sup>512</sup>

<sup>509</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Makrina* 22 (GNO 8/1:395, line 19).

<sup>510</sup> I.e., the mean terms.

<sup>511</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 41.12 (SC 358:342, lines 23-29).

<sup>512</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 4.13 (159, lines 9-14; 712AB).

{71.7} From the meaning of these words it might perhaps, as I said, be possible to expand upon this brief interpretation of the phrase, “The sublime Word plays,” and so suggest the following. We know that parents—if I may use examples we are familiar with to illustrate things that are above us—providing their children with opportunities to shake off their sluggishness, frequently condescend to their level, and thus we see them indulgently taking part in childish games, such as playing with nuts and knucklebones with them,<sup>513</sup> or showing them [1413C] many-colored flowers and colorfully-dyed clothing to beguile their senses, thereby attracting their attention and filling them with amazement, for young children have no other kind of work or occupation. But eventually their parents send them to school, after which they converse with them in a more mature manner, and allow them the use of their own things. Thus, perhaps the teacher is saying that God, who is superior to all, by leading us through the nature of visible creations, as if it were a kind of story, seeks to amaze us or attract our attention by the sight and knowledge of these things, as if we were no different than children, after which He directs us to the contemplation of the more spiritual principles within these things, and finally leads us by way of theology up to the [1413D] more mystical knowledge of Himself, so far as this is possible—a knowledge which in the initial stages is purified from all varied appearances and compounds, whether of form and quality or shape and quantity, found in either numerical multiplicity or bodily mass, and so on to the end of contemplation—and this is called “playing” by the God-bearing Gregory, and “beguiling” and “going out of Himself” by the godly-minded Dionysios.

{71.8} Indeed, when things that are present and visible are compared and considered alongside things that properly and truly exist, and [1416A] which will be manifested at a later stage, the former seem to be but a child’s game, and even something rather less than that. For when the arrangement of present, visible things is compared to the truth of what in fact are divine and archetypal realities, it will not even be reckoned to exist in the eyes of those who have been made worthy to behold (as far as possible) all the splendor of divine beauty—in the same way, when a child’s plaything is compared to anything true and real, it is not reckoned as having actual existence.

#### **Another contemplation of the same**

{71.9} Or perhaps the mutability of the material objects which we hold in our hands, which shift things around and are themselves shifted around in various ways, [1416B] having no solid foundation, save for the first intelligible principle, in accordance with which they are carried along wisely and providentially, and carry us along with them—and whereas it might be thought that they can be controlled by us, they slip through our fingers far more frequently than we control them, and they rather almost repel the desire of those among us who insist on clinging to them, and so they neither maintain their hold over us nor are they held by us, since the only stable characteristic their nature possesses is their state of flux and their instability—perhaps this, I say, was fittingly called God’s “play” by the teacher, seeing that it is through these things that God leads us to what is really real and can never be shaken.

#### **Another contemplation of the same**

{71.10} [1416C] And if we ourselves, in accordance with the prevailing sequence of our nature, are now born like the rest of the living creatures on the earth, after which we become children, and after which, in the manner of quickly fading flowers, our

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<sup>513</sup> Versions of marbles, jacks, and dice, these games are described by Suetonius, *Concerning Greek Children* 1 (ed. Taillardat 1967, 67, lines 84-103); and Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon* 9.103 (ed. Bethe 1900, 2:176), but they could also be used to pose mathematical puzzles, cf. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 14.50 (LCL 1:38).

youth withers into the wrinkles of old age, and dying we are transferred to another life—then not without reason are we said to be the “plaything of God” by that God-bearing teacher. For this present life, when compared to the archetype of the divine and true life that is to come, is a child’s toy, than which no other such toy could be more insubstantial. The teacher states this much more clearly in the funeral oration for his brother Kaisarios, when he says: “Such is our life, brothers, of we who live only briefly: a sort of game played upon the earth. Not having existed, [1416D] we were brought into being, and having been brought into being, we are dissolved. We are a dream that does not last, a phantom that cannot be grasped, *the flight of a bird that passes and is gone, a ship passing through the sea and leaving no trace, dust, vapor, morning dew, a flower that sprouts up and in a moment is withered—man, his days are like grass, he blossoms like the flower of the field*, as the divine David aptly said when he reflected on our weakness.”<sup>514</sup>

### Epilogue

{71.11} [1417A] These, then, and to the best of my abilities, are my responses to those passages in the most divine orations of Gregory, our great father and teacher, that you, most blessed ones, found perplexing, and urged me to address. Yielding obediently to your wishes, as was only right, I have spoken conjecturally and not by way of assertions. For my intellect is hardly capable of scaling the height of the great and lofty mind of our godly-minded teacher, since it continues to be wounded—and voluntarily at that—by the arrows of the passions, and takes greater delight in being scarred by the vices than it does in being cleansed by the graces of the virtues, because its long association with evil has made it a habitual lover of sin. And if anything that I have said should appear to you to have any value for the purpose at hand, and not to have fallen completely short of the truth, then the thanks are due to God,<sup>515</sup> who illumined my stunted intelligence (a miracle indeed), [1417B] which creeps along low to the ground,<sup>516</sup> and who granted me the commensurate power of expression, so that I might express the proper measure of my thoughts. Thanks are also due to you who commissioned <this work> and whose prayers assisted in bringing the whole to completion. “If, however, these things are either incorrect or imperfect, and I have wandered from the truth, either wholly or partially”—here I beseech you with the words of the great theologian Dionysios—“may it be of your loving kindness to correct him who unwillingly is ignorant, and to impart a word to him who wishes to learn, and to vouchsafe assistance to him who has not power in himself; and to heal him who, not willingly, is sick.”<sup>517</sup> Thus, together with all your other blessings, or rather before them all, you will preside over a precious offering, more venerable than every sacrifice, namely, loving-kindness to God, who in heaven and on earth is glorified by all creation, [1417C] and who asks of us but a single sacrifice: that we love one another.

<sup>514</sup> Gregory the Theologian, Or. 7.19 (SC 405:226, lines 1-9).

### Epilogue

<sup>515</sup> Cf. Letter 5 (PG 91:432C).

<sup>516</sup> Cf. the Introduction to the QThal, where Maximus is reluctant to undertake the solution to the biblical difficulties, since he “drags along the ground like a snake, consistent with the ancient curse (Gen 3:15), and, beyond the (produce of) the land of passions, has no other sustenance, and slithers like a worm in the putrefaction of the pleasures” (CCSG 7:19, lines 35-38).

<sup>517</sup> Dionysios the Areopagite, DN 13.4 (230, lines 16-20; 981D); Maximus’s epilogue as a whole is more generally modeled on this, the closing paragraph of Dionysios’s celebrated work.



