



ANCIENT
CHRISTIAN
COMMENTARY
ON SCRIPTURE

OLD TESTAMENT
IX

PROVERBS,
ECCLESIASTES,
SONG OF SOLOMON

EDITED BY
J. ROBERT WRIGHT

GENERAL EDITOR
THOMAS C. ODEN

**PRAISE FOR THE
ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE**

“The conspectus of patristic exposition that this series offers has been badly needed for several centuries, and the whole Christian world should unite to thank those who are undertaking to fill the gap. For the ongoing ecumenical conversation, and the accurate appreciation of early Christian thought, and the current hermeneutical debate as well, the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture will prove itself to be a really indispensable resource.”

J. I. PACKER
Board of Governors Professor of Theology
Regent College

“In the desert of biblical scholarship that tries to deconstruct or get behind the texts, the patristic commentators let the pure, clear waters of Christian faith flow from its scriptural source. Preachers, teachers and Bible students of every sort will want to drink deeply from the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture.”

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS
President, Religion and Public Life
Editor-in-Chief, First Things

“The fathers of the ancient church were enabled, by the grace of God, to interpret the divine Scriptures in a way that integrates spirituality and erudition, liturgy and dogma, and generally all aspects of our faith which embrace the totality of our life. To allow the fathers to speak to us again, in our contemporary situation, in the way that you have proposed in your project, provides a corrective to the fragmentation of the faith which results from the particularization and overspecialization that exists today in the study of the Holy Bible and of sacred theology.”

FR. GEORGE DRAGAS
Holy Cross Seminary

“This new but old Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture takes us out of the small, closed-minded world in which much modern biblical scholarship is done into an earlier time marked by a Christian seriousness, by robust inquiry and by believing faith. This Commentary is a fresh breeze blowing in our empty, postmodern world.”

DAVID F. WELLS
Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and
Systematic Theology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“Composed in the style of the great medieval *catenae*, this new anthology of patristic commentary on Holy Scripture, conveniently arranged by chapter and verse, will be a valuable resource for prayer, study and proclamation. By calling attention to the rich Christian heritage preceding the separations between East and West and between Protestant and Catholic, this series will perform a major service to the cause of ecumenism.”

AVERY CARDINAL DULLES, S.J.
Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society
Fordham University

“The initial cry of the Reformation was *ad fontes*—back to the sources! The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture is a marvelous tool for the recovery of biblical wisdom in today’s church. Not just another scholarly project, the ACCS is a major resource for the renewal of preaching, theology and Christian devotion.”

TIMOTHY GEORGE
Dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

“Modern church members often do not realize that they are participants in the vast company of the communion of saints that reaches far back into the past and that will continue into the future, until the kingdom comes. This Commentary should help them begin to see themselves as participants in that redeemed community.”

ELIZABETH ACHTEMEIER
Union Professor Emerita of Bible and Homiletics
Union Theological Seminary in Virginia

“Contemporary pastors do not stand alone. We are not the first generation of preachers to wrestle with the challenges of communicating the gospel. The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture puts us in conversation with our colleagues from the past, that great cloud of witnesses who preceded us in this vocation. This Commentary enables us to receive their deep spiritual insights, their encouragement and guidance for present-day interpretation and preaching of the Word. What a wonderful addition to any pastor’s library!”

WILLIAM H. WILLIMON
Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Christian Ministry
Duke University

“Here is a nonpareil series which reclaims the Bible as the book of the church by making accessible to earnest readers of the twenty-first century the classrooms of Clement of Alexandria and Didymus the Blind, the study and lecture hall of Origen, the cathedrae of Chrysostom and Augustine, the scriptorium of Jerome in his Bethlehem monastery.”

GEORGE LAWLESS
Augustinian Patristic Institute and Gregorian University, Rome

“We are pleased to witness publication of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. It is most beneficial for us to learn how the ancient Christians, especially the saints of the church who proved through their lives their devotion to God and his Word, interpreted Scripture. Let us heed the witness of those who have gone before us in the faith.”

METROPOLITAN THEODOSIUS
Primate, Orthodox Church in America

“Across Christendom there has emerged a widespread interest in early Christianity, both at the popular and scholarly level. . . . Christians of all traditions stand to benefit from this project, especially clergy and those who study the Bible. Moreover, it will allow us to see how our traditions are both rooted in the scriptural interpretations of the church fathers while at the same time seeing how we have developed new perspectives.”

ALBERTO FERREIRO
Professor of History, Seattle Pacific University

“The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture fills a long overdue need for scholars and students of the church fathers. . . . Such information will be of immeasurable worth to those of us who have felt inundated by contemporary interpreters and novel theories of the biblical text. We welcome some ‘new’ insight from the ancient authors in the early centuries of the church.”

H. WAYNE HOUSE
Professor of Theology and Law
Trinity University School of Law

“Chronological snobbery—the assumption that our ancestors working without benefit of computers have nothing to teach us—is exposed as nonsense by this magnificent new series. Surfeited with knowledge but starved of wisdom, many of us are more than ready to sit at table with our ancestors and listen to their holy conversations on Scripture. I know I am.”

EUGENE H. PETERSON
Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology
Regent College

“Few publishing projects have encouraged me as much as the recently announced Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture with Dr. Thomas Oden serving as general editor. . . .

How is it that so many of us who are dedicated to serve the Lord received seminary educations which omitted familiarity with such incredible students of the Scriptures as St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius the Great and St. John of Damascus? I am greatly anticipating the publication of this Commentary.”

FR. PETER E. GILLQUIST

*Director, Department of Missions and Evangelism
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

“The Scriptures have been read with love and attention for nearly two thousand years, and listening to the voice of believers from previous centuries opens us to unexpected insight and deepened faith. Those who studied Scripture in the centuries closest to its writing, the centuries during and following persecution and martyrdom, speak with particular authority. The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture will bring to life the truth that we are invisibly surrounded by a ‘great cloud of witnesses.’”

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN

Commentator, National Public Radio

“For those who think that church history began around 1941 when their pastor was born, this Commentary will be a great surprise. Christians throughout the centuries have read the biblical text, nursed their spirits with it and then applied it to their lives. These commentaries reflect that the witness of the Holy Spirit was present in his church throughout the centuries. As a result, we can profit by allowing the ancient Christians to speak to us today.”

HADDON ROBINSON

*Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

“All who are interested in the interpretation of the Bible will welcome the forthcoming multivolume series Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Here the insights of scores of early church fathers will be assembled and made readily available for significant passages throughout the Bible and the Apocrypha. It is hard to think of a more worthy ecumenical project to be undertaken by the publisher.”

BRUCE M. METZGER

*Professor of New Testament, Emeritus
Princeton Theological Seminary*

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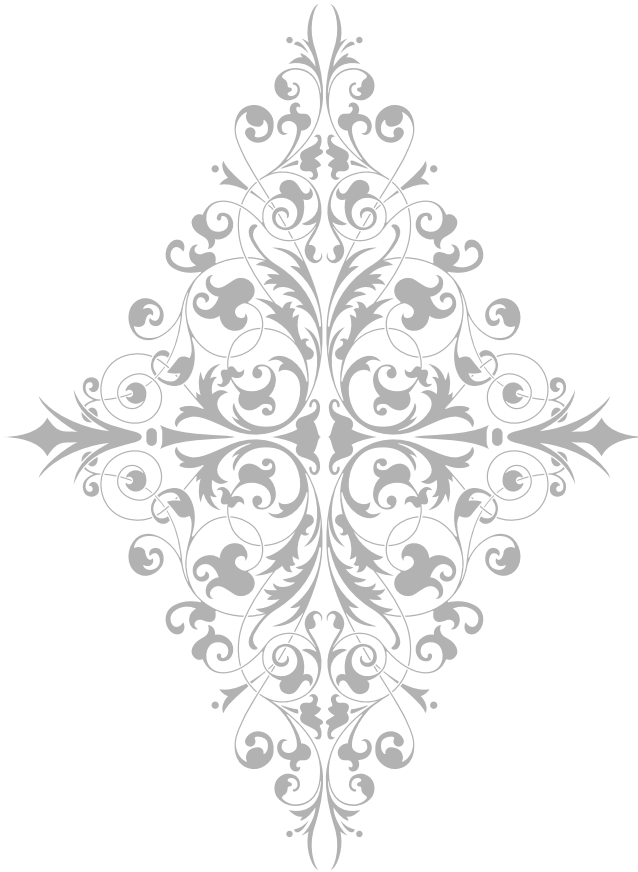
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE REGARDING
THIS DIGITAL EDITION

Due to limitations regarding digital rights, the RSV Scripture text is linked to but does not appear in this digital edition of this Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture volume as it does in the print edition. Page numbering has been maintained, however, to match the print edition. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (hereafter ACCS) is a twenty-eight volume patristic commentary on Scripture. The patristic period, the time of the fathers of the church, spans the era from Clement of Rome (fl. c. 95) to John of Damascus (c. 645-c. 749). The commentary thus covers seven centuries of biblical interpretation, from the end of the New Testament to the mid-eighth century, including the Venerable Bede.

Since the method of inquiry for the ACCS has been developed in close coordination with computer technology, it serves as a potential model of an evolving, promising, technologically pragmatic, theologically integrated method for doing research in the history of exegesis. The purpose of this general introduction to the series is to present this approach and account for its methodological premises.

This is a long-delayed assignment in biblical and historical scholarship: reintroducing in a convenient form key texts of early Christian commentary on the whole of Scripture. To that end, historians, translators, digital technicians, and biblical and patristic scholars have collaborated in the task of presenting for the first time in many centuries these texts from the early history of Christian exegesis. Here the interpretive glosses, penetrating reflections, debates, contemplations and deliberations of early Christians are ordered verse by verse from Genesis to Revelation. Also included are patristic comments on the deuterocanonical writings (sometimes called the Apocrypha) that were considered Scripture by the Fathers. This is a full-scale classic commentary on Scripture consisting of selections in modern translation from the ancient Christian writers.

The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture has three goals: the renewal of Christian *preaching* based on classical Christian exegesis, the intensified study of Scripture by *lay* persons who wish to think with the early church about the canonical text, and the stimulation of Christian historical, biblical, theological and pastoral *scholarship* toward further inquiry into the scriptural interpretations of the ancient Christian writers.

On each page the Scripture text is accompanied by the most noteworthy remarks of key consensual exegetes of the early Christian centuries. This formal arrangement follows approximately the traditional pattern of the published texts of the Talmud after the invention of printing and of the *glossa ordinaria* that preceded printing.¹

¹ Students of the Talmud will easily recognize this pattern of organization. The Talmud is a collection of rabbinic arguments, discussions and comments on the Mishnah, the first Jewish code of laws after the Bible, and the Gemara, an elaboration of the Mishnah. The study of Talmud is its own end and reward. In the Talmud every subject pertaining to Torah is worthy of consideration and analysis. As the Talmud is a vast repository of Jewish wisdom emerging out of revealed Scripture, so are the Fathers the repository of Christian wisdom

Retrieval of Neglected Christian Texts

There is an emerging felt need among diverse Christian communities that these texts be accurately recovered and studied. Recent biblical scholarship has so focused attention on post-Enlightenment historical and literary methods that it has left this longing largely unattended and unserved.

After years of quiet gestation and reflection on the bare idea of a patristic commentary, a feasibility consultation was drawn together at the invitation of Drew University in November 1993 in Washington, D.C. This series emerged from that consultation and its ensuing discussions. Extensive further consultations were undertaken during 1994 and thereafter in Rome, Tübingen, Oxford, Cambridge, Athens, Alexandria and Istanbul, seeking the advice of the most competent international scholars in the history of exegesis. Among distinguished scholars who contributed to the early layers of the consultative process were leading writers on early church history, hermeneutics, homiletics, history of exegesis, systematic theology and pastoral theology. Among leading international authorities consulted early on in the project design were Sir Henry Chadwick of Oxford; Bishops Kallistos Ware of Oxford, Rowan Williams of Monmouth and Stephen Sykes of Ely (all former patristics professors at Oxford or Cambridge); Professors Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer of the Patristic Institute of Rome; and Professors Karlfried Froehlich and Bruce M. Metzger of Princeton. They were exceptionally helpful in shaping our list of volume editors. We are especially indebted to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew and Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Vatican, for their blessing, steady support, and wise counsel in developing and advancing the Drew University Patristic Commentary Project.

The outcome of these feasibility consultations was general agreement that the project was profoundly needed, accompanied by an unusual eagerness to set out upon the project, validated by a willingness on the part of many to commit valuable time to accomplish it. At the pace of three or four volumes per year, the commentary is targeted for completion within the first decade of the millennium.

This series stands unapologetically as a practical homiletic and devotional guide to the earliest layers of classic Christian readings of biblical texts. It intends to be a brief compendium of reflections on particular Septuagint, Old Latin and New Testament texts by their earliest Christian interpreters. Hence it is not a commentary by modern standards, but it is a commentary by the standards of those who anteceded and formed the basis of the modern commentary.

emerging out of revealed Scripture. The Talmud originated largely from the same period as the patristic writers, often using analogous methods of interpretation. In the Talmud the texts of the Mishnah are accompanied by direct quotations from key consensual commentators of the late Judaic tradition. The format of the earliest published versions of the Talmud itself followed the early manuscript model of the medieval *glossa ordinaria* in which patristic comments were organized around Scripture texts. Hence the ACCS gratefully acknowledges its affinity and indebtedness to the early traditions of the *catena* and *glossa ordinaria* and of the tradition of rabbinic exegesis that accompanied early Christian Scripture studies.

Many useful contemporary scholarly efforts are underway and are contributing significantly to the recovery of classic Christian texts. Notable in English among these are the Fathers of the Church series (Catholic University of America Press), Ancient Christian Writers (Paulist), Cistercian Studies (Cistercian Publications), The Church's Bible (Eerdmans), Message of the Fathers of the Church (Michael Glazier, Liturgical Press) and Texts and Studies (Cambridge). In other languages similar efforts are conspicuously found in Sources Chrétiennes, Corpus Christianorum (Series Graeca and Latina), Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Patrologia Orientalis, Patrologia Syriaca, Bibliotheca patristica, Les Pères dans la foi, Colana di Testi Patristici, Letture cristiane delle origini, Letture cristiane del primo millennio, Cultura cristiana antica, Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and the Cetedoc series, which offers in digital form the volumes of Corpus Christianorum. The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture builds on the splendid work of all these studies, but focuses primarily and modestly on the recovery of patristic biblical wisdom for contemporary preaching and lay spiritual formation.

Digital Research Tools and Results

The volume editors have been supported by a digital research team at Drew University which has identified these classic comments by performing global searches of the Greek and Latin patristic corpus. They have searched for these texts in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) digitalized Greek database, the Cetedoc edition of the Latin texts of Corpus Christianorum from the Centre de traitement électronique des documents (Université catholique de Louvain), the Chadwyck-Healey Patrologia Latina Database (Migne) and the Packard Humanities Institute Latin databases. We have also utilized the CD-ROM searchable version of the Early Church Fathers, of which the Drew University project was an early cosponsor along with the Electronic Bible Society.

This has resulted in a plethora of raw Greek and Latin textual materials from which the volume editors have made discriminating choices.² In this way the project office has already supplied to each volume editor³ a substantial read-out of Greek and Latin glosses, explanations, observations and comments on each verse or pericope of Scripture text.⁴ Only a small percentage of this raw material has in fact made the grade of our selection criteria. But such is the poignant work of

²Having searched Latin and Greek databases, we then solicited from our Coptic, Syriac and Armenian editorial experts selections from these bodies of literature, seeking a fitting balance from all available exegetical traditions of ancient Christianity within our time frame. To all these we added the material we could find already in English translation.

³Excepting those editors who preferred to do their own searching.

⁴TLG and Cetedoc are referenced more often than Migne or other printed Greek or Latin sources for these reasons: (1) the texts are more quickly and easily accessed digitally in a single location; (2) the texts are more reliable and in a better critical edition; (3) we believe that in the future these digital texts will be far more widely accessed both by novices and specialists; (4) short selections can be easily downloaded; and (5) the context of each text can be investigated by the interested reader.

the catenist, or of any compiler of a compendium for general use. The intent of the exercise is to achieve brevity and economy of expression by exclusion of extraneous material, not to go into critical explanatory detail.

Through the use of Boolean key word and phrase searches in these databases, the research team identified the Greek and Latin texts from early Christian writers that refer to specific biblical passages. Where textual variants occur among the Old Latin texts or disputed Greek texts, they executed key word searches with appropriate or expected variables, including allusions and analogies. At this time of writing, the Drew University ACCS research staff has already completed most of these intricate and prodigious computer searches, which would have been unthinkable before computer technology.

The employment of these digital resources has yielded unexpected advantages: a huge residual database, a means of identifying comments on texts not previously considered for catena usage, an efficient and cost-effective deployment of human resources, and an abundance of potential material for future studies in the history of exegesis. Most of this was accomplished by a highly talented group of graduate students under the direction of Joel Scandrett, Michael Glerup and Joel Elowsky. Prior to the technology of digital search and storage techniques, this series could hardly have been produced, short of a vast army of researchers working by laborious hand and paper searches in scattered libraries around the world.

Future readers of Scripture will increasingly be working with emerging forms of computer technology and interactive hypertext formats that will enable readers to search out quickly in more detail ideas, texts, themes and terms found in the ancient Christian writers. The ACCS provides an embryonic paradigm for how that can be done. Drew University offers the ACCS to serve both as a potential research model and as an outcome of research. We hope that this printed series in traditional book form will in time be supplemented with a larger searchable, digitized version in some stored-memory hypertext format. We continue to work with an astute consortium of computer and research organizations to serve the future needs of both historical scholarship and theological study.

The Surfeit of Materials Brought to Light

We now know that there is virtually no portion of Scripture about which the ancient Christian writers had little or nothing useful or meaningful to say. Many of them studied the Bible thoroughly with deep contemplative discernment, comparing text with text, often memorizing large portions of it. All chapters of all sixty-six books of the traditional Protestant canonical corpus have received deliberate or occasional patristic exegetical or homiletic treatment. This series also includes patristic commentary on texts not found in the Jewish canon (often designated the Apocrypha or deuterocanonical writings) but that were included in ancient Greek Bibles (the Septuagint). These texts, although not precisely the same texts in each tradition, remain part of the recognized canons of the

Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

While some books of the Bible are rich in verse-by-verse patristic commentaries (notably Genesis, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Matthew, John and Romans), there are many others that are lacking in intensive commentaries from this early period. Hence we have not limited our searches to these formal commentaries, but sought allusions, analogies, cross-connections and references to biblical texts in all sorts of patristic literary sources. There are many perceptive insights that have come to us from homilies, letters, poetry, hymns, essays and treatises, that need not be arbitrarily excluded from a catena. We have searched for succinct, discerning and moving passages both from line-by-line commentaries (from authors such as Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyr, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and Bede) and from other literary genres. Out of a surfeit of resulting raw materials, the volume editors have been invited to select the best, wisest and most representative reflections of ancient Christian writers on a given biblical passage.

For Whom Is This Compendium Designed?

We have chosen and ordered these selections primarily for a general lay reading audience of nonprofessionals who study the Bible regularly and who earnestly wish to have classic Christian observations on the text readily available to them. In vastly differing cultural settings, contemporary lay readers are asking how they might grasp the meaning of sacred texts under the instruction of the great minds of the ancient church.

Yet in so focusing our attention, we are determined not to neglect the rigorous requirements and needs of academic readers who up to now have had starkly limited resources and compendia in the history of exegesis. The series, which is being translated into the languages of half the world's population, is designed to serve public libraries, universities, crosscultural studies and historical interests worldwide. It unapologetically claims and asserts its due and rightful place as a staple source book for the history of Western literature.

Our varied audiences (lay, pastoral and academic) are much broader than the highly technical and specialized scholarly field of patristic studies. They are not limited to university scholars concentrating on the study of the history of the transmission of the text or to those with highly focused interests in textual morphology or historical-critical issues and speculations. Though these remain crucial concerns for specialists, they are not the paramount interest of the editors of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Our work is largely targeted straightaway for a pastoral audience and more generally to a larger audience of laity who want to reflect and meditate with the early church about the plain sense, theological wisdom, and moral and spiritual meaning of particular Scripture texts.

There are various legitimate competing visions of how such a patristic commentary should be developed, each of which were carefully pondered in our feasibility study and its follow-up. With

high respect to alternative conceptions, there are compelling reasons why the Drew University project has been conceived as a practically usable commentary addressed first of all to informed lay readers and more broadly to pastors of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox traditions. Only in an ancillary way do we have in mind as our particular audience the guild of patristic academics, although we welcome their critical assessment of our methods. If we succeed in serving lay and pastoral readers practically and well, we expect these texts will also be advantageously used by college and seminary courses in Bible, hermeneutics, church history, historical theology and homiletics, since they are not easily accessible otherwise.

The series seeks to offer to Christian laity what the Talmud and Midrashim have long offered to Jewish readers. These foundational sources are finding their way into many public school libraries and into the obligatory book collections of many churches, pastors, teachers and lay persons. It is our intent and the publishers' commitment to keep the whole series in print for many years to come and to make it available on an economically viable subscription basis.

There is an emerging awareness among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox laity that vital biblical preaching and teaching stand in urgent need of some deeper grounding beyond the scope of the historical-critical orientations that have dominated and at times eclipsed biblical studies in our time.

Renewing religious communities of prayer and service (crisis ministries, urban and campus ministries, counseling ministries, retreat ministries, monasteries, grief ministries, ministries of compassion, etc.) are being drawn steadily and emphatically toward these biblical and patristic sources for meditation and spiritual formation. These communities are asking for primary source texts of spiritual formation presented in accessible form, well-grounded in reliable scholarship and dedicated to practical use.

The Premature Discrediting of the Catena Tradition

We gratefully acknowledge our affinity and indebtedness to the spirit and literary form of the early traditions of the catena and *glossa ordinaria* that sought authoritatively to collect salient classic interpretations of ancient exegetes on each biblical text. Our editorial work has benefited by utilizing and adapting those traditions for today's readers.

It is regrettable that this distinctive classic approach has been not only shelved but peculiarly misplaced for several centuries. It has been a long time since any attempt has been made to produce this sort of commentary. Under fire from modern critics, the catena approach dwindled to almost nothing by the nineteenth century and has not until now been revitalized in this postcritical situation. Ironically, it is within our own so-called progressive and broad-minded century that these texts have been more systematically hidden away and ignored than in any previous century of Christian scholarship. With all our historical and publishing competencies, these texts have been regrettably denied to hearers of Christian preaching in our time, thus revealing the dogmatic biases of moder-

nity (modern chauvinism, naturalism and autonomous individualism).

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century exegesis has frequently displayed a philosophical bias toward naturalistic reductionism. Most of the participants in the ACCS project have lived through dozens of iterations of these cycles of literary and historical criticism, seeking earnestly to expound and interpret the text out of ever-narrowing empiricist premises. For decades Scripture teachers and pastors have sailed the troubled waters of assorted layers and trends within academic criticism. Preachers have attempted to digest and utilize these approaches, yet have often found the outcomes disappointing. There is an increasing awareness of the speculative excesses and the spiritual and homiletic limitations of much post-Enlightenment criticism.

Meanwhile the motifs, methods and approaches of ancient exegetes have remained shockingly unfamiliar not only to ordained clergy but to otherwise highly literate biblical scholars, trained exhaustively in the methods of scientific criticism. Amid the vast exegetical labors of the last two centuries, the ancient Christian exegetes have seldom been revisited, and then only marginally and often tendentiously. We have clear and indisputable evidence of the prevailing modern contempt for classic exegesis, namely that the extensive and once authoritative classic commentaries on Scripture still remain untranslated into modern languages. Even in China this has not happened to classic Buddhist and Confucian commentaries.

This systematic modern scholarly neglect is seen not only among Protestants, but also is widespread among Catholics and even Orthodox, where ironically the Fathers are sometimes piously venerated while not being energetically read.

So two powerful complementary contemporary forces are at work to draw our lay audience once again toward these texts and to free them from previous limited premises: First, this series is a response to the deep hunger for classical Christian exegesis and for the history of exegesis, partly because it has been so long neglected. Second, there is a growing demoralization in relation to actual useful exegetical outcomes of post-Enlightenment historicist and naturalistic-reductionist criticism. Both of these animating energies are found among lay readers of Roman, Eastern and Protestant traditions.

Through the use of the chronological lists and biographical sketches at the back of each volume, readers can locate in time and place the voices displayed in the exegesis of a particular pericope. The chains (*catenae*) of interpretation of a particular biblical passage thus provide glimpses into the history of the interpretation of a given text. This pattern has venerable antecedents in patristic and medieval exegesis of both Eastern and Western traditions, as well as important expressions in the Reformation tradition.

The Ecumenical Range and Intent

Recognition of need for the Fathers' wisdom ranges over many diverse forms of Christianity. This

has necessitated the cooperation of scholars of widely diverse Christian communities to accomplish the task fairly and in a balanced way. It has been a major ecumenical undertaking.

Under this classic textual umbrella, this series brings together in common spirit Christians who have long distanced themselves from each other through separate and often competing church memories. Under this welcoming umbrella are gathering conservative Protestants with Eastern Orthodox, Baptists with Roman Catholics, Reformed with Arminians and charismatics, Anglicans with Pentecostals, high with low church adherents, and premodern traditionalists with postmodern classicists.

How is it that such varied Christians are able to find inspiration and common faith in these texts? Why are these texts and studies so intrinsically ecumenical, so catholic in their cultural range? Because all of these traditions have an equal right to appeal to the early history of Christian exegesis. All of these traditions can, without a sacrifice of intellect, come together to study texts common to them all. These classic texts have decisively shaped the entire subsequent history of exegesis. Protestants have a right to the Fathers. Athanasius is not owned by Copts, nor is Augustine owned by North Africans. These minds are the common possession of the whole church. The Orthodox do not have exclusive rights over Basil, nor do the Romans over Gregory the Great. Christians everywhere have equal claim to these riches and are discovering them and glimpsing their unity in the body of Christ.

From many varied Christian traditions this project has enlisted as volume editors a team of leading international scholars in ancient Christian writings and the history of exegesis. Among Eastern Orthodox contributors are Professors Andrew Louth of Durham University in England and George Dragas of Holy Cross (Greek Orthodox) School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. Among Roman Catholic scholars are Benedictine scholar Mark Sheridan of the San Anselmo University of Rome, Jesuit Joseph Lienhard of Fordham University in New York, Cistercian Father Francis Martin of the Catholic University of America, Alberto Ferreiro of Seattle Pacific University, and Sever Voicu of the Eastern European (Romanian) Uniate Catholic tradition, who teaches at the Augustinian Patristic Institute of Rome. The New Testament series is inaugurated with the volume on Matthew offered by the renowned Catholic authority in the history of exegesis, Manlio Simonetti of the University of Rome. Among Anglican communion contributors are Mark Edwards (Oxford), Bishop Kenneth Stevenson (Fareham, Hampshire, in England), J. Robert Wright (New York), Anders Bergquist (St. Albans), Peter Gorday (Atlanta) and Gerald Bray (Cambridge, England, and Birmingham, Alabama). Among Lutheran contributors are Quentin Wesselschmidt (St. Louis), Philip Krey and Eric Heen (Philadelphia), and Arthur Just, William Weinrich and Dean O. Wenthe (all of Ft. Wayne, Indiana). Among distinguished Protestant Reformed, Baptist and other evangelical scholars are John Sailhamer and Steven McKinion (Wake Forest, North Carolina), Craig Blaising and Carmen Hardin (Louisville, Kentucky), Christopher Hall (St. Davids, Pennsylvania),

J. Ligon Duncan III (Jackson, Mississippi), Thomas McCullough (Danville, Kentucky), John R. Franke (Hatfield, Pennsylvania) and Mark Elliott (Hope University Liverpool).

The international team of editors was selected in part to reflect this ecumenical range. They were chosen on the premise not only that they were competent to select fairly those passages that best convey the consensual tradition of early Christian exegesis, but also that they would not omit significant voices within it. They have searched insofar as possible for those comments that self-evidently would be most widely received generally by the whole church of all generations, East and West.

This is not to suggest or imply that all patristic writers agree. One will immediately see upon reading these selections that within the boundaries of orthodoxy, that is, excluding outright denials of ecumenically received teaching, there are many views possible about a given text or idea and that these different views may be strongly affected by wide varieties of social environments and contexts.

The Drew University project has been meticulous about commissioning volume editors. We have sought out world-class scholars, preeminent in international biblical and patristic scholarship, and wise in the history of exegesis. We have not been disappointed. We have enlisted a diverse team of editors, fitting for a global audience that bridges the major communions of Christianity.

The project editors have striven for a high level of consistency and literary quality over the course of this series. As with most projects of this sort, the editorial vision and procedures are progressively being refined and sharpened and fed back into the editorial process.

Honoring Theological Reasoning

Since it stands in the service of the worshipping community, the ACCS unabashedly embraces crucial ecumenical premises as the foundation for its method of editorial selections: revelation in history, trinitarian coherence, divine providence in history, the Christian *kerygma*, *regula fidei et caritatis* (“the rule of faith and love”), the converting work of the Holy Spirit. These are common assumptions of the living communities of worship that are served by the commentary.

It is common in this transgenerational community of faith to assume that the early consensual ecumenical teachers were led by the Spirit in their interpretive efforts and in their transmitting of Christian truth amid the hazards of history. These texts assume some level of unity and continuity of ecumenical consensus in the mind of the believing church, a consensus more clearly grasped in the patristic period than later. We would be less than true to the sacred text if we allowed modern assumptions to overrun these premises.

An extended project such as this requires a well-defined objective that serves constantly as the organizing principle and determines which approaches take priority in what sort of balance. This objective informs the way in which tensions inherent in its complexity are managed. This objective has already been summarized in the three goals mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. To alter any one of these goals would significantly alter the character of the whole task. We view our

work not only as an academic exercise with legitimate peer review in the academic community, but also as a vocation, a task primarily undertaken *coram Deo* (“before God”) and not only *coram hominibus* (“before humanity”). We have been astonished that we have been led far beyond our original intention into a Chinese translation and other translations into major world languages.

This effort is grounded in a deep respect for a distinctively theological reading of Scripture that cannot be reduced to historical, philosophical, scientific or sociological insights or methods. It takes seriously the venerable tradition of ecumenical reflection concerning the premises of revelation, apostolicity, canon and consensuality. A high priority is granted here, contrary to modern assumptions, to theological, christological and triune reasoning as the distinguishing premises of classic Christian thought. This approach does not pit theology against critical theory; instead, it incorporates critical methods and brings them into coordinate accountability within its overarching homiletic-theological-pastoral purposes. Such an endeavor does not cater to any cadre of modern ideological advocacy.

Why Evangelicals Are Increasingly Drawn Toward Patristic Exegesis

Surprising to some, the most extensive new emergent audience for patristic exegesis is found among the expanding worldwide audience of evangelical readers who are now burgeoning from a history of revivalism that has often been thought to be historically unaware. This is a tradition that has often been caricatured as critically backward and hermeneutically challenged. Now Baptist and Pentecostal laity are rediscovering the history of the Holy Spirit. This itself is arguably a work of the Holy Spirit. As those in these traditions continue to mature, they recognize their need for biblical resources that go far beyond those that have been made available to them in both the pietistic and historical-critical traditions.

Both pietism and the Enlightenment were largely agreed in expressing disdain for patristic and classic forms of exegesis. Vital preaching and exegesis must now venture beyond the constrictions of historical-critical work of the century following Schweitzer and beyond the personal existential storytelling of pietism.

During the time I have served as senior editor and executive editor of *Christianity Today*, I have been privileged to surf in these volatile and exciting waves. It has been for me (as a theologian of a liberal mainline communion) like an ongoing seminar in learning to empathize with the tensions, necessities and hungers of the vast heterogeneous evangelical audience.

But why just now is this need for patristic wisdom felt particularly by evangelical leaders and laity? Why are worldwide evangelicals increasingly drawn toward ancient exegesis? What accounts for this rapid and basic reversal of mood among the inheritors of the traditions of Protestant revivalism? It is partly because the evangelical tradition has been long deprived of any vital contact with these patristic sources since the days of Luther, Calvin and Wesley, who knew them well.

This commentary is dedicated to allowing ancient Christian exegetes to speak for themselves. It will not become fixated unilaterally on contemporary criticism. It will provide new textual resources for the lay reader, teacher and pastor that have lain inaccessible during the last two centuries. Without avoiding historical-critical issues that have already received extensive exploration in our time, it will seek to make available to our present-day audience the multicultural, transgenerational, multi-lingual resources of the ancient ecumenical Christian tradition. It is an awakening, growing, hungry and robust audience.

Such an endeavor is especially poignant and timely now because increasing numbers of evangelical Protestants are newly discovering rich dimensions of dialogue and widening areas of consensus with Orthodox and Catholics on divisive issues long thought irreparable. The study of the Fathers on Scripture promises to further significant interactions between Protestants and Catholics on issues that have plagued them for centuries: justification, authority, Christology, sanctification and eschatology. Why? Because they can find in pre-Reformation texts a common faith to which Christians can appeal. And this is an arena in which Protestants distinctively feel at home: biblical authority and interpretation. A profound yearning broods within the heart of evangelicals for the recovery of the history of exegesis as a basis for the renewal of preaching. This series offers resources for that renewal.

Steps Toward Selections

In moving from raw data to making selections, the volume editors have been encouraged to move judiciously through three steps:

Step 1: *Reviewing extant Greek and Latin commentaries.* The volume editors have been responsible for examining the line-by-line commentaries and homilies on the texts their volume covers. Much of this material remains untranslated into English and some of it into any modern language.

Step 2: *Reviewing digital searches.* The volume editors have been responsible for examining the results of digital searches into the Greek and Latin databases. To get the gist of the context of the passage, ordinarily about ten lines above the raw digital reference and ten lines after the reference have been downloaded for printed output. *Biblia Patristica* has been consulted as needed, especially in cases where the results of the digital searches have been thin. Then the volume editors have determined from these potential digital hits and from published texts those that should be regarded as more serious possibilities for inclusion.

Step 3. *Making selections.* Having assembled verse-by-verse comments from the Greek and Latin digital databases, from extant commentaries, and from already translated English sources, either on disk or in paper printouts, the volume editors have then selected the best comments and reflections of ancient Christian writers on a given biblical text, following agreed upon criteria. The intent is to set apart those few sentences or paragraphs of patristic comment that best reflect the mind of the believing church on that pericope.

The Method of Making Selections

It is useful to provide an explicit account of precisely how we made these selections. We invite others to attempt similar procedures and compare outcomes on particular passages.⁵ We welcome the counsel of others who might review our choices and suggest how they might have been better made. We have sought to avoid unconsciously biasing our selections, and we have solicited counsel to help us achieve this end.

In order that the whole project might remain cohesive, the protocols for making commentary selections have been jointly agreed upon and stated clearly in advance by the editors, publishers, translators and research teams of the ACCS. What follows is our checklist in assembling these extracts.

The following principles of selection have been mutually agreed upon to guide the editors in making spare, wise, meaningful catena selections from the vast patristic corpus:

1. From our huge database with its profuse array of possible comments, we have preferred those passages that have enduring relevance, penetrating significance, crosscultural applicability and practical applicability.

2. The volume editors have sought to identify patristic selections that display trenchant rhetorical strength and self-evident persuasive power, so as not to require extensive secondary explanation. The editorial challenge has been to identify the most vivid comments and bring them to accurate translation.

We hope that in most cases selections will be pungent, memorable, quotable, aphoristic and short (often a few sentences or a single paragraph) rather than extensive technical homilies or detailed expositions, and that many will have some narrative interest and illuminative power. This criterion follows in the train of much Talmudic, Midrashic and rabbinic exegesis. In some cases, however, detailed comments and longer sections of homilies have been considered worthy of inclusion.

3. We seek the most representative comments that best reflect the mind of the believing church (of all times and cultures). Selections focus more on the attempt to identify consensual strains of exegesis than sheer speculative brilliance or erratic innovation. The thought or interpretation can emerge out of individual creativity, but it must not be inconsistent with what the apostolic tradition teaches and what the church believes. What the consensual tradition trusts least is individualistic innovation that has not yet subtly learned what the worshiping community already knows.

Hence we are less interested in idiosyncratic interpretations of a given text than we are in those

⁵A number of Ph.D. dissertations are currently being written on the history of exegesis of a particular passage of Scripture. This may develop into an emerging academic methodology that promises to change both biblical and patristic studies in favor of careful textual and intertextual analysis, consensuality assessment and history of interpretation, rather than historicist and naturalistic reductionism.

texts that fairly represent the central flow of ecumenical consensual exegesis. Just what is central is left for the fair professional judgment of our ecumenically distinguished Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic volume editors to discern. We have included, for example, many selections from among the best comments of Origen and Tertullian, but not those authors' peculiar eccentricities that have been widely distrusted by the ancient ecumenical tradition.

4. We have especially sought out for inclusion those consensus-bearing authors who have been relatively disregarded, often due to their social location or language or nationality, insofar as their work is resonant with the mainstream of ancient consensual exegesis. This is why we have sought out special consultants in Syriac, Coptic and Armenian.

5. We have sought to cull out annoying, coarse, graceless, absurdly allegorical⁶ or racially offensive interpretations. But where our selections may have some of those edges, we have supplied footnotes to assist readers better to understand the context and intent of the text.

6. We have constantly sought an appropriate balance of Eastern, Western and African traditions. We have intentionally attempted to include Alexandrian, Antiochene, Roman, Syriac, Coptic and Armenian traditions of interpretation. Above all, we want to provide sound, stimulating, reliable exegesis and illuminating exposition of the text by the whole spectrum of classic Christian writers.

7. We have made a special effort where possible to include the voices of women⁷ such as Macrina,⁸ Eudoxia, Egeria, Faltonia Betitia Proba, the Sayings of the Desert Mothers and others who report the biblical interpretations of women of the ancient Christian tradition.

8. In order to anchor the commentary solidly in primary sources so as to allow the ancient Christian writers to address us on their own terms, the focus is on the texts of the ancient Christian writers themselves, not on modern commentators' views or opinions of the ancient writers. We have looked for those comments on Scripture that will assist the contemporary reader to encounter the deepest level of penetration of the text that has been reached by its best interpreters living amid highly divergent early Christian social settings.

Our purpose is not to engage in critical speculations on textual variants or stemma of the text, or

⁶Allegorical treatments of texts are not to be ruled out, but fairly and judiciously assessed as to their explanatory value and typicality. There is a prevailing stereotype that ancient Christian exegesis is so saturated with allegory as to make it almost useless. After making our selections on a merit basis according to our criteria, we were surprised at the limited extent of protracted allegorical passages selected. After making a count of allegorical passages, we discovered that less than one twentieth of these selections have a decisive allegorical concentration. So while allegory is admittedly an acceptable model of exegesis for the ancient Christian writers, especially those of the Alexandrian school and especially with regard to Old Testament texts, it has not turned out to be as dominant a model as we had thought it might be.

⁷Through the letters, histories, theological and biographical writings of Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Palladius, Augustine, Ephrem, Gerontius, Paulinus of Nola and many anonymous writers (of the Lives of Mary of Egypt, Thais, Pelagia).

⁸Whose voice is heard through her younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa.

extensive deliberations on its cultural context or social location, however useful those exercises may be, but to present the most discerning comments of the ancient Christian writers with a minimum of distraction. This project would be entirely misconceived if thought of as a modern commentary on patristic commentaries.

9. We have intentionally sought out and gathered comments that will aid effective preaching, comments that give us a firmer grasp of the plain sense of the text, its authorial intent, and its spiritual meaning for the worshiping community. We want to help Bible readers and teachers gain ready access to the deepest reflection of the ancient Christian community of faith on any particular text of Scripture.

It would have inordinately increased the word count and cost if our intention had been to amass exhaustively all that had ever been said about a Scripture text by every ancient Christian writer. Rather we have deliberately selected out of this immense data stream the strongest patristic interpretive reflections on the text and sought to deliver them in accurate English translation.

To refine and develop these guidelines, we have sought to select as volume editors either patristics scholars who understand the nature of preaching and the history of exegesis, or biblical scholars who are at ease working with classical Greek and Latin sources. We have preferred editors who are sympathetic to the needs of lay persons and pastors alike, who are generally familiar with the patristic corpus in its full range, and who intuitively understand the dilemma of preaching today. The international and ecclesiastically diverse character of this team of editors corresponds with the global range of our task and audience, which bridge all major communions of Christianity.

Is the ACCS a Commentary?

We have chosen to call our work a commentary, and with good reason. A commentary, in its plain sense definition, is “a series of illustrative or explanatory notes on any important work, as on the Scriptures.”⁹ *Commentary* is an Anglicized form of the Latin *commentarius* (an “annotation” or “memoranda” on a subject or text or series of events). In its theological meaning it is a work that explains, analyzes or expounds a portion of Scripture. In antiquity it was a book of notes explaining some earlier work such as Julius Hyginus’s commentaries on Virgil in the first century. Jerome mentions many commentators on secular texts before his time.

The commentary is typically preceded by a proem in which the questions are asked: who wrote it? why? when? to whom? etc. Comments may deal with grammatical or lexical problems in the text. An attempt is made to provide the gist of the author’s thought or motivation, and perhaps to deal with sociocultural influences at work in the text or philological nuances. A commentary usually

⁹*Funk & Wagnalls New “Standard” Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1947).

takes a section of a classical text and seeks to make its meaning clear to readers today, or proximately clearer, in line with the intent of the author.

The Western literary genre of commentary is definitively shaped by the history of early Christian commentaries on Scripture, from Origen and Hilary through John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria to Thomas Aquinas and Nicolas of Lyra. It leaves too much unsaid simply to assume that the Christian biblical commentary took a previously extant literary genre and reshaped it for Christian texts. Rather it is more accurate to say that the Western literary genre of the commentary (and especially the biblical commentary) has patristic commentaries as its decisive pattern and prototype, and those commentaries have strongly influenced the whole Western conception of the genre of commentary. Only in the last two centuries, since the development of modern historicist methods of criticism, have some scholars sought to delimit the definition of a commentary more strictly so as to include only historicist interests—philological and grammatical insights, inquiries into author, date and setting, or into sociopolitical or economic circumstances, or literary analyses of genre, structure and function of the text, or questions of textual criticism and reliability. The ACCS editors do not feel apologetic about calling this work a commentary in its classic sense.

Many astute readers of modern commentaries are acutely aware of one of their most persistent habits of mind: control of the text by the interpreter, whereby the ancient text comes under the power (values, assumptions, predispositions, ideological biases) of the modern interpreter. This habit is based upon a larger pattern of modern chauvinism that views later critical sources as more worthy than earlier. This prejudice tends to view the biblical text primarily or sometimes exclusively through historical-critical lenses accommodative to modernity.

Although we respect these views and our volume editors are thoroughly familiar with contemporary biblical criticism, the ACCS editors freely take the assumption that the Christian canon is to be respected as the church's sacred text. The text's assumptions about itself cannot be made less important than modern assumptions about it. The reading and preaching of Scripture are vital to the church's life. The central hope of the ACCS endeavor is that it might contribute in some small way to the revitalization of that life through a renewed discovery of the earliest readings of the church's Scriptures.

A Gentle Caveat for Those Who Expect Ancient Writers to Conform to Modern Assumptions

If one begins by assuming as normative for a commentary the typical modern expression of what a commentary is and the preemptive truthfulness of modern critical methods, the classic Christian exegetes are by definition always going to appear as dated, quaint, premodern, hence inadequate, and in some instances comic or even mean-spirited, prejudiced, unjust and oppressive. So in the interest of hermeneutic fairness, it is recommended that the modern reader not impose on ancient

Christian exegetes lately achieved modern assumptions about the valid reading of Scripture. The ancient Christian writers constantly challenge what were later to become these unspoken, hidden and often indeed camouflaged modern assumptions.

This series does not seek to resolve the debate between the merits of ancient and modern exegesis in each text examined. Rather it seeks merely to present the excerpted comments of the ancient interpreters with as few distractions as possible. We will leave it to others to discuss the merits of ancient versus modern methods of exegesis. But even this cannot be done adequately without extensively examining the texts of ancient exegesis. And until now biblical scholars have not had easy access to many of these texts. This is what this series is for.

The purpose of exegesis in the patristic period was humbly to seek the revealed truth the Scriptures convey. Often it was not even offered to those who were as yet unready to put it into practice. In these respects much modern exegesis is entirely different: It does not assume the truth of Scripture as revelation, nor does it submit personally to the categorical moral requirement of the revealed text: that it be taken seriously as divine address. Yet we are here dealing with patristic writers who assumed that readers would not even approach an elementary discernment of the meaning of the text if they were not ready to live in terms of its revelation, i.e., to practice it in order to hear it, as was recommended so often in the classic tradition.

The patristic models of exegesis often do not conform to modern commentary assumptions that tend to resist or rule out chains of scriptural reference. These are often demeaned as deplorable proof-texting. But among the ancient Christian writers such chains of biblical reference were very important in thinking about the text in relation to the whole testimony of sacred Scripture by the analogy of faith, comparing text with text, on the premise that *scripturam ex scriptura explicandam esse* ("Scripture is best explained from Scripture").

We beg readers not to force the assumptions of twentieth-century fundamentalism on the ancient Christian writers, who themselves knew nothing of what we now call fundamentalism. It is uncritical to conclude that they were simple fundamentalists in the modern sense. Patristic exegesis was not fundamentalist, because the Fathers were not reacting against modern naturalistic reductionism. They were constantly protesting a merely literal or plain-sense view of the text, always looking for its spiritual and moral and typological nuances. Modern fundamentalism oppositely is a defensive response branching out and away from modern historicism, which looks far more like modern historicism than ancient typological reasoning. Ironically, this makes both liberal and fundamentalist exegesis much more like each other than either are like the ancient Christian exegesis, because they both tend to appeal to rationalistic and historicist assumptions raised to the forefront by the Enlightenment.

Since the principle prevails in ancient Christian exegesis that each text is illumined by other texts and by the whole of the history of revelation, we find in patristic comments on a given text

many other subtexts interwoven in order to illumine that text. When ancient exegesis weaves many Scriptures together, it does not limit its focus to a single text as much modern exegesis prefers, but constantly relates it to other texts by analogy, intensively using typological reasoning as did the rabbinic tradition.

The attempt to read the New Testament while ruling out all theological and moral, to say nothing of ecclesiastical, sacramental and dogmatic assumptions that have prevailed generally in the community of faith that wrote it, seems to many who participate in that community today a very thin enterprise indeed. When we try to make sense of the New Testament while ruling out the plausibility of the incarnation and resurrection, the effort appears arrogant and distorted. One who tentatively reads one page of patristic exegesis, gasps and tosses it away because it does not conform adequately to the canons of modern exegesis and historicist commentary is surely no model of critical effort.

On Misogyny and Anti-Semitism

The questions of anti-Semitism and misogyny require circumspect comment. The patristic writers are perceived by some to be incurably anti-Semitic or misogynous or both. I would like to briefly attempt a cautious apologia for the ancient Christian writers, leaving details to others more deliberate efforts. I know how hazardous this is, especially when done briefly. But it has become such a stumbling block to some of our readers that it prevents them even from listening to the ancient ecumenical teachers. The issue deserves some reframing and careful argumentation.

Although these are challengeable assumptions and highly controverted, it is my view that modern racial anti-Semitism was not in the minds of the ancient Christian writers. Their arguments were not framed in regard to the hatred of a race, but rather the place of the elect people of God, the Jews, in the history of the divine-human covenant that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Patristic arguments may have had the unintended effect of being unfair to women according to modern standards, but their intention was to understand the role of women according to apostolic teaching.

This does not solve all of the tangled moral questions regarding the roles of Christians in the histories of anti-Semitism and misogyny, which require continuing fair-minded study and clarification. Whether John Chrysostom or Justin Martyr were anti-Semitic depends on whether the term *anti-Semitic* has a racial or religious-typological definition. In my view, the patristic texts that appear to modern readers to be anti-Semitic in most cases have a typological reference and are based on a specific approach to the interpretation of Scripture—the analogy of faith—which assesses each particular text in relation to the whole trend of the history of revelation and which views the difference between Jew and Gentile under christological assumptions and not merely as a matter of genetics or race.

Even in their harshest strictures against Judaizing threats to the gospel, they did not consider

Jews as racially or genetically inferior people, as modern anti-Semites are prone to do. Even in their comments on Paul's strictures against women teaching, they showed little or no animus against the female gender as such, but rather exalted women as "the glory of man."

Compare the writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether and David C. Ford¹⁰ on these perplexing issues. Ruether steadily applies modern criteria of justice to judge the inadequacies of the ancient Christian writers. Ford seeks to understand the ancient Christian writers empathically from within their own historical assumptions, limitations, scriptural interpretations and deeper intentions. While both treatments are illuminating, Ford's treatment comes closer to a fair-minded assessment of patristic intent.

A Note on Pelagius

The selection criteria do not rule out passages from Pelagius's commentaries at those points at which they provide good exegesis. This requires special explanation, if we are to hold fast to our criterion of consensuality.

The literary corpus of Pelagius remains highly controverted. Though Pelagius was by general consent the arch-heretic of the early fifth century, Pelagius's edited commentaries, as we now have them highly worked over by later orthodox writers, were widely read and preserved for future generations under other names. So Pelagius presents us with a textual dilemma.

Until 1934 all we had was a corrupted text of his Pauline commentary and fragments quoted by Augustine. Since then his works have been much studied and debated, and we now know that the Pelagian corpus has been so warped by a history of later redactors that we might be tempted not to quote it at all. But it does remain a significant source of fifth-century comment on Paul. So we cannot simply ignore it. My suggestion is that the reader is well advised not to equate the fifth-century Pelagius too easily with later standard stereotypes of the arch-heresy of Pelagianism.¹¹

It has to be remembered that the text of Pelagius on Paul as we now have it was preserved in the corpus of Jerome and probably reworked in the sixth century by either Primasius or Cassiodorus or both. These commentaries were repeatedly recycled and redacted, so what we have today may be regarded as consonant with much standard later patristic thought and exegesis, excluding, of course, that which is ecumenically censured as "Pelagianism."

Pelagius's original text was in specific ways presumably explicitly heretical, but what we have now is largely unexceptional, even if it is still possible to detect points of disagreement with Augustine.

¹⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); David C. Ford, "Men and Women in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom" (So. Canaan, Penn.: St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1995). Cf. related works by John Meyendorff, Stephen B. Clark and Paul K. Jewett.

¹¹Cf. Adalbert Hamman, *Supplementum to PL 1:1959*, cols. 1101-1570.

We may have been ill-advised to quote this material as “Pelagius” and perhaps might have quoted it as “Pseudo-Pelagius” or “Anonymous,” but here we follow contemporary reference practice.

What to Expect from the Introductions, Overviews and the Design of the Commentary

In writing the introduction for a particular volume, the volume editor typically discusses the opinion of the Fathers regarding authorship of the text, the importance of the biblical book for patristic interpreters, the availability or paucity of patristic comment, any salient points of debate between the Fathers, and any particular challenges involved in editing that particular volume. The introduction affords the opportunity to frame the entire commentary in a manner that will help the general reader understand the nature and significance of patristic comment on the biblical texts under consideration, and to help readers find their bearings and use the commentary in an informed way.

The purpose of the *overview* is to give readers a brief glimpse into the cumulative argument of the pericope, identifying its major patristic contributors. This is a task of summarizing. We here seek to render a service to readers by stating the gist of patristic argument on a series of verses. Ideally the overview should track a reasonably cohesive thread of argument among patristic comments on the pericope, even though they are derived from diverse sources and times. The design of the overview may vary somewhat from volume to volume of this series, depending on the requirements of the specific book of Scripture.

The purpose of the selection *heading* is to introduce readers quickly into the subject matter of that selection. In this way readers can quickly grasp what is coming by glancing over the headings and overview. Usually it is evident upon examination that some phrase in the selection naturally defines the subject of the heading. Several verses may be linked together for comment.

Since biographical information on each ancient Christian writer is in abundant supply in various general reference works, dictionaries and encyclopedias, the ACCS has no reason to duplicate these efforts. But we have provided in each volume a simple chronological list of those quoted in that volume, and an alphabetical set of biographical sketches with minimal ecclesiastical, jurisdictional and place identifications.

Each passage of Scripture presents its own distinct set of problems concerning both selection and translation. The sheer quantity of textual materials that has been searched out, assessed and reviewed varies widely from book to book. There are also wide variations in the depth of patristic insight into texts, the complexity of culturally shaped allusions and the modern relevance of the materials examined. It has been a challenge to each volume editor to draw together and develop a reasonably cohesive sequence of textual interpretations from all of this diversity.

The footnotes intend to assist readers with obscurities and potential confusions. In the annotations we have identified many of the Scripture allusions and historical references embedded within the texts.

The aim of our editing is to help readers move easily from text to text through a deliberate editorial linking process that is seen in the overviews, headings and annotations. We have limited the footnotes to roughly less than a one in ten ratio to the patristic texts themselves. Abbreviations are used in the footnotes, and a list of abbreviations is included in each volume. We found that the task of editorial linkage need not be forced into a single pattern for all biblical books but must be molded by that particular book.

The Complementarity of Interdisciplinary Research Methods in This Investigation

The ACCS is intrinsically an interdisciplinary research endeavor. It conjointly employs several diverse but interrelated methods of research, each of which is a distinct field of inquiry in its own right. Principal among these methods are the following:

Textual criticism. No literature is ever transmitted by handwritten manuscripts without the risk of some variations in the text creeping in. Because we are working with ancient texts, frequently recopied, we are obliged to employ all methods of inquiry appropriate to the study of ancient texts. To that end, we have depended heavily on the most reliable text-critical scholarship employed in both biblical and patristic studies. The work of textual critics in these fields has been invaluable in providing us with the most authoritative and reliable versions of ancient texts currently available. We have gratefully employed the extensive critical analyses used in creating the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and Cetedoc databases.

In respect to the biblical texts, our database researchers and volume editors have often been faced with the challenge of considering which variants within the biblical text itself are assumed in a particular selection. It is not always self-evident which translation or stemma of the biblical text is being employed by the ancient commentator. We have supplied explanatory footnotes in some cases where these various textual challenges may raise potential concerns for readers.

Social-historical contextualization. Our volume editors have sought to understand the historical, social, economic and political contexts of the selections taken from these ancient texts. This understanding is often vital to the process of discerning what a given comment means or intends and which comments are most appropriate to the biblical passage at hand. However, our mission is not primarily to discuss these contexts extensively or to display them in the references. We are not primarily interested in the social location of the text or the philological history of particular words or in the societal consequences of the text, however interesting or evocative these may be. Some of these questions, however, can be treated briefly in the footnotes wherever the volume editors deem necessary.

Though some modest contextualization of patristic texts is at times useful and required, our purpose is not to provide a detailed social-historical placement of each patristic text. That would require volumes ten times this size. We know there are certain texts that need only slight contextualization, others that require a great deal more. Meanwhile, other texts stand on their own easily

and brilliantly, in some cases aphoristically, without the need of extensive contextualization. These are the texts we have most sought to identify and include. We are least interested in those texts that obviously require a lot of convoluted explanation for a modern audience. We are particularly inclined to rule out those blatantly offensive texts (apparently anti-Semitic, morally repugnant, glaringly chauvinistic) and those that are intrinsically ambiguous or those that would simply be self-evidently alienating to the modern audience.

Exegesis. If the practice of social-historical contextualization is secondary to the purpose of the ACCS, the emphasis on thoughtful patristic exegesis of the biblical text is primary. The intention of our volume editors is to search for selections that define, discuss and explain the meanings that patristic commentators have discovered in the biblical text. Our purpose is not to provide an inoffensive or extensively demythologized, aseptic modern interpretation of the ancient commentators on each Scripture text but to allow their comments to speak for themselves from within their own worldview.

In this series the term *exegesis* is used more often in its classic than in its modern sense. In its classic sense, exegesis includes efforts to explain, interpret and comment on a text, its meaning, its sources, its connections with other texts. It implies a close reading of the text, using whatever linguistic, historical, literary or theological resources are available to explain the text. It is contrasted with *eisegesis*, which implies that the interpreter has imposed his or her own personal opinions or assumptions on the text.

The patristic writers actively practiced *intratextual* exegesis, which seeks to define and identify the exact wording of the text, its grammatical structure and the interconnectedness of its parts. They also practiced *extratextual* exegesis, seeking to discern the geographical, historical or cultural context in which the text was written. Most important, they were also very well-practiced in *intertextual* exegesis, seeking to discern the meaning of a text by comparing it with other texts.

Hermeneutics. We are especially attentive to the ways in which the ancient Christian writers described their own interpreting processes. This hermeneutic self-analysis is especially rich in the reflections of Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and Vincent of Lérins.¹² Although most of our volume editors are thoroughly familiar with contemporary critical discussions of hermeneutical and literary methods, it is not the purpose of ACCS to engage these issues directly. Instead, we are concerned to display and reveal the various hermeneutic assumptions that inform the patristic reading of Scripture, chiefly by letting the writers speak in their own terms.

Homiletics. One of the practical goals of the ACCS is the renewal of contemporary preaching in the light of the wisdom of ancient Christian preaching. With this goal in mind, many of the most trenchant and illuminating comments included are selected not from formal commentaries but

¹²Our concern for this aspect of the project has resulted in the production of a companion volume to the ACCS written by the ACCS Associate Editor, Prof. Christopher Hall of Eastern College, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

from the homilies of the ancient Christian writers. It comes as no surprise that the most renowned among these early preachers were also those most actively engaged in the task of preaching. The prototypical Fathers who are most astute at describing their own homiletic assumptions and methods are Gregory the Great, Leo the Great, Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Peter Chrysologus and Caesarius of Arles.

Pastoral care. Another intensely practical goal of the ACCS is to renew our readers' awareness of the ancient tradition of pastoral care and ministry to persons. Among the leading Fathers who excel in pastoral wisdom and in application of the Bible to the work of ministry are Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Gregory the Great. Our editors have presented this monumental pastoral wisdom in a guileless way that is not inundated by the premises of contemporary psychotherapy, sociology and naturalistic reductionism.

Translation theory. Each volume is composed of direct quotations in dynamic equivalent English translation of ancient Christian writers, translated from the original language in its best received text. The adequacy of a given attempt at translation is always challengeable. The task of translation is intrinsically debatable. We have sought dynamic equivalency¹³ without lapsing into paraphrase, and a literary translation without lapsing into wooden literalism. We have tried consistently to make accessible to contemporary readers the vital nuances and energies of the languages of antiquity. Whenever possible we have opted for metaphors and terms that are normally used by communicators today.

What Have We Achieved?

We have designed the first full-scale early Christian commentary on Scripture in the last five hundred years. Any future attempts at a Christian Talmud or patristic commentary on Scripture will either follow much of our design or stand in some significant response to it.

We have successfully brought together a distinguished international network of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox scholars, editors and translators of the highest quality and reputation to accomplish this design.

¹³The theory of dynamic equivalency has been most thoroughly worked out by Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), and Eugene A. Nida and Jan de Waard, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 1986). Its purpose is "to state clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts in words and forms that are widely accepted by people who use English as a means of communication." It attempts to set forth the writer's "content and message in a standard, everyday, natural form of English." Its aim is "to give today's readers maximum understanding of the content of the original texts." "Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous. Consequently there has been no attempt to reproduce in English the parts of speech, sentence structure, word order and grammatical devices of the original languages. Faithfulness in translation also includes a faithful representation of the cultural and historical features of the original, without any attempt to modernize the text." [Preface, *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1976)]. This does not imply a preference for paraphrase, but a middle ground between literary and literal theories of translation. Not all of our volume editors have viewed the translation task precisely in the same way, but the hope of the series has been generally guided by the theory of dynamic equivalency.

This brilliant network of scholars, editors, publishers, technicians and translators, which constitutes an amazing *novum* and a distinct new ecumenical reality in itself, has jointly brought into formulation the basic pattern and direction of the project, gradually amending and correcting it as needed. We have provided an interdisciplinary experimental research model for the integration of digital search techniques with the study of the history of exegesis.

At this time of writing, we are approximately halfway through the actual production of the series and about halfway through the time frame of the project, having developed the design to a point where it is not likely to change significantly. We have made time-dated contracts with all volume editors for the remainder of the volumes. We are thus well on our way toward bringing the English ACCS to completion. We have extended and enhanced our international network to a point where we are now poised to proceed into modern non-English language versions of ACCS. We already have inaugurated editions in Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian and Italian, and are preparing for editions in Arabic and German, with several more languages under consideration.

We have received the full cooperation and support of Drew University as academic sponsor of the project—a distinguished university that has a remarkable record of supporting major international publication projects that have remained in print for long periods of time, in many cases over one-hundred years. The most widely used Bible concordance and biblical word-reference system in the world today was composed by Drew professor James Strong. It was the very room once occupied by Professor Strong, where the concordance research was done in the 1880s, that for many years was my office at Drew and coincidentally the place where this series was conceived. Today *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* rests on the shelves of most pastoral libraries in the English-speaking world over a hundred years after its first publication. Similarly the *New York Times's* Arno Press has kept in print the major multivolume Drew University work of John M'Clintock and James Strong, *Theological and Exegetical Encyclopedia*. The major edition of Christian classics in Chinese was done at Drew University fifty years ago and is still in print. Drew University has supplied much of the leadership, space, library, work-study assistance and services that have enabled these durable international scholarly projects to be undertaken.

Our selfless benefactors have preferred to remain anonymous. They have been well-informed, active partners in its conceptualization and development, and unflagging advocates and counselors in the support of this lengthy and costly effort. The series has been blessed by steady and generous support, and accompanied by innumerable gifts of providence.

Thomas C. Oden
Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology, Drew University
General Editor, ACCS

A GUIDE TO USING THIS COMMENTARY

Several features have been incorporated into the design of this commentary. The following comments are intended to assist readers in making full use of this volume.

Pericopes of Scripture

The scriptural text has been divided into pericopes, or passages, usually several verses in length. Each of these pericopes is given a heading, which appears at the beginning of the pericope. For example, the first pericope in the commentary on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon is “Definitions, Purpose, Meaning Proverbs 1:1-7.”

Overviews

Following each pericope of text is an overview of the patristic comments on that pericope. The format of this overview varies within the volumes of this series, depending on the requirements of the specific book of Scripture. The function of the overview is to provide a brief summary of all the comments to follow. It tracks a reasonably cohesive thread of argument among patristic comments, even though they are derived from diverse sources and generations. Thus the summaries do not proceed chronologically or by verse sequence. Rather they seek to rehearse the overall course of the patristic comment on that pericope.

We do not assume that the commentators themselves anticipated or expressed a formally received cohesive argument but rather that the various arguments tend to flow in a plausible, recognizable pattern. Modern readers can thus glimpse aspects of continuity in the flow of diverse exegetical traditions representing various generations and geographical locations.

Topical Headings

An abundance of varied patristic comment is available for each pericope of these letters. For this reason we have broken the pericopes into two levels. First is the verse with its topical heading. The patristic comments are then focused on aspects of each verse, with topical headings summarizing the essence of the patristic comment by evoking a key phrase, metaphor or idea. This feature provides a bridge by which modern readers can enter into the heart of the patristic comment.

Identifying the Patristic Texts

Following the topical heading of each section of comment, the name of the patristic commentator is given. An English translation of the patristic comment is then provided. This is immediately followed by the title

of the patristic work and the textual reference—either by book, section and subsection or by book-and-verse references. If the notation differs significantly between the English-language source footnoted and other sources, alternate references appear in parentheses. Some differences may also be due to variant biblical versification or chapter and verse numbering. Where there is a scriptural quotation directly from the pericope under consideration, it is not footnoted.

The Footnotes

Readers who wish to pursue a deeper investigation of the patristic works cited in this commentary will find the footnotes especially valuable. A footnote number directs the reader to the notes at the bottom of the right-hand column, where in addition to other notations (clarifications or biblical cross references) one will find information on English translations (where available) and standard original-language editions of the work cited. An abbreviated citation (normally citing the book, volume and page number) of the work is provided. A key to the abbreviations is provided on page xv. Where there is any serious ambiguity or textual problem in the selection, we have tried to reflect the best available textual tradition.

Where original language texts have remained untranslated into English, we provide new translations. Wherever current English translations are already well rendered, they are utilized, but where necessary they are stylistically updated. A single asterisk (*) indicates that a previous English translation has been updated to modern English or amended for easier reading. The double asterisk (**) indicates either that a new translation has been provided or that some extant translation has been significantly amended. We have standardized spellings and made grammatical variables uniform so that our English references will not reflect the odd spelling variables of the older English translations. For ease of reading we have in some cases edited out superfluous conjunctions.

For the convenience of computer database users the digital database references are provided to either the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (Greek texts) or to the Cetedoc (Latin texts) in the appendix found on pages 369-79.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ACD St. Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Translated by D. W. Robertson Jr. Library of Liberal Arts. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958.
- ACW Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1946-.
- AHSIS Dana Miller, ed. *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984.
- ANF A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 10 vols. Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1885-1896. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951-1956. Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
- AOV Ambrose. *On Virginity*. Translated by Daniel Callam, CSB. Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1996.
- CCL Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953-.
- CGSL Cyril of Alexandria. *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*. Translated by R. Payne Smith. Long Island, N.Y.: Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983.
- CMWM Dwight W. Young. *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenoute*. 2 vols. Vienna, Austria: In Kommission bei Verlag Brüder Hollinek, 1993.
- CS Cistercian Studies. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1973-.
- CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Louvain, 1903-.
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna, 1866-.
- CURTIS William A. Curtis, trans. *Origen on Prayer*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- ECS Pauline Allen, et al., eds. *Early Christian Studies*. Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2001-.
- ECTD C. McCarthy, trans. and ed. *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709*. *Journal of Semitic Studies* Supplement 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the University of Manchester, 1993.
- EKOG Eznik of Kolb. *On God*. Translated by Monica J. Blanchard and Robin Darling Young. Louvain: Peeters, 1998.
- FC Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947-.
- FEF W. A. Jurgens, ed. *The Faith of the Early Fathers*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1970.
- FGFR F. W. Norris. *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*. Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991.
- GCS Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1897-.
- GNHE Stuart George Hall, ed. *Gregory of Nyssa Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*. Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (St. Andrews, September 5-10, 1990). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993.
- GNSS *Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Translated by Casimir McCambley. Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1987.
- GTPE John Jarick. *Gregory Thaumaturgos: Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes*. Society of Biblical Literature, Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 29. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.
- HOP Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns on Paradise*. Translated by S. Brock. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990.
- ITA *Isaiah Through the Ages*. Compiled and edited by Johanna Manly. Menlo Park, Calif.: Monastery Books, 1995.
- IWG Macarius. *Intoxicated with God: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies of Macarius*. Translated by George A. Maloney. Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1978.
- JCC John Cassian. *Conferences*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist, 1985.

- LCC J. Baillie et al., eds. *The Library of Christian Classics*. 26 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953-1966.
- LCL Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1912-.
- LF *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West*. Translated by members of the English Church. 44 vols. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1800-1881.
- MFC *Message of the Fathers of the Church*. Edited by Thomas Halton. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983-.
- McCAMBLY Gregory of Nyssa. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Translated by Richard McCambly, OCSO. <http://www.sage.edu/faculty/salomd/nyssa/eccl.html>.
- NPNF P. Schaff et al., eds. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. 2 series (14 vols. each). Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1887-1894; Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952-1956; Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
- OFP Origen. *On First Principles*. Translated by G. W. Butterworth. London: SPCK, 1936. Reprint, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973.
- OSW Origen. *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Writings*. Translated by Rowan A. Greer with preface by Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Classics of Western Spirituality*. New York: Paulist, 1979.
- PDCW *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. *Classics of Western Spirituality*. New York: Paulist, 1987.
- PG J.-P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*. 166 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857-1886.
- PL J.-P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*. 221 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844-1864.
- PO *Patrologia Orientalis*. Paris, 1903-.
- POG Eusebius. *The Proof of the Gospel*. 2 vols. Translated by W. J. Ferrar. London: SPCK, 1920. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981.
- PS R. Graffin, ed. *Patrologia Syriaca*. 3 vols. Paris: Firmin-Didot et socii, 1894-1926.
- PSt *Patristic Studies*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1922-.
- PTA Dieter Hagedorn, Rudolf Kassel, Ludwig Koenen and Reinhold Merkelbach, eds. *Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen*. Bonn: Habelt, 1968-.
- SC H. de Lubac, J. Daniélou et al., eds. *Sources Chrétiennes*. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941-.
- SNTD *Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses*. Translated by C. J. de Catanzaro. *Classics of Western Spirituality*. New York: Paulist, 1980.
- TCC Richard A. Norris Jr., ed. *The Christological Controversy*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.
- TCH *Two Coptic Homilies Attributed to Saint Peter of Alexandria: On Riches, On the Epiphany*. Translation and commentary by Birger Pearson and Tim Vivian with the assistance of Donald B. Spanel. Rome: C.I.M., 1993.
- TLG L. Berkowitz and K. Squiter, eds. *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: Canon of Greek Authors and Works*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- TMB Dimitri Z. Zaharopoulos. *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis*. New York: Paulist, 1989.
- TTC William G. Rusch, ed. *The Trinitarian Controversy*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.
- TTH Clark, G., M. Gibson, and M. Whitby, eds. *Translated Texts for Historians*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1985-.
- WSA J. E. Rotelle, ed. *Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995.

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF SOLOMON

In the early church the critical study of the books of the Bible was not so far advanced that the ancient commentators were preoccupied with the questions of date, authorship, setting, context, source, genre and structure that energize so many scholars today. There was a developing sense already then, however, that the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, together with the book of Job and certain of the Psalms, did have some of the common features that over time would lead them to become known collectively as the Wisdom literature of the canonical Old Testament. The Song of Solomon (Heb *Song of Songs*) was also seen as closely related because of a reputed Solomonic authorship, whereas the apocryphal books of Wisdom and of Ecclesiasticus or Sirach were affiliated on the basis of a similar content. Early groupings of the three canonical books treated in the present volume were made by Origen in the east (in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*) and in the west by Augustine of Hippo (in *City of God* 17.20). They, like most other ancient commentators, were unified in their conviction that Solomon was the author of all three books,¹ an opinion that is held by very few scholars today.

There was also a consensus that the contents of these books represented some of the finest wisdom about the deeper meaning of life that was available prior to the time that God became incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wisdom at times was even conceived as a personification or personified agent of God (see Prov 8—9), and thus the Wisdom literature collectively, then as now, was seen as an acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding and of the difficulty for human beings to grasp the ultimate meaning of life, short of an intervention from God that Christians came to call the incarnation. Such ambiguities, even the futility, frustration and mere vanity of life, could be stated but not finally solved short of an understanding of Christian revelation, in the view of the ancient Christian commentators.

The early Christian writers are often known as the early church fathers, a description that is not here intended to exclude women but only to acknowledge as a fact that the vast preponderance of surviving literature is written by men. Their writings are of various sorts, and not all of the ancient Christian commentators covered here wrote running commentary on the Bible that proceeds line by line and verse by verse. For the purpose of this series they are all called commentators, although it must be stressed that much of the contents of this volume are taken from a myriad of occasional writings and not exclusively from serial commentaries. These writers and their comments have been identified as a result of extensive searches performed within patristic source collections of all sorts, in English and in the original languages, conducted initially by the editorial staff of the ACCS project at Drew University and subsequently by authors of each

¹A legend from the Talmud asserted that Solomon had written the Song of Songs in his lusty youth, Proverbs during the maturity of his middle age and Ecclesiastes in the skepticism of his advancing years. Origen and Theodoret of Cyr linked Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song as constituting a three-step ladder that Solomon had provided for ascent in the stages of the spiritual life, from moral to natural to mystical or contemplative.

volume in this series. No retrieval system is perfect, though, and it must be acknowledged that final choices from them have had to be made on the basis of my subjective judgment.

The principles of selection and arrangement that I have followed are the same general principles outlined in the preceding general introduction to the series, and they include enduring relevance of the passages chosen, their penetrating significance, their practical applicability and their consensual agreement with one another but balanced at times by noteworthy individuality.² In principle, all substantive comments found for every verse of these three biblical books are included within this volume, which means that for the relatively few verses where no comments are recorded here no comments could be found or only passing references of little significance. No such criteria can be absolutely objective, and it is also obvious that one volume of selected excerpts from several writers, such as the present, may tell less than several volumes devoted separately to each of them, but the latter would have necessitated a much more extensive process. Existing translations of the ancient writers have been utilized when appropriate, and in other cases fresh translations have been made from the original languages, usually Greek or Latin, especially when none existed. A single asterisk (*) indicates that a previous English translation has been modernized, whereas a double asterisk (**) indicates that a new translation has been made, such as for the sake of better syntax. Spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been standardized, archaisms generally eliminated and grammatical variables made uniform. Biblical quotations in each excerpted selection that are not footnoted as to source come directly or nearly from the particular verse of Scripture (usually the RSV, or the LXX or Vulgate in translation) under which they are gathered, thus indicating their direct relationship to it. Every section begins with an overview of single sentences that summarize the excerpts selected for inclusion. Each collective overview thus in effect affords a retrospective conversation between the various commentators and their different points of view. Readers who wish to dig deeper are urged to consult the hundreds of original sources that are referenced. Biographical sketches and dates for all of the writers are given in an appendix at the end of this volume.

It should be noted that the Scriptural texts that these early writers were commenting upon were frequently not the same as the precise English text of the Revised Standard Version that is often used today and that is given and printed as the basis for the present and all other volumes in this series. The Greek, or Septuagint, versions of these biblical books are especially different in many ways from the Hebrew text upon which the RSV translation was made, and the implications of this point need to be drawn finely. Usually, when the ancient Christian commentators wrote in Greek they were commenting upon the books of the Bible as they were known in the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scripture, and when they wrote in Latin they were commenting upon the Vulgate or Old Latin of the same body of material. The Vulgate, or Latin translation of the Hebrew that is associated with Jerome in the fifth century, was therefore not the same as the Septuagint, nor is the RSV based upon either. Less attention, for these reasons, will be paid in this volume to commentaries upon texts or portions of either Septuagint or Vulgate that do not survive in the RSV, although some attention will be given to them in the footnotes. When a scriptural passage that varies from the RSV is cited within a patristic quotation, it is indicated in the footnote by "cf.;" and when a

²See Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995).

scriptural passage is merely evoked or indirectly invoked by allusion and without quotation marks, it is indicated in the footnote by “see.”

At the outset it should also be remarked that the very earliest Christian commentators on many books of the Old Testament were to be found among the writers of the New Testament. They are excluded from the excerpts in the pages that follow by the fixed boundaries of the series in which this volume must play its part. Nonetheless, it seems at least appropriate to take some notice of these instances by way of background in order to illustrate the biblical precedent they offer and the continuity they establish. Like the early Christian commentators, such New Testament passages relate to the books of the Old Testament largely by way of allusion or paraphrase rather than by direct quotation, but the parallels are striking and do seem to be intended.³ By far the largest number of instances for the present volume are found in the New Testament’s references to Proverbs, too many in fact to enumerate them all.

For each of the biblical books covered by this volume there are some verse-by-verse, or running, commentaries that survive but do not exhaust the evidence. For the book of Proverbs, there is the extensive sequential commentary written by the Venerable Bede (672-735), as well as portions of verse-by-verse or running commentaries written by Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and Didymus the Blind, as well as the *scholia* of Evagrius of Pontus⁴ and surviving fragments of commentaries by Hippolytus and Origen. On Ecclesiastes, the most useful verse-by-verse commentaries have been those of Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus the Blind and Jerome, together with the paraphrase (or metaphrase) of Gregory Thaumaturgus and the *scholia* of Evagrius of Pontus. For the Song of Solomon, by comparison, the most useful running commentaries have been those of Origen, Gregory of Elvira (spanning only the first three chapters), Apponius (whose work is little known), Gregory of Nyssa (in fifteen homilies), Theodoret of Cyr, Nilus of Ancyra, Gregory the Great (treating only part of the first chapter) and the Venerable Bede (a work both extensive and profound). Notwithstanding, it will be obvious that the vast majority of the selections have been taken from early writings of other sorts that contain quotations or allusions, albeit somewhat uneven in contents. It should be underlined that the works of early Christian authors who wrote sequential commentaries on the biblical books, therefore, do not begin to exhaust the surviving corpus of early Christian commentary, even by the same writers, that has survived in various occasional writings and is included here.

From the book of Proverbs, the aggregate of New Testament passages containing direct quotations or allusions is fifty-eight, the total comprised of five by direct quotation and fifty-three by indirect allusion. Although a complete run of such instances will be given below for the book of Ecclesiastes, where the total is much less, it will suffice at this point merely to note the one instance in Proverbs that is arguably the most important. Proverbs 8:22, “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,⁵ the first of his acts of old,⁶ finds its resonance and completion within the latter half of Revelation 3:14: “The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.” It is not without reason, therefore, that this typological correspon-

³The parallels are laid out in the index of such quotations that is printed at the back of many standard editions of the Greek New Testament. I thank my colleague Professor Robert J. Owens for drawing my attention to this index and for other assistance.

⁴Not to be confused with Evagrius of Antioch or Evagrius Scholasticus. May also be referred to as Evagrius Ponticus or simply Evagrius.

⁵Heb *way*.

⁶LXX adds “He established me before time was.”

dence came to be given high christological meaning, Jesus Christ being seen as the beginning of God's creation in the biblical commentaries of the early church. The earliest Christian commentators on Scripture were thus following the precedent of the New Testament writers who were commenting upon the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Jesus in the Gospel of John (Jn 16:25) had said: "These things I have spoken to you in proverbs,⁷ but the time is coming when I shall no longer speak unto you in proverbs but plainly."

For the book of Proverbs, as indeed for all three books under consideration in the present volume, there is no consensus among modern scholars as to dating, structure, authorship or historical setting, but these matters need not detain us overmuch because they were of no great concern to the ancient Christian commentators. Indeed, as we have already remarked, the one point upon which the ancients were agreed, Solomonic authorship, is the one assertion that the modern scholars are largely agreed in rejecting. Neither the references to Solomon's composition of "three thousand proverbs" in 1 Kings 4:32 nor the attributions of Solomon's authorship in Proverbs 1:1, Proverbs 10:1 and Proverbs 25:1 seem as convincing to authorities now as they did to the early Christian writers,⁸ and estimates today for dating the composition of Proverbs range all the way from the late eighth century B.C. down to the fourth century B.C.

Although the book of Proverbs was early recognized to consist of different sorts of materials, today there seems to be at least some agreement that the largest block of this material (Prov 10—29), which is quite possibly the oldest section, consists of proverbs properly so called. These were short, pithy sayings, often in the form of poetic couplets that presented some memorable truth in a striking way, either by antithesis or by comparison. These sayings convey pragmatic advice for the conduct of daily life, possibly to give practical advice for the young, especially young courtiers, about how to live in a way that would please God. As the contents of this volume will indicate, in the early Christian commentaries such proverbs could be further understood as riddles or enigmas that pointed to some deeper meaning for the living of life, often by way of moral instruction or exhortation or wisdom (Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Didymus). These proverbs could also be considered sayings that, under the guise of the physical, signified the intelligible (Evagrius) or as "dark sayings" that related to the hidden and mysterious nature of God's glory (Cassiodorus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa). Many of these writers, especially Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius and Jerome, go out of their way to emphasize that the true meaning of Scripture is deeper than the literal or historical. Still another sort of material in the book is the longer instructional discourses, such as Proverbs 1—9 and Proverbs 22:17—24:22, and there is a brief and miscellaneous appendix consisting of the last two chapters (Prov 30—31). Solomon was generally regarded as the author of most of this material by the ancient Christian commentators, in spite of the varied contents contained within the book.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" is the recurrent theme of Proverbs: a basic wisdom that is presented as necessary not only for pragmatic success but also for life to be lived wisely, even wisdom that comes from God and that conveys God to us. It is in the third grouping of material within Proverbs (Prov 1:20-33 and Prov 8:1—9:6) that this theme gets its fullest development. And it is within this group-

⁷Gk *paroimiais*; RSV *figures*.

⁸Among the ancient writers, I was able to find these transitions noticed only in the commentary of the Venerable Bede at Prov 10:1 and only in the comment of Hippolytus at Prov 25:1.

ing, in Proverbs 8:22-31, that one finds the female figure of personified Wisdom⁹ that became identified with Christ as God's Word incarnate in patristic Christology and over which there are many theories as to its origin and meaning. Although Wisdom rejoices to be present in the inhabited world and delights to be with human beings (Prov 8:31), she was also present with God when the world was made (cf. Jn 1:1), and her existence before creation is affirmed no fewer than six times in Proverbs 8:22-26. For Proverbs 8:22 alone, twenty-eight passages of commentary from sixteen ancient authors are presented in this volume, mostly in approximate chronological order from Justin Martyr to Bede, so that the historical development of this verse's exegesis can be more clearly pondered.¹⁰ Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is not only personified but also virtually hypostatized and developed into an almost metaphysical idea as a constituent part of the universe and, indeed, of the very being of God. Not only has this development been called the "Hebrew thinkers' closest approach to Greek philosophy,"¹¹ but it also leads directly into the descriptions of Christ as the Wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 1:24 and in Hebrews 1:3, which, as already suggested, provided a rich foundation for christological thought on the part of early Christian commentators upon Scripture.¹² Most of those writers, however, as the catena at Proverbs 8:22 in this volume often bears witness, tended to apply the statement in that verse merely to the created humanity of the incarnate Christ and did not regard the verse as literally meaning "created" in the normal sense.¹³

Perhaps inevitable in a biblical book that consists of great numbers of profound sayings not connected by any overall narrative plan, much of the comment that these verses begat in the ancient Christian writers was also of a similar nature, "proverbs begetting fresh proverbs" as it were. Such comments, disparate though they may be, have their own interest and profundity, as is apparent from even an abbreviated and selective enumeration of their varied themes: the emperor's command to turn an ape into a lion (Prov 1:5); the concept of spiritual marriage in love of wisdom (Prov 4:6-8); assertion that there is more than one path of salvation (Prov 4:10-11); the case of an expert theologian who is also a shameless fornicator (Prov 5:3-4); the similarities of bees and ants and a description of "the ant of God" (Prov 6:6-8; 30:24-28); comment on "the hangover of God after his inebriation" (Prov 9:1); Christ as the true host and the food at every Eucharist (Prov 9:1; 23:1); early comment on "the Triad" or Trinity and interesting references to Plato, "who provided not the drink of faith but of unbelief" (Prov 9:2-5, 23:13-14); significance of a "golden ring in the snout of a pig" (Prov 11:22); a good husband as "the crown of the wife" rather than the other way around (Prov 12:1); advocacy of corporal punishment and even the discipline of the rod for the young (Prov 13:24; 23:13-14; 29:19); the bees that produced honey in the mouth of Ambrose (Prov 16:24); the theme that "money given to the poor is money lent to God" (Prov 19:17; 28:27); scorn at the emperor Julian the Apos-

⁹Such a positive personification in feminine terms, and the prominence of women in Prov 1—9 and Prov 30—31, has not gone without notice.

¹⁰For one interpretation of this development at the height of the Arian controversy, but only one, see Charles Kannengiesser, "The Bible in the Arian Crisis," pp. 217-28 of *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, ed. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), esp. pp. 221, 224. For a perceptive analysis, see Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), pp. 123, 127-28, 133-35.

¹¹Robert C. Dentan in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:305. For this and some other observations here I am indebted to the late Professor Dentan, my former mentor, and to Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, p. 450.

¹²See, for example, the identification of God's Son as Christ, the Wisdom of God, in Augustine's comment on Prov 30:3-4.

¹³Further see Robert J. Owens, "The Early Syriac Text of Ben Sira in the Demonstrations of Aphrahat," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34:1 (1989), esp. p. 47.

tate, whose heart was not in the hand of God (Prov 21:1); development of early Christian theology of wealth and almsgiving (Prov 21:13; 22:1-2; 28:27; 30:8-9; 31:20); the canonicity and text of the Scriptures and their relationship to the Apocrypha as well as discussion of the Nicene Creed, divinity of the Holy Spirit and doctrine of the Trinity as ancient boundaries that must not be altered (Prov 22:28); historical examples of persons humiliated by their own pride (Prov 29:23); and the church, as the bride of Christ, standing at the gate of heaven (Prov 31:10-12, 31). The foregoing are but samples of the rich fare that the early Christian commentators provide to accompany and explain this book.

Overall, some 671 selections from some 64 ancient authors who wrote on the book of Proverbs have been chosen for inclusion here, this being by far the longest of the three books covered by this volume. Nine writers are represented by 30 or more selections each, the greatest numbers being from Augustine, who is the author of 74 of them; John Chrysostom, who authored 66; Origen with 55; and Ambrose with 45; followed by the Venerable Bede, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory the Great and Caesarius of Arles, each with 33. A second and smaller group represented by fewer than 30 down to 20 selections each is comprised of Jerome with 29, Basil the Great with 28 and John Cassian with 23. Behind them and showing fewer than 20 selections each down to 10 are Hippolytus and Cyril of Alexandria each with 18, Athanasius with 16, Evagrius Ponticus and the Apostolic Constitutions with 13 each and Gregory of Nyssa with 11. And after them comes a variegated group of 47 additional writers represented by fewer than 10 selections each, for a total of 131 selections.

The book of Ecclesiastes, and indeed the name, for those ancient writers then as for us today, posits the existence of an office or officer whose function is to assemble and to teach an assembly. The name *Ecclesiastes*, coming from the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations of the Hebrew *Kohleth* or *Qohleth*, a name not found in biblical literature outside the book itself, has come to identify such a person who has been known and rendered in English variously as “the Preacher,” “the Teacher,” “the Speaker,” “the Conveyor” or “the Ecclesiast.” This person is no longer seen today as being Solomon, except in the sense of a personification or literary device, an acknowledgment that Solomon was renowned in the ancient world for his wisdom. The name *Solomon* does not appear anywhere in that book. Nonetheless, the relationship of Ecclesiastes to a collective gathering or congregation or even church by means of the similar words *qāhāl* in Hebrew, *ekklēsia* in Greek, and *ecclesia* in Latin, all meaning “assembly,” was not lost on the ancient Christian writers, and the ascription to Solomon may have helped to facilitate the acceptance of these books within the Christian canon of Scripture. The translation as “Preacher” seems to go back ultimately to the Latin commentary on this book in the late fourth century by Jerome, who rendered the same word as *concionator* and led the sixteenth-century Reformers along his line of reasoning, although it is hardly the case that this person in the biblical book of Ecclesiastes can be said to be preaching in any sense generally accepted either then or now.

The structure and message of Ecclesiastes are not clear, and various modern commentators generally fail to agree about them with each other. Its structure, its historical setting and even its probable modern dating to the third century B.C. (around 350-250 B.C.) were not of much interest or concern to the ancient Christian commentators, and their views as to its message will gradually unfold in this volume as readers survey and reflect upon the excerpts from the early Christian writings that are presented. The apparent contradictions in its message were as apparent to those patristic exegetes then as they still are to scholars today. One

consistent message within Ecclesiastes does seem to be an implication that traditional wisdom is inadequate, that the conventional values of secularized religion are generally not worth the effort, that illusions are easily shattered and that simplistic pronouncements inherited from the past must always be questioned. The fact that, in spite of such challenging assertions, this book did find a place in the Christian canon of Scripture as early as the list compiled by Melito of Sardis in the late second century A.D. and retained that place in spite of doubts raised by Theodore of Mopsuestia as late as the fifth century, may well indicate that already in Christian history such skeptical thought was nevertheless seen to merit a place within, rather than outside, the Christian community in the same way as the book came to be included within the canon. It presents a “wisdom of the heart” that needs to be pondered. It reminds us that life is empty without a firm faith in God, and it signals for us that, for the early Christian commentators, the ultimate answer to such assertions of meaninglessness was none other than Jesus Christ.

Who then were the early Christian commentators on the book of Ecclesiastes and what were some of their perspectives? It has already been noted that the earliest Christian commentators on many books of the Old Testament were the writers of the New Testament, and in the case of Ecclesiastes there are six comments on it located in the New Testament that constitute the earliest stratum of evidence. We now survey this evidence, each passage from Ecclesiastes being followed by the words of the New Testament in which it finds its echo and comment.

Ecclesiastes 1:2, “Vanity of vanity, all is vanity,” is to be compared with Romans 8:20, “The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope.”

Ecclesiastes 5:15, “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil, which he may carry away in his hand,” finds resonance in 1 Timothy 6:7: “We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Be not quick to anger,” is paralleled in James 1:19: “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Ecclesiastes 7:20, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins,” is echoed in Romans 3:10-12: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one.”

Ecclesiastes 11:5, “As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything,” finds its match in John 3:8: “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”

Ecclesiastes 12:14, “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil,” needs to be read alongside 2 Corinthians 5:10: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.”

Moving on after the time of the Bible, we encounter the ancient Christian commentators, the principal subject of this volume. Broadly speaking, for the book of Ecclesiastes a total of some fifty commentaries of a more intentional sort (including catenas but not including other occasional comments in scattered writings) have been identified from the patristic period. This total includes those that still survive and those that do not, those only known in fragments or by reference, and some that have and others that have not been edited,

translated or published.¹⁴ The earliest is that of Melito of Sardis from the late second century, of which little is known. The writing of Origen on Ecclesiastes had a particular influence in the ancient Christian Greek world, especially from the way that he classified the books attributed to Solomon, and it was Origen who set the highest standards for deeply perceptive exegesis and verse-by-verse running commentary in the early church. His disciple Gregory Thaumaturgus paraphrased the book to give it a more directly Christian meaning, especially so as not to make God seem responsible for the human predicament.¹⁵ Ecclesiastes was of less interest to Latin writers in the early Christian West, although the commentary of Jerome was not without significance. Following the example of Thaumaturgus, Jerome also proceeded to correct some of the pre-Christian wisdom that was thought to come from Solomon and to give it Christian meaning. The most profound of the ancient commentaries, at least of those that survive in print, seems to have been the eight homilies of Gregory of Nyssa, even though they cover somewhat less than the first three chapters of the book. For Nyssa, as for Jerome, there was an attempt to portray Solomon as more reserved and less affirmative regarding the carefree enjoyment of temporal goods. Still more sophisticated, however, was the Greek commentary of Gregory of Agrigentum, of which a critical edition is in preparation at this time of writing.¹⁶

Overall, some 346 selections from some 46 ancient authors who wrote on Ecclesiastes have been chosen for inclusion in the present volume, the most frequent in choice being Didymus the Blind (69 selections), Gregory of Nyssa (35), Ambrose (27), Augustine (26), Gregory the Great (20), Origen (18), Evagrius of Pontus (15), John Cassian (13), Chrysostom (12), Athanasius (11), Bede (11) and Jerome (11). Beyond these 12 authors, each of whom represents 10 or more selections, there are only 6 more writers from whom the numbers of selections range from 9 down to 5: Gregory Nazianzus (7), Basil the Great (7), Gregory Thaumaturgus (8), Olympiodorus (6), Cyril of Jerusalem (5) and Apostolic Constitutions (5). Beyond them, there are still many more.

The Song of Solomon, our third biblical book for consideration in this volume, came to be called by this title in English versions from the time of the King James Version down through the RSV and NRSV under the influence of a previously supposed Solomonic authorship, now generally discounted, that also gave it a certain tangential affiliation with the literature of wisdom. The book is also known as Song of Songs (from the first two words of the first verse of the Hebrew text) and, in Roman Catholic tradition, usually as *Canticle of Canticles*, the last two titles being translations of the Hebrew superlative and thus indicating that it was regarded as “the greatest song” or “the song sublime.” All three titles, as well as the more literal Songs of Songs that is used to translate Bede’s Latin plural *Cantica Canticorum*, refer to the same scriptural reality in the excerpts chosen here. All such titles impute to the book a certain unity of theme and content, even an affiliation with the literature of wisdom, in spite of a lack of clear structure and the probability of plural authorship, and many of the ancient authors comment upon the book’s title. Unity is also suggested by the

¹⁴An extensive list is given by the Polish scholar Marek Starowieski in his superb essay “Le Livre de l’Écclésiaste dans l’antiquité chrétienne,” *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (St. Andrews, September 5-10, 1990), ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 405-40. See also Marc Hirshman, “The Greek Fathers and the Aggada on Ecclesiastes: Formats of Exegesis in Late Antiquity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59:1 (1988): 137-65.

¹⁵There is merit in the translation of this paraphrase by Michael Slusser published in 1998 (FC 98), but on the whole I have preferred that of John Jarick (1990). Their subdivisions are numbered differently.

¹⁶PG 98:741-1181, forthcoming in *Corpus Christianorum, series Graeca*, edited by Gerard H. Ettliger, S.J.

dialogical interplay of the voices of two lovers, one male and one female, and their professions of erotic love for each other. The book seems to be a loose collection or anthology of songs, poems or lyrics, counted as anywhere from six to as many as forty in number by individual scholars who think they know, and modern authorities tend to believe that this material was composed, or at least revised, at various times perhaps over the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

Such agonizing questions of modern scholarship were not paramount in the minds of most early Christian commentators, any more than the obvious and literal meaning of the contents as all having to do with sensual, sexual love between a man and a woman. Even in Judaic tradition as well as generally in the early Christian world, the book's contents were treated allegorically or figuratively, although the book does not mention God or purport to be telling its readers a sacred history. Rabbi Akiba at the rabbinical council of Jamnia in the late first century of the common era is famous for his remark that "the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." When the book is treated allegorically or spiritually, as most patristic commentators did, its mosaic of love stories is seen as suggestive of the relationship between a bride and a bridegroom, between God and Israel as God's chosen people, between God and the individual soul, between Christ and the individual soul, or between Christ and the church.

Unlike in Ecclesiastes, the name of Solomon does appear in the Song, some six times, but not as the speaker. An early endorsement of Solomonic authorship, which is not demanded by the book's references to him, was given by Origen in the third century, as is attested in some of the excerpts that are included here. This endorsement, together with the early Christian tradition of allegorical interpretation, has worked to ensure the book's place within the Wisdom literature and its location within the Christian canon. It was, however, one of the last books to be so included. Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine remarked, each in their own ways, that if a literal reading of Scripture is without spiritual profit, then a more allegorical or figurative interpretation must be pursued.

The earliest surviving Christian commentary on the Song was by Hippolytus of Rome, surviving in fragments that span only the first three chapters, but it was Origen who wrote the commentary whose influence was all-pervasive.¹⁷ Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Song as an allegory of Christ and the church seems in its own way to draw upon the one reference to the Song in the New Testament, where Paul says of marriage in Ephesians 5:32: "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Only three books of Origen's complete commentary, as well as two additional homilies, are extant, each fragment covering just slightly more than the same first two chapters of the Song, and all of these survive not in their Greek originals but only in the Latin translations of Jerome or Rufinus. More so than those of Hippolytus, the writings of Origen display the fertile imagination of allegory in interpreting the Song's contents, and his principles of exegesis are set forth with special clarity in his remarks on the Song's first two verses from the prologue of his commentary in the excerpts that follow. Origen's methodology is generally to expound first the literal or "superficial" meaning and then to proceed

¹⁷For his approach, interpretation and influence, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), esp. chap. 2. See also Joseph W. Trigg, "Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Origen, The Early Church Fathers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 45-49; and Mark W. Elliott, *The Song of Songs and Christology in the Early Church 381-451* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

to the “inner meaning” or “mystical explanation,” as he calls it.¹⁸ In the profundity of Origen’s thought, the church already existed from the creation of the world, and Christ’s mystical union with it at the incarnation marked the transition in time from law to grace. In many ways, Origen’s use of allegory is at its most profound in his exposition of the Song’s famous “black and beautiful” passages at Song 1:5 and Song 1:6, excerpted below, in lines of interpretation that were evidently developed and augmented by his followers and that constitute the most sophisticated Christian commentary on race and skin color in the legacy of the ancient church. It is a pity that they are not better known and used in today’s well-intentioned but theologically somewhat impoverished discussions of the same subject.

Nearly a century and a half after Origen, a similar profundity and methodology but with some difference of terminology and approach and with a greater emphasis upon mysticism and spiritual progress, is found in the fifteen surviving homilies of Gregory of Nyssa on the Song, whose commentary extends into the middle of the sixth of the book’s eight chapters.¹⁹ With Gregory as earlier with Origen, his commentary even in its side comments is capable of surprising depth, as in his observations about the inadequacy of religious language, the interchangeability of divine genders and the absence of sexuality in God, made almost at random in his passing remarks upon Song 3:11 that are excerpted below. Ranking close behind Origen and Gregory in originality, and close to them even in profundity, is the commentary of Nilus of Ancyra, represented here by only a few selections and still in the process of being edited as this essay is written.²⁰ Traces of Origen are also clearly evident in the virtually complete, sequential commentary of Theodoret of Cyr from the mid-fifth century, spiritual and allegorical in approach (even christological and ecclesiological), in spite of his Antiochene background.²¹ In the patristic west of the later fourth century, traces of Origen’s approach are evident in various scattered writings of Ambrose, and similarities to Origen can also be found in the verse-by-verse commentary of Aponius, possibly an early Italian abbot, who wrote twelve books on all of the Song’s eight chapters. The allegorical approach of Origen was also spread and popularized by Jerome (c. 347-420), Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and others.

The single writer in the early church favoring a literal and rationalizing exegesis of the Song was Theodore of Mopsuestia (360-429) of the school of Antioch, a sample of whose comment is presented below, who clearly implied that the literal is all there is, and whose views were condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II, 553). Theodore’s literal interpretation of the Song as an account of the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh’s daughter also finds echoes in his contemporary Julian of Eclanum, a Pelagian theologian and bishop, fragments of whose commentary are also presented here, although Theodore’s literal interpretation is not followed in Theodoret of Cyr, who nearly matched Theodore in time and place. Located in the West and less easy to categorize are Gregory the Great (590-604), who wrote two homilies containing important and at times

¹⁸Further see Ronald Heine, “Reading the Bible with Origen,” in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, ed. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 131-48.

¹⁹On this work see Ronald E. Heine, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Apology for Allegory,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984):360-70.

²⁰Of special interest may be his comments on the “bow and arrow” method of scriptural interpretation, at Song 2:7 *ad loc.*

²¹Theodoret also tells us (at Song 1:1, excerpted below) why he can borrow from his predecessors and not consider it to be plagiarism. Further see Jean-Noel Guinot, “Theodoret of Cyrus: Bishop and Exegete,” in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, ed. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 163-93.

even mystical commentary that survive covering the first eight verses,²² and the Venerable Bede (672-735), who composed a verse-by-verse explication that covers most of the Song's text in five books.²³

Today, with the decline of allegory in scriptural exegesis, there seems a widespread consensus that the Song's contents, for a start, should be read as a literal appreciation of human love and the joys of mutuality in sex, but, paradoxically, there is also a lingering conviction among scholars that no mere literal reading can exhaust their meaning.²⁴ As they review the biblical and patristic evidence there is more here, they say, than a collection of simple human love songs. Certainly the book's final remarks, such as the declaration in Song 8:6-7 that love is stronger than death, natural catastrophe or wealth, and the admonition in Song 8:14 to ascend rapidly upon the scented mountains, give a positive and even transcendent note to the book's message about fidelity and mutual enjoyment in sex and marriage, whether the biblical text and the patristic commentators are read literally or figuratively and whether that message is seen as being more about desire than about satisfaction.

Overall, some 368 selections from some 34 ancient authors who wrote on the Song of Solomon have been chosen for inclusion here. Eleven writers are represented by 10 or more selections each, by far the greatest numbers being from Ambrose, who is the author of 81 of them, and Theodoret of Cyr, who is the author of 45. Ambrose was obviously quite familiar with the book's contents, although there is no evidence that he ever wrote a running commentary upon it, whereas Theodoret did. Others represented by the greatest numbers include Augustine with 33, Origen and Jerome with 25, Gregory of Nyssa with 23, Gregory the Great and Bede each with 19, Cyril of Alexandria with 18 and Gregory of Elvira and Aponius with 12 each. Behind them are Cyril of Jerusalem with 8, Nilus of Ancyra with 7 and Hippolytus and Casiodorus with 5 each. All the rest have fewer than five.

In retrospect, since the purpose of this series is not to provide a commentary upon the commentators, much less to become immersed in the thicket of modern critical studies about the biblical text, it seems best to refrain from any more seemingly erudite observations upon the various methods of exegesis that these various writers employed. It is often remarked, although the distinction may be overdrawn, that commentators from the school of Alexandria, such as Origen, were generally more interested in the deeper and spiritual, or allegorical, meaning of the sacred page and were more ready to interpret one passage of Scripture by a direct application of some other passage to it. Writers of the school of Antioch, such as Chrysostom or Theodore of Mopsuestia, tended to eschew allegorizing in favor of seeking moral

²²Cf. Joan M. Petersen, "The Influence of Origen upon Gregory the Great's Exegesis of the Song of Songs," *Studia Patristica* 18:1 (1985):343-47.

²³A fresh translation of blocks of excerpts from many of the patristic and medieval writers who wrote running commentaries on the Song will be found in the helpful book edited by Richard A. Norris Jr., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003) which appeared just as the present volume was nearing completion. An earlier work from the last century, of similar scope, was Richard F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs from Ancient and Medieval Sources* (London: Joseph Masters and Son, 1869). A modern survey and critique of such early writers is provided by Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 112-25. Making its appearance too late for consideration in the present volume was Russell J. DeSimone, *The Bride and the Bridegroom of the Fathers: An Anthology of Patristic Interpretations of the Song of Songs* (Sussidi Patristici 10; Rome: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, 2000).

²⁴For a collection of recent scholarly essays that affirm the literal meaning of the Song but do not regard the literal as the only or primary meaning, see Richard W. Corney, "What Does 'Literal Meaning' Mean? Some Commentaries on the Song of Songs"; R. A. Norris, "The Soul Takes Flight: Gregory of Nyssa and the Song of Songs"; and Ellen F. Davis, "Romance of the Land in the Song of Songs," all in *The Anglican* 25:2 (October 1996), all republished in the *Anglican Theological Review* 80:4 (fall 1998). For a recent disagreement with them, see Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), esp. p. 35.

lessons that could be drawn from the text.²⁵

All told, considering the three biblical books under review, there are some 1,385 passages of patristic commentary selected and excerpted from some 84 different patristic authors for inclusion within the present volume. Very few of these ancient commentators, however, offered comments upon the works of their predecessors by name, in spite of an amazing degree of consensus that is often evident in the particular interpretations that they offered. For the most part, these writers seem little concerned to place their own works in the context of their predecessors, rarely naming them by name or discerning a consensus among them or even showing awareness that there was a historical continuum of interpretation, even though occasional instances can be detected such as the influence of Origen. It should be emphasized, above all, that most of the patristic writers, of whatever school of exegesis, were so thoroughly imbued with Scripture that much of their commentary thereupon must be extracted from works whose primary intention was to discuss other subjects of Christian faith and teaching rather than to be independent running commentaries written upon particular biblical books.

Another way to state the above is to observe that Christian theology in the early history of the church was written with extensive and constant reference to what the Bible had said, and biblical commentators then, in some contrast to the present, were not seeking to establish their academic reputations by becoming the leading published authorities solely upon one or two biblical books by writing technical commentaries upon them. Modern theologians and biblical scholars may well claim, as many do, that the necessities of the world and worldview and context of scholarship in which we now live demand that they write their futuristic theologies and their critical commentaries in the ways that they often do. It is not the purpose of this series to take issue with what they do but only to indicate that there was also an earlier way, closer to the time of the Bible and lasting for several hundreds of years, that still has much to say to us and need not be rejected in order to be truly modern. Whereas today the Old Testament is often presented as the Hebrew Scriptures and taught historically only within an ancient Near Eastern context, the material from these earlier commentaries dates from a period when the entire Bible was thought to be a book about Christ and for the church—past, present and to come. It is this older wisdom that this series seeks to recover from the earliest Christian times down to the mid-eighth century, drawing from the doctrinal treatises, paraphrases, catechetical instructions, pastoral writings, letters, homilies, and other works of all those writers, as well as from their running commentaries whenever they happen to survive.

Therefore, the excerpts here presented constitute the best catena, or chain, of interpretation that could be identified, extracted and assembled from these classical writers who have clarified and interpreted the sacred text for the church over the centuries, especially insofar as this rich Christian heritage can be useful today for purposes of preaching, teaching, prayer, reflection and meditation. The overviews that precede each group of passages attempt to establish links within each chain. The material is not presented primarily for a technical academic readership, although one may hope that it will also be of use to the increasing num-

²⁵Today the two schools tend to be regarded more as complementary than as opposed to each other, and their dichotomy has been challenged. Cf. Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation* (Message of the Fathers of the Church 9; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), esp. pp. 31, 34; and Robert Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), esp. p. 107. For a description of the two schools more in terms of reaction and polemic, see Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), esp. pp. 19-22, and for the same in terms of rivalry and opposition, see Rowan A. Greer, pp. 176-99 of "The Christian Bible and Its Interpretation," in *Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

ber of scholars today who believe that modern exegesis must give some consideration to the meanings that Scripture has received from successive ages of committed Christians throughout the history of the church. This material is not presented as an alternative to modern or so-called postmodern critical scholarship but as a much-needed and long-neglected adjunct or supplement to it, offering earlier Christian perspectives that have sometimes been forgotten, sometimes ignored and perhaps sometimes even suppressed.

In the preparation of this volume, I have been greatly assisted by two teams of invaluable assistants: my own research team, as well as the editorial team from the offices of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture at Drew University. Among the former I want to give thanks for the research of Victor Gorodenchuk, Richard Mammana and the Reverend Barrington Bates, all of whom did so much of the initial investigation into the sources under my direction. Likewise my gratitude is due also to the editorial supervision of the Reverend Joel Elowsky, who headed the ACCS team from the offices at Drew, as well as to Calhoun Robertson for his extensive editorial work and to Jeffrey Finch, Alexei Khamine, Michael Nausner, Dr. Mark Sheridan and Dr. Marco Conti for their valued assistance in the professional translation of various texts from other languages. Above all, however, my appreciation goes to Dr. Thomas Oden for his conceptualization of this project and for inviting me to be a part of it.

The fact remains, let it be underlined in conclusion, that the writers from this early period in Christian history believed that God was still speaking to them in Scripture as they prayerfully studied it and wrote about it. The modern historical-critical method of biblical scholarship, insofar as it tends to locate the “real” meaning of Scripture only in an academic past and not within the church’s broader tradition of interpretation, was not an approach that they would have particularly recognized or comprehended. All too often, modern biblical commentaries seem to posit a necessary gap between the then and the now, focusing overmuch on the distant textual origins or upon the immediate present and choosing to ignore the intervening centuries of foundation and development. It is possible for a first-rate commentary to be written that speaks to us today and avoids an endless fixation upon modern textual and critical analysis, although even here the gap can remain because the long and distinguished tradition of exegesis from the early Christian centuries has not been readily available.²⁶

The present volume, as indeed this entire series, seeks to give easy access to this older material, as it seeks to span the gap of hundreds of years of interpretation that have elapsed between manuscript and modern application. As we now invite these ancient commentators to speak to us today, I pause to dedicate this volume to one who has most inspired me in the scholarly study of the early church and its history and who needs no other introduction: Professor Henry Chadwick.

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Easter 2004

²⁶A fine modern commentary upon the three books under discussion that speaks well to modern readers and neither ignores modern critical exegesis nor is overcome by it, but whose scope and intention does not include extensive consideration of the early Christian commentaries, is Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

P R O V E R B S



DEFINITIONS, PURPOSE, MEANING PROVERBS 1:1-7

OVERVIEW: A proverb is a riddle or enigma that points to a deeper meaning, often by way of moral instruction or exhortation or wisdom for the living of life (ORIGEN, CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, HIPPOLYTUS). It is even a sign or roadmap (DIDYMUS). It is also a saying that, under the guise of the physical, signifies the intelligible (EVAGRIUS). A proverb is called a parable in Greek and a simile in Latin (BEDE).

The authorship of this book has long been ascribed to Solomon (ORIGEN), who is also understood as a type of Christ the Lord (HIPPOLYTUS). The wisdom in Solomon's proverbs comes from secular as well as religious sources (AUGUSTINE), and it is closely related to the true justice and wisdom by which a just ruler is meant to govern (JEROME). Such wisdom can be subtle in its meaning, as "the wisdom of a serpent"

(JEROME, AUGUSTINE), but to the faithful heart it can become clear (CHRYSOSTOM). Even the wise can increase in wisdom (ORIGEN), but they must take care not to fall in the process of doing so (GREGORY THE GREAT).

Proverbs can also be called "dark sayings," because they relate to the hidden and mysterious nature of God's glory (CASSIODORUS, ORIGEN). They contain hidden meanings that carry indirect signification (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Even the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, is God's free gift to us, for which no prior wisdom is necessary (PROSPER OF AQUITAINE). The fear of God can dissolve our human pride (AUGUSTINE), as we practice self-restraint in an effort for something better in life (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Wherever God exists, there also God is feared (TERTULLIAN). The fool lacks fear and denies God (THEO-

DORÉ OF CYR). To fear the Lord is to renounce sin (AMBROSE), but the true source of wisdom is virtuous living (CHRYSOSTOM). Knowledge without practice is insufficient (DIDYMUS). The beginning of discernment is piety (CHRYSOSTOM). Servile fear, however, differs from friendly fear (BEDE).

1:1-2 Solomon and His Proverbial Wisdom

A PROVERB HAS A DEEPER MEANING. ORIGEN: He manifestly shows at once in the beginning of his Proverbs that he is establishing these foundations of true philosophy and an order of disciplines and institutions because the place of reason has not lain hidden or been rejected by him. First of all, he shows this by the very fact that he titled his book “Proverbs,” which name indicates that something is being said openly but something else is being indicated inwardly. The common use of proverbs teaches this fact. John too in the Gospel writes that the Savior says, “I have spoken these things to you in proverbs; the hour will come when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but will proclaim to you openly about the Father.”¹ Meanwhile, these things have been said in the very inscription of the book. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.²

A CRYPTIC SAYING WITH AN INDIRECT MEANING. ORIGEN: A proverb is a cryptic saying that has an indirect meaning. [Solomon] ruled in Israel, in order to understand wisdom and instruction. Wisdom is the spiritual knowledge pertaining to God, bodiless hosts and judgment; it also includes teaching about providence and unveils contemplation on the subjects of ethics, natural sciences and theology. Or rather, wisdom is the knowledge of both physical and spiritual worlds and of the judgment and providence pertaining to them. On the other hand, instruction is the disciplining of the passions of that passionate or unreasonable part of the soul. One who has advanced to the level of theology has learned wisdom. EXPOSITION ON PROVERBS, FRAGMENT I.I.³

LIKE A SIGN OR MAP. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: A proverb is a saying such as, “War is pleasant to the inexperienced,” or “A drop constantly falling hollows a stone.” The name *proverb* derived from the fact that once roads were marked off with no signs. Now there are signs, which are called *miliaria* (milestones) by the Romans, while they were just called signs before. Ancient people set them in certain places and then inscribed them with certain information and questions. So they fulfilled two purposes. On the one hand, they indicated to the traveler the length of the journey. On the other, when one read the inscription and kept busy comprehending it, one was relieved of weariness. Therefore a road is called in Greek *oimos*, from which is derived the word *paroimia*, which means “proverb.” COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT I.I.⁴

MORAL INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE KING IN ISRAEL. ORIGEN: Solomon, who seems to have served the will of the Holy Spirit in those three books, is called in Proverbs, “Solomon, the Son of David, who ruled in Israel.” . . . Therefore, in the first book, Proverbs, when he grounds us in moral disciplines, he is said to be “king” in “Israel”—but not yet in Jerusalem—because although we are said to be “Israel” because of our faith, nonetheless we have not yet arrived to that level so that we seem to have arrived at “the heavenly Jerusalem.” COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.⁵

PROVERB A MODE OF PROPHECY. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: The proverb, according to barbarian philosophy, is called a mode of prophecy, and the parable is so called, and the enigma in addition. Further also, they are called wisdom; and again, as something different from it, “instruction and words of prudence,” and “turnings of words” and “true righteousness”; and again, “teaching to direct judgment” and “subtlety to

¹Jn 16:25. ²Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.76.16. ³PG 17:161. ⁴PG 39:1621. ⁵Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.83.20.

the simple,” which is the result of training, and “perception and thought,” with which the young catechumen is imbued. STROMATEIS 6.15.⁶

WHAT PROVERBS ARE AND HOW TO UNDERSTAND THEM. HIPPLYTUS: Proverbs, therefore, are words of exhortation serviceable for the whole path of life; for to those who seek their way to God, these serve as guides and signs to revive them when wearied with the length of the road. These, moreover, are the proverbs of “Solomon,” that is to say, the “peacemaker,” who, in truth, is Christ the Savior. And since we understand the words of the Lord without offense, as being the words of the Lord, that no one may mislead us by likeness of name, he tells us who wrote these things and of what people he was king. [He does this] in order that the credit of the speaker may make the discourse acceptable and the hearers attentive, for they are the words of that Solomon to whom the Lord said, “I will give you a wise and an understanding heart, so that there has been none like you upon the earth, and after you there shall not arise any like unto you,”⁷ and as follows in what is written of him. Now he was the wise son of a wise father; wherefore there is added the name of David, by whom Solomon was begotten. From a child he was instructed in the sacred Scriptures and obtained his dominion not by lot, nor by force, but by the judgment of the Spirit and the decree of God.

“To know wisdom and instruction.” One who knows the wisdom of God receives from him also instruction and learns by it the mysteries of the Word; and they who know the true heavenly wisdom will easily understand the words of these mysteries. Wherefore he says, “To understand the difficulties of words,”⁸ for things spoken in strange language by the Holy Spirit become intelligible to those who have their hearts right with God. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.⁹

MEANING OF “PROVERB.” EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: A proverb is a saying that, under the guise of physical things, signifies intelligible things.

SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 1.1.1.¹⁰

PROVERB IS CALLED PARABLE IN GREEK AND SIMILE IN LATIN. BEDE: “The parables of Solomon, son of David, the king of Israel.” What are called “parables” in Greek are called “similes” in Latin. Solomon gave this title to the book to encourage us to understand more deeply, not only according to the literal sense, because the Lord would speak to the crowds in parables,¹¹ just as he also announces the everlasting kingdom of Christ and the church both in his own name and through the peaceful state of his kingdom, about which it is written: “His rule will be multiplied and there will be no end to peace upon his throne and upon his kingdom.”¹² Likewise, by the construction and dedication of the temple, he insinuates the building up of holy church, which will be dedicated for eternity at the time of the resurrection. He was also declared to be the son of David himself and the spiritual king of Israel by the testimony of the crowds of people who greeted him with praises and palm branches upon his entry to Jerusalem.¹³ It must be noted, however, that the common translation of “parables,” which in Hebrew is *māšlōt*,¹⁴ is called *parhoemias*¹⁵ [in Greek], that is, “parables.” But this term is not inconsistent with the truth. For what are rightly called parables because they are mysterious can also not incongruously be called proverbs because such matters, often found in the course of conversation, ought to be contemplated and retained in memory. Proverbs are frequently so full of mystery that they can also be known as parables, as the Lord attests when he says, “I have said these things to you in proverbs; the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but I will announce the Father to you plainly.”¹⁶ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.1.1.¹⁷

SECULAR WISDOM IS NOT REJECTED IN

⁶ANF 2:510. ⁷1 Kings 3:12. ⁸Prov 1:6. ⁹ANF 5:172*; TLG 2115.015.33.2. ¹⁰SC 340:90. ¹¹See Mt 13:34. ¹²Is 9:7. ¹³See Mt 21:8-9; Jn 12:13. ¹⁴Femine plural; it should be *mēsālīm*, masculine plural. ¹⁵Or *paroimiai*. ¹⁶Jn 16:25. ¹⁷CCL 119B:23.

PROVERBS. JEROME: You ask me . . . why it is that sometimes in my writings I quote examples from secular literature and thus defile the whiteness of the church with the foulness of heathenism. I will now briefly answer your question. . . . Both in Moses and in the prophets there are passages cited from Gentile books, and . . . Solomon proposed questions to the philosophers of Tyre and answered others put by them. In the commencement of the book of Proverbs he charges us to understand prudent maxims and shrewd adages, parables and obscure discourse, the words of the wise and their dark sayings; all of which belong by right to the sphere of the dialectician and the philosopher. *LETTER 70.2.*¹⁸

KNOWING WISDOM AND DISCIPLINE FOR THE SAKE OF JUSTICE. AUGUSTINE: The purpose for which the royal Father gave to the royal Son his judgment and his justice is sufficiently shown when he says, “To judge your people in justice,”¹⁹ that is, for the purpose of judging your people. Such an idiom is found in . . . the Proverbs of Solomon, for the purpose of knowing wisdom and discipline. *EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 72.3.*²⁰

1:3-4 Foundations for Instruction in Wisdom

THE WISDOM OF TRUE JUSTICE. JEROME: Even as there is one true God, and as there are many who are called gods by participation in him, and as there is one begotten Son of God, but others are called sons by adoption; so also there is one true justice—as it is written in the introduction of the Book of Proverbs—but the Lord loves the many acts of righteousness that are pronounced just because of their participation in true justice. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 60 (PSALM 10).*²¹

TRUE JUSTICE ALSO IMPLIES THE OPPOSITE. JEROME: To confess that we are imperfect; that we have not yet laid hold of it; and that we have not yet obtained it. This is true wisdom in man: to know that he is imperfect; and, if I may so say, the

perfection of all the just, living in the flesh, is imperfect. Whence, also, we read in Proverbs: “To understand true justice.” For unless there were also false justice, the justice of God would never be referred to as true justice. *AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 1.14A.*²²

CONTRARY MEANINGS NECESSITATE SOPHISTICATION OF UNDERSTANDING. JEROME:

According to Proverbs, “That resourcefulness may be imparted to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” [is a statement that may be taken in a good sense but also] in a bad sense, as in the letter of the apostle: “But I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his guile, so your minds may be corrupted and fall from a single devotion to Christ.”²³

What the Lord is saying, therefore, is this: My knowledge, deepest thought and the inmost desire of my heart was with me, not only in my heavenly mansions but also when I dwelt in the night of this world and in darkness. It remained in me as man, and it instructed me and never left me, so that whatever the weakness of the flesh was unable to achieve, divine thought and power accomplished. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 61 (PSALM 15).*²⁴

EXAMPLE IS THE WISDOM AND SUBTLETY OF THE SERPENT. AUGUSTINE: There are, as you know, certain vices forming contraries to the virtues by a clear distinction, as imprudence to prudence. There are also some which are only contrary because they are vices but which have a sort of deceptive resemblance to virtues, as when we set against prudence, not imprudence, but craftiness. I am now speaking of that craftiness which is more commonly understood and expressed in an evil sense, not as our Scripture ordinarily uses it, which often gives it a good meaning; hence we have “wise as serpents”²⁵ and “to give subtlety to little ones.” . . .

¹⁸NPNF 2 6:149. ¹⁹Ps 72:2 (71:2 LXX, Vg). ²⁰NPNF 1 8:327**.

²¹FC 57:13. ²²FC 53:252. ²³2 Cor 11:3. ²⁴FC 57:27-28. ²⁵Mt 10:16.

In the same way, injustice is contrary to justice by an evident antithesis, whereas the craving for vengeance puts on a show of justice but is a vice. LETTER 167.6.²⁶

HOW PARABLES BECOME CLEAR TO US. CHRYSOSTOM: Those concepts which are expressed by the Holy Spirit in parables through their counterpart of speech become quite clear when one brings them before God with a faithful heart. For they understand the true righteousness which was announced by Christ. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 1.3.²⁷

1:5 *Self-Advancement in Wisdom*

MINISTRY OF HIGHER POWER COMMITTED TO A WEAK AGENT. GREGORY THE GREAT: There are indeed many who know how so to control their outward advancement as by no means to fall inwardly thereby. Whence it is written, "God casts not away the mighty, seeing that he also himself is mighty."²⁸ And it is said through Solomon, "A man of understanding shall possess governments." But to me these things are difficult, since they are also exceedingly burdensome, and what the mind has not received willingly it does not control fitly. Lo, our most serene lord the emperor had ordered an ape to be made a lion. And, indeed, in virtue of this order it can be called a lion, but a lion it cannot be made. Wherefore his piety must . . . himself take the blame of all my faults and shortcomings, having committed a ministry of power to a weak agent. LETTER 5.²⁹

EVEN THE WISE MAY INCREASE IN WISDOM. ORIGEN: He who accepts the doctrines of wisdom, sometimes, in addition to the first doctrines because of which he is already wise, takes up second doctrines in reference to which he was not formerly wise, and [then] he will be wiser, just as also it is said, "For when a wise man has heard these things, he will be wiser." COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 32.172.³⁰

1:6 *Riddles, Enigmas or Dark Sayings*

DARKNESS IN THE GOOD SENSE. CASSIODORUS: "He made darkness his cover, his pavilion around him: dark water in the clouds of the air."³¹ . . . Remember that darkness is used also in a good sense, as in this passage from Solomon's Proverbs: "He also understands a parable and a dark saying." All divine matters that we do not know about are dark to us, that is, deep and obscure, though they bask in continuous light. A hiding place, namely, the secret place of his majesty, which he reveals to the just when it falls to them to gaze face to face upon the glory of his divinity. "His pavilion around him": this expression is explained as the glorious worthiness of the blessed, that those who have persevered faithfully in his church dwell beside him. "Around him" indicates his nearness, for he encircles and penetrates all things, but he is not encircled by anyone, because he is not able to be hemmed in by any place. Exposition of the Psalms 17.12.³²

DARK, HIDDEN, INVISIBLE TREASURES. ORIGEN: We must observe that not every time something is named "darkness" is it taken in a bad sense; there are times when it has also been used in a good sense. It is because the heterodox did not make this distinction that they accepted the most irreverent doctrines concerning the Creator and withdrew from him and abandoned themselves to the fictions of myths. We must now point out, therefore, how and when the term *darkness* is understood in a good sense.

Darkness, storm clouds and thunderstorms are said to surround God in Exodus,³³ and in Psalm 17 it says, God "made darkness his hiding place, his tent around him, dark water in the clouds of the air."³⁴ . . .

But if someone takes offense at such interpretations, let him be persuaded both from the dark

²⁶FC 30:37. ²⁷PG 64:660. ²⁸Job 36:5. ²⁹NPNF 2 12:75-76. ³⁰FC 89:375*. ³¹Ps 18:11 (17:12 LXX, Vg). ³²Cetedoc 0900, 97.17.220.

³³See Ex 9:23, 16:10, 24:15-18. ³⁴Ps 18:11 (17:12 LXX, Vg).

sayings and the dark, hidden, invisible treasures given to Christ by God.³⁵ COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 2.171-73.³⁶

HIDDEN MEANING THAT CARRIES AN INDIRECT SIGNIFICATION. GREGORY OF NYSSA: It is universally admitted that the name of “proverb,” in its scriptural use, is not applied with regard to the evident sense but is used with a view to some hidden meaning, as the Gospel thus gives the name of “proverbs” to dark and obscure sayings. So the “proverb,” if one were to set forth the interpretation of the name by a definition, is a form of speech which, by means of one set of ideas immediately presented, points to something else which is hidden. Or [it is] a form of speech which does not point out the aim of the thought directly but gives its instruction by an indirect signification. AGAINST EUNOMIUS 3.2.³⁷

1:7 *Fear of the Lord and What It Means*

EVEN THE FEAR OF GOD IS GOD’S GIFT TO US. PROSPER OF AQUITAINE: Since, therefore, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and this virtue can be had without wisdom, to whom belongs the beginning of fear? The blessed apostle Peter says, “Grace to you and peace be accomplished in the knowledge of God, and of Christ Jesus our Lord,” who has now given “us all things of his divine power, which appertain to life and godliness.”³⁸ Does he say, “Who has excited in us by his help the seeds of virtues which we had naturally implanted”? Rather, he says, “Who has now given us all things which pertain to life and godliness.” And in saying this, of what virtue has he placed the beginning in nature, which was not conferred by him who gave all things:³⁹ Wherefore, St. Paul also says, “For what have you that you have not received? And if you have received, why do you glory as if you had not received?”⁴⁰ GRACE AND FREE WILL 13.4.⁴¹

HUMAN PRIDE IS BROKEN DOWN BY RELIGIOUS FEAR. AUGUSTINE: You should regulate

your life and conduct by the commandments of God, which we have received to enable us to lead a good life, beginning with a religious fear, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” whereby human pride is broken down and weakened. Second, with a mild and gentle piety you should refrain from objecting to passages of the holy Scriptures which you do not yet understand and which seem to the uninstructed devoid of sense and self-contradictory. And you should not try to impose your ideas on the meaning of the holy books but submit and hold your mind in check rather than savagely attack its hidden meaning. LETTER 171A.⁴²

SELF-RESTRAINT IS AN EFFORT FOR SOMETHING BETTER. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: There are things practiced in a vulgar style by some people, such as control over pleasures. For as among the heathen there are those who, from the impossibility of obtaining what one sees and from fear of men, and also for the sake of greater pleasures, abstain from the delights before them, so also, in the case of faith, some practice self-restraint, either out of regard to the promise or from fear of God. [Indeed] such self-restraint is the basis of knowledge, and an approach to something better, and an effort after perfection. For “the fear of the Lord,” it is said, “is the beginning of wisdom.” STROMATEIS 7.12.⁴³

VIRTUOUS LIVING IS THE TRUE SOURCE OF WISDOM. CHRYSOSTOM: Virtuous living is really the source and root of wisdom, just as all wickedness has its source in folly. I say this because the braggart and the slave of passion are taken captive by these vices as a result of a lack of wisdom. For this reason the prophet has said, “There is no health in my flesh. My sores are foul and festering because of my folly,”⁴⁴ to indicate that all sin takes its beginning from a lack of wisdom; just as the

³⁵See Col 2:3. ³⁶FC 80:140-41. ³⁷NPNF 2 5:137-38*. ³⁸2 Pet 1:2. ³⁹See 1 Cor 12:6. ⁴⁰1 Cor 4:7. ⁴¹FC 7:384-85. ⁴²FC 30:69. ⁴³ANF 2:543*. ⁴⁴Ps 38:3, 5 (37:4, 6 LXX).

virtuous person who fears God is wisest of all. That is why a certain wise man also says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If, then, to fear God is to have wisdom, and the evil-doer does not possess this fear, he is really bereft of wisdom; and he who is bereft of wisdom is truly the most foolish of all. **HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 41.**⁴⁵

KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT PRACTICE IS INSUFFICIENT. **DIDYMUS THE BLIND:** To know goodness is not sufficient to reach blessedness, if one does not put goodness into practice with works. Piety toward God is actually the beginning of knowledge. **COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 1.7.**⁴⁶

BEGINNING OF DISCERNMENT. **CHRYSOSTOM:** Piety toward God is a beginning [of discernment]. It acts as a fountain and source for discerning the divine, according to our inner being, so that we may see the true light, hear the secret oracles, be nourished with the bread of life, obtain the fragrance of Christ and learn the doctrine of this life. When we have piety, our senses too are allied with us, when neither our eyes see nor our mouth speaks evil. **COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 1.7.**⁴⁷

TO FEAR THE LORD IS TO RENOUNCE SIN. **AMBROSE:** He who fears the Lord departs from error and directs his ways to the path of virtue. Except a man fear the Lord, he is unable to renounce sin. **SIX DAYS OF CREATION 1.4.12.**⁴⁸

THE FOOL LACKS FEAR AND DENIES GOD. **THEODORET OF CYR:** To the atheist is the name *fool* most accurately applied in truth and nature: if the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,⁴⁹ lack of fear and denial of him would be the opposite of wisdom. **COMMENTARY ON PSALM 14.3.**⁵⁰

WHEREVER GOD EXISTS, THERE ALSO GOD IS FEARED. **TERTULLIAN:** How extremely frequent is the intercourse which heretics hold with

magicians, with mountebanks, with astrologers, with philosophers. The reason is that they are people who devote themselves to curious questions. "Seek and you shall find," is everywhere in their minds. Thus, from the very nature of their conduct may be estimated the quality of their doctrine. They say that God is not to be feared; therefore all things are in their view free and unchecked. Where, however, is God not feared, except where he is not present? Where God is not, there truth also is not. Where there is no truth, then, naturally enough, there is also such a discipline as theirs. But where God is, there exists "the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom." **PRESCRIPTIONS AGAINST HERETICS 43.**⁵¹

SERVILE FEAR DIFFERS FROM FRIENDLY FEAR. **BEDE:** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Two things constitute the fear of the Lord: first, the servanthood which is called the beginning of knowledge or wisdom and, second, the friendship which accompanies the perfection of wisdom. Servile fear is the beginning of wisdom because whoever begins to taste it after the error of sins is corrected by this first divine fear, lest he be led into torments. But perfect love casts this fear out.⁵² Holy fear of the Lord then follows, remaining forever,⁵³ and is augmented by charity, not removed by it. This is the fear with which the good son is afraid, lest he offend the eyes of his most loving father in the least degree. For the soul is still afraid with elementary servile fear, lest it suffer punishment from an angry Lord. But each fear will come to an end in the future life. Charity, however, never passes away,⁵⁴ but will remain perpetually in the fulness of wisdom, which is to know the one, true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.⁵⁵ **COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.1.7.**⁵⁶

⁴⁵FC 33:422. ⁴⁶PG 39:1624. ⁴⁷PG 64:661-64. ⁴⁸FC 42:12. ⁴⁹Ps 111:10 (110:10 LXX). ⁵⁰FC 101:108. ⁵¹ANF 3:264. ⁵²See 1 Jn 4:18. ⁵³See Ps 19:9 (18:10 LXX, Vg). ⁵⁴See 1 Cor 13:8. ⁵⁵See Jn 17:3. ⁵⁶CCL 119B:25.



WARNINGS AGAINST
EVIL AND VIOLENCE
PROVERBS 1:8-19

OVERVIEW: God is our Father and the church our Mother (DIDYMUS). Our parents' teachings, coming from God the Father but in the name of mother church, should direct us away from evil and violence (BEDE), for we shall not go wrong if we follow the general teachings of the church (FULGENTIUS). The transient laurel wreath of the Olympic games is nothing compared with the eternal crown offered us by the Lord (CHRYSOSTOM). By contrast, the desire of the wicked to ambush and bury the innocent is a reference to Christ and the church (AUGUSTINE) as well as a prediction of the Lord's passion (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Jesus the Savior is the way of forgiveness, and our feet should run to the gospel rather than to mischief and evil (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS, GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Nets even for birds are spread for a purpose, and

therefore temptation is to be avoided (BARNABAS, ORIGEN).

1:8-9 *The Teaching of Our Parents*

GOD IS OUR FATHER AND THE CHURCH OUR MOTHER. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: God is Father of the righteous. Whoever practices justice was born from God. Our mother is the church, whose bridegroom is our Lord Jesus Christ. Our laws are the apostolic constitutions. Even though the concepts expressed above have a sublime meaning, they also apply to earthly parents when they educate their children in how to live piously before God. Since that teacher, who generates his children through the gospel, is a man, his wife and mother of his children is the church, or rather the ecclesiastical doctrine and way of life.

If you, he says, listen to me as the author of the Proverbs—first in my role as the narrator of the father, and then as the narrator of wisdom and virtue (that is, of the mother)—you will be encircled with a crown of grace and your neck will be adorned with a necklace fashioned of intellectual gold and jewels. The material of the crown, with which the head of the interior man is encircled, is the circle of virtues, which are called graces.

Accordingly, the golden necklace put around the neck of the soul (that is, around one's obedience) must be understood as a part of the intellectual crown. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 1.8.¹

COMING FROM GOD THE FATHER IN THE NAME OF MOTHER CHURCH. BEDE: "Listen, my son, to the discipline of your father, and do not reject your mother's law." Thus far, it argues proverbially from each side. From here on, it begins assiduously to admonish whoever is faithful that he prefer the discipline of the divine law to the flatteries of the reprobate, for eternal death surely follows their crimes, while a crown is given to those who keep the law. Hence, it rightly calls him son whom the father was careful to instruct with solicitude. This statement can be accepted as coming from the person of God the Father but in the name of mother church, who was then called the synagogue, I understand. Observe also that it commands us to listen to the father's instruction that we not reject the mother's law for any reason. For it is not adequate that anyone claims to love God and to comply with his precepts if he does not also pursue the unity of the church with fraternal charity, or if he denies that the mother herself receives any of the grace of God whereby we are saved. Even among the Hebrews the spirit that grants grace is known by the feminine gender. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.1.8.²

PATERNAL INSTRUCTION AND MATERNAL

LAW. BEDE: Through listening to paternal instruction and through observance of maternal

law, grace is put on our head and a neck ring on our neck. For the more one gives heed to divine commands [and] strives to observe with greater diligence what one has learned in the unity of mother church, the more one may now ascend with greater worthiness to the honor of preaching and may in the future ascend with greater exaltation to the blessedness of reigning with Christ for ever. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 1.19.³

THIS INSTRUCTION IS THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH. FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: The church is not truly called the "pillar and foundation of truth"⁴ if it is found unsound in the most basic mystery of human salvation. But because it is truly called the "pillar and foundation of truth" by the apostle, whatever according to the canons of the church itself is given and received within it, among the holy mysteries of human redemption and reconciliation, is given with firm truth and received with firm truth.

It is so commanded in Proverbs: "Hear, my child, your father's instruction and do not reject your mother's teaching," so that we may never reject the general canons of holy mother the church, that is, those which the most harmonious assent of all the bishops confirms. LETTER TO FERRANDUS 12.21-22.⁵

UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY. CHRYSOSTOM: Our Lord . . . offers us his hand, takes part in the struggle, and seemingly in every way hands over our adversary to us in defeat, striving might and main that we may prevail and wrest the victory, so that he may place on our head the unfading crown. Scripture says, remember, "You will receive a crown of graces upon your head." Whereas in the Olympic games the crown after victory is nothing more than a laurel wreath, or applause, or acclamation of the crowd, all of which disappears and is lost with the coming of evening, the crown for virtue and its struggles has

¹PG 39:1624. ²CCL 119B:26. ³CS 110:189-90. ⁴1 Tim 3:15. ⁵FC 95:490-91.

nothing material about it. It is not subject to decay in this world but is everlasting, immortal, enduring for all ages. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 42.4.⁶

REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS. CHRYSOSTOM: If you preserve in your faithful heart the law of your Father and observe the commands of your mother, you will receive the crown of graces on your head and the golden necklace in the resurrection of the righteous ones. You will be glorified in the heavenly and imperishable kingdom and crowned by Christ if you fight in a manner worthy of such a crown. No athlete is crowned unless such a person has contended strongly and legitimately.⁷ COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 1.9.⁸

1:11-13 *To Ambush and Bury the Innocent*

REFERENCE TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: There is one text in Proverbs so far from being obscure that its relationship to Christ and his possession, the church, can be grasped without any such trouble. Wicked men are speaking: "Let us unjustly hide away in the earth the just man, let us swallow him up alive like hell. Let us abolish his memory from the earth, let us lay hands upon his precious possession." This is very like what the Lord Jesus himself, in one of the Gospel parables, puts into the mouths of the wicked vinedressers: "This is the heir; come let us kill him, and we shall have his inheritance."⁹ CITY OF GOD 17.20.¹⁰

PREDICTION OF THE LORD'S PASSION. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: In the words of Solomon, "My son, let not sinners lead you astray, do not walk in their ways. Do not walk if they entice you saying: Come with us, let us share innocent blood: let us hide the just man in the earth unjustly, let us swallow him up alive as in hell." This last passage is also a prophecy of the passion of the Lord. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 1.10.94-95.¹¹

1:16 *Sinners Whose Feet Run to Evil*

THE WAY OF JESUS IS FORGIVENESS. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: It is not fair to be too hasty in casting out an offender but slow in receiving him when he returns; to be forward in cutting off but unmerciful when he is sorrowful and ought to be healed. For of such as these speaks the divine Scripture: "Their feet run to mischief; they are hasty to shed blood." . . . Now the way of peace is our Savior Jesus Christ, who has taught us, saying, "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you,"¹² that is, give remission of sins, and your offenses shall be forgiven you. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.3.21.¹³

FEET SHOULD RUN TO THE GOSPEL. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: It is good for the . . . feet . . . that they be not swift to shed blood or to run to evil, but that they be prompted to run to the gospel and the prize¹⁴ of the high calling, and to receive Christ who washes and cleanses them. ON HOLY BAPTISM, ORATION 40.39.¹⁵

1:17 *Nets Are Spread for a Purpose*

THE WAY OF DARKNESS IS TO BE AVOIDED. EPISTLE OF BARNABAS: The Scripture says, "Not unjustly are the nets spread out for the birds." This means that a man shall perish justly, who, having knowledge of the way of righteousness, thrusts himself into the way of darkness. EPISTLE OF BARNABAS 5.4.¹⁶

TEMPTATION IS LIKEWISE TO BE AVOIDED. ORIGEN: If then nets are not wrongfully stretched for birds, as it is said in Proverbs, but God justly leads men into the snare, as it is said, "You led us into the snare,"¹⁷ and if not even a sparrow, cheapest of birds, falls into the snare without the will of the Father¹⁸ (its fall into the snare being due to

⁶FC 82:419-20*. ⁷See 2 Tim 2:5. ⁸PG 64:664. ⁹Mt 21:38. ¹⁰FC 24:75. ¹¹FC 23:84. ¹²Lk 6:37-38. ¹³ANF 7:405-6. ¹⁴See Phil 3:14. ¹⁵NPNF 2 7:374. ¹⁶FC 1:197**. ¹⁷Ps 66:11 (65:11 LXX). ¹⁸Mt 10:29.

its failure to use properly the power of its wings given to it to soar), let us pray to do nothing to deserve being brought into temptation. By God's righteous judgment, the wicked are delivered to uncleanness by God into the lusts of their own heart; or are delivered unto shameful affections;

or, having not proved to have God in full knowledge, are delivered to a reprobate mind to do that which is disgraceful.¹⁹ ON PRAYER 29.16.²⁰

¹⁹Rom 1:24, 26, 28. ²⁰Curtis 19*.



WARNINGS THAT WISDOM
BE NOT NEGLECTED
PROVERBS 1:20-33

OVERVIEW: The praise of the dead is preferable to the praise of the living (HILARY), for wisdom is appropriately proclaimed at the moment or point of departure (HILARY, SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER). The one Word of God is distinct from the words of God's commands (ATHANASIUS), but we must always obey what God has decreed (CLEMENT OF ROME). We must also take heed when God reaches out to us (ORIGEN), for the correction of God is beneficial (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). But God will not hear those who refuse his call (GREGORY THE GREAT), and there is no room for complaint if we do not hear or look (SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER). After all, not every prayer is really a call to God, seeing that our minds fluctuate between the extremes of hope and despair (AUGUSTINE). The rejection of wisdom, therefore, can be the ruin of small minds or of fools (GREGORY THE GREAT).

1:20 Wisdom Proclaimed at a Place or Point of Departure

PRaise OF THE DEAD PREFERABLE TO PRAISE OF THE LIVING. HILARY OF ARLES: It is written: "Wisdom is made known in death," that is to say, the life of the wise man is praised at the end of his life. Wherefore we read also in another place: "Do not praise a man during his lifetime" and again, "Praise not any man before death."¹ Now suppose someone says: praise a man after death, for in the praise of the living there is a possible occasion of vain exultation for the object of the laudation and a note of flattery is attached to the one bestowing it. In many ways, however, it is useful to praise the dead: in the first place, because, while the one is absent who might be gratified by our praise, it is necessary that the whole glory be referred to the bestower of grace; second, because only admiration for his virtue remains when the suspicion of flattery is removed. Therefore, praise of the dead which is proclaimed in the holy congregation of the faithful is full of edification and utterly free from ostentation. LIFE OF ST. HONORATUS, PREFACE 3.²

WISDOM PROCLAIMED AT DEATH. SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER: What about this saying: "He who shall have persevered to the end, shall be saved,"³ or that oracle of the divine word in the sacred proverbs: "Wisdom is proclaimed at the moment of departure"? These sayings show that, though wisdom is helpful in every age, all people should be particularly wise when they are leaving this world, because the wisdom of past years will not fully deserve praise if it does not terminate in a good end. Wisdom is proclaimed at the moment of departure. FOUR BOOKS OF TIMOTHY TO THE CHURCH 4.1.⁴

1:23 My Words Known

THE ONE WORD OF GOD IS DISTINCT FROM THE WORDS OF GOD'S COMMANDS. ATHANASIUS: For where at all have they found in divine Scripture, or from whom have they heard, that there is another Word and another wisdom besides this Son, that they should frame to themselves such a doctrine? True, indeed, it is written, "Are not my words like fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"⁵ and in the Proverbs, "I will make known my words unto you." But these are precepts and commands, which God has spoken to the saints through his proper and only true Word, concerning which the psalmist said, "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep your words."⁶ Such words accordingly the Savior signifies to be distinct from himself, when he says in his own person, "The words which I have spoken unto you."⁷ For certainly such words are not offsprings or sons, nor are there so many words that frame the world, nor so many images of the one God, nor so many who have become men for us, nor as if from many such there were one who has become flesh, as John says. He was preached by John as being the only Word of God: "the Word was made flesh," and "all things were made by him."⁸

¹Cf. Sir 11:26-28. ²FC 15:362-63*. ³Me 10:22. ⁴FC 3:355. ⁵Jer 23:29. ⁶Ps 119:101 (118:101 LXX). ⁷Jn 6:63. ⁸Jn 1:14; 1:3.

Wherefore of him alone, our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his oneness with the Father, are written and set forth the testimonies, both of the Father signifying that the Son is one, and of the saints, aware of this and saying that the Word is one, and that he is Only-begotten. **FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS 2.39.**⁹

LET US OBEY WHAT GOD HAS DECREED.

CLEMENT OF ROME: So, then, let us obey his most holy and glorious name and escape the threats which wisdom has predicted against the disobedient. In that way we shall live in peace, having our confidence in his most holy and majestic name. Accept our advice, and you will never regret it. For as God lives, as the Lord Jesus Christ lives and the Holy Spirit (on whom the elect believe and hope), the man who with humility and eager considerateness and with no regrets does what God has decreed and ordered will be enlisted and enrolled in the ranks of those who are saved through Jesus Christ. Through him be the glory to God for ever and ever. Amen.

I CLEMENT 58.¹⁰

1:24-28 Refusal to Heed God's Call

BENEFICIAL CORRECTION. **CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA:** The correction of the Lord is very beneficial. He calls the same people, through David, also, "a perverse and exasperating generation, a generation that set not their heart aright: and whose spirit was not faithful to God. They kept not the covenant of God: and in his law they would not walk."¹¹ These are the reasons for his exasperation, and for these reasons he will come as judge to pass sentence on those who are unwilling to preserve goodness in their lives. Therefore, he treats them severely in the hope that perhaps he might curb their impulse toward death. . . . He knew that they repented out of fear, after neglecting his love; as a general rule, men always neglect the good that is kind, but serve it with loving fear if it keeps recalling justice.

CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 85-86.¹²

WE MUST TAKE HEED WHEN GOD

STRETCHES OUT TO US. **ORIGEN:** If there is someone who meditates in the law of the Lord day and night,¹³ and if there is someone who is like the mouth of the just because he meditates on wisdom,¹⁴ he will be able to investigate diligently and find these things. If nonetheless he has rightly sought and by his seeking knocked on the door of wisdom, asking from God to open it for him, he also deserves to receive the Word of wisdom and the Word of knowledge through the Holy Spirit and to become a participant of that wisdom which said, "For I stretched out my words and you did not hear."¹⁵ And rightly he said that he "stretched out words" in his heart, to whom God had given, as we said above, "the breadth of the heart."¹⁶ For the heart is made broad of that man who can explain those things that have been said briefly in figurative language, taking assertions from the divine books with a broader teaching. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.**¹⁷

STRETCHING FORTH. **ORIGEN:** How then is the heaven stretched forth? Wisdom stretches it forth. For it is clear that wisdom stretches it forth in the text: "Since I stretched forth words and you did not pay attention." He speaks of words being stretched forth; in this way the heaven is stretched forth. **HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 8.2.3.**¹⁸

SINNERS UNKNOWN TO GOD. **GREGORY THE GREAT:** "Then they will call upon me, and I will not listen; they will arise early in the morning and will not find me." You see how they cry out that it be opened for them; driven by sorrow at their rejection, they call twice upon him who has dominion over them, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us."¹⁹ They offer entreaties, but they are unknown to him. God abandons them as unknown persons. He does not recognize them now because of their

⁹NPWF 2 4:369*. ¹⁰LCC 1:70. ¹¹Ps 78:8,10 (77:8,10 LXX). ¹²FC 23:76-77. ¹³Ps 1:2. ¹⁴Ps 37:30 (36:30 LXX). ¹⁵Cf. Col 4:3. ¹⁶1 Kings 4:29. ¹⁷Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.77.17. ¹⁸FC 97:77. ¹⁹Mt 25:11.

sins. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 10 (12).²⁰

NOT EVERY PRAYER IS REALLY A CALL TO GOD. AUGUSTINE: What is it then which Scripture says in many places: “They shall call, and I will not hear them”? Yet surely you are merciful to all who call upon you. . . . Some call, yet call not upon him of whom it is said, “They have not called upon God.”²¹ They call, but not on God. You call upon whatever you love: you call upon whatever you draw to yourself, whatever you wish to come to you. Therefore if you call upon God for this reason, in order that money may come to you, that an inheritance may come to you, that worldly rank may come to you, then you are calling upon those things that you desire may come to you; but you are making God the helper of your desires, not the listener to your needs. God is good, if he gives what you wish. What if you wish ill, will he not then be more merciful by not giving? Then if he gives not, then is God nothing to you; and you say, How much I have prayed, how often I have prayed, and have not been heard! Why, what did you ask? Perhaps that your enemy might die. What if he at the same time was praying for your death? God who created you, created him also. You are a human, your enemy also is human. But God is the judge: he hears both, and he grants the prayer to neither. You are sad, because you were not heard when praying against your enemy. But be glad, because his prayer was not heard against you. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 86.7.²²

NO ROOM FOR COMPLAINT IF WE DO NOT HEAR OR LOOK. SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER: What room is there for just complaint when each suffers according to his deeds? There is this exception which I can easily prove, namely, we never suffer in proportion to our deeds, and God deals with us much more leniently than we deal with him. But, in the meantime, let me [continue]. . . . Thus spoke the Lord himself: “I have cried unto you, and you have not heard me; and you shall cry unto me, and I shall not hear you.”²³ What is more suitable and just than this? We

have not heard; therefore, we are not heeded. We have not looked; therefore, we are not noticed. THE GOVERNANCE OF GOD 3.9.²⁴

EXTREMES OF HOPE AND DESPAIR. AUGUSTINE: The mind fluctuates between hope and despair. It must be feared lest hope slays you; and when you hope for too much from mercy, you fall into judgment. Again, it must be feared lest despair slays you; and when you think that you cannot now be forgiven for grave sins you have committed, you do no penance and you encounter the judge, wisdom, which says, “And I will laugh at your doom.”

What, then, has the Lord to do with those endangered by these diseases? To those who are endangered by hope, he says this: “Delay not to be converted to the Lord; and put it not off from day to day; for suddenly his wrath will come, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy you.”²⁵ To those who are endangered by despair, what does he say? “On whatever day the wicked man is converted, I shall forget all his iniquities.”²⁶ Therefore, because of those who are endangered by despair, he has proposed the harbor of forgiveness; because of those who are endangered by hope and deluded by delays, he has made the day of death uncertain. You do not know when the last day may come. Are you ungrateful because you have today, in which you may be corrected? TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 33.3-4.²⁷

1:32 *The Foolishness of Those Who Neglect Wisdom*

THE RUIN OF SMALL MINDS AND OF FOOLS WHO REJECT WISDOM. GREGORY THE GREAT: Solomon says, “The turning away of the simple shall kill them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” So Paul admonishes, saying, “They that buy will be as though they possessed

²⁰CS 123:73. ²¹Ps 53:4 (52:5 LXX, Vg). ²²NPNF 1 8:412**. ²³See Jer 11:11. ²⁴FC 3:83**. ²⁵Cf. Sir 5:8-9. ²⁶See Ezek 18:21-22; 33:14-15. ²⁷FC 88:58-59.

not; and they that use this world, as though they used it not."²⁸ So may the things that are supplied be of service to us outwardly only so as not to turn our minds away from desire of supernal delight; and thus the things that afford us comfort in our state of exile may not abate the mourning of our soul's pilgrimage. May we, who see

ourselves wretched in our severance from the things that are eternal, not rejoice as though we were happy in the things that are transitory. PASTORAL RULE 3.26.27.²⁹

²⁸See 1 Cor 7:30-31. ²⁹NPNF 2 12:55*.



UNDERSTANDING THE
FEAR OF THE LORD
PROVERBS 2:1-22

OVERVIEW: The union of soul and spirit produces life, and inward perception leads to reverence (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Although Scripture encourages us to seek wisdom like we seek money, this is not to say that Scripture is praising avarice, but rather it is to say that money and God are competing for our love (AUGUSTINE). Wisdom and understanding must precede the fear of God (EVAGRIUS). There is a divine sense, higher than human sense, that enables those of a pure heart to see God (ORIGEN). It is necessary not only to study the Scriptures but also to pray to understand them, that we may obtain not only learning but also the wisdom that comes from the Lord (AUGUSTINE). Those who do seek salvation will be guided by holy counsel (CAESARIUS). Jesus mourns for evil-doers, although they should mourn for themselves (GREGORY THE GREAT).

Straightforwardness of the mind makes for a straight path (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). In the end, though, it is we ourselves who cause the smooth paths to become rough (JOHN CASSIAN).

2:1 *Spiritual Growth*

UNION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT PRODUCES LIFE.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Wisdom is open to all and loves humankind.¹ Anyway, Solomon says, “My son, if you accept my words of instruction and keep them deep within you, your ear will listen to wisdom.” This means that the word is sown and kept deep in the soul of the learner as if in the ground. This is spiritual growth.

So he adds, “You shall direct your heart to understanding and direct it towards instruction for your son.” For in my view, the union of soul

with soul and spirit with spirit in accordance with the sowing of the word brings growth to the seed sown and produces life. Everyone who is educated in obedience to his educator becomes a son. STROMATEIS 1.1.3-2.1.²

2:3 *Cry Out for Insight*

INWARD PERCEPTION LEADS TO REVERENCE.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: God’s wisdom . . . [works] “in many forms and many ways”³ through technical skill, scientific knowledge, faith, prophecy; it shows us its power to our benefit, because “all wisdom comes from the Lord and is with him to all eternity,” as the wisdom of Jesus puts it.⁴ “For if you call for practical wisdom and perception at the top of your voice, if you seek it as you would a treasure of silver, and if you track it down ardently, then you will realize the meaning of reverence for God and you will grasp the perception of God.” The prophet spoke to distinguish this from the philosophic approach to perception. He is teaching us with great dignity and solemnity to search it out in order to progress toward reverence for God. So he opposed to it perception made in reverence for God, alluding to revealed knowledge in these words: “For God grants wisdom from his mouth together with perception and practical wisdom, and stores up help for the righteous.”⁵ When people are made righteous by philosophy, they have stored help for themselves and inward perception which leads to reverence for God. STROMATEIS 1.27.1-3.⁶

¹See Tit 3:4. ²FC 85:23-24. ³Heb 1:1. ⁴Jesus the son of Sirach; Sir 1:1. ⁵Prov 2:6-7. ⁶FC 85:41.

2:4 Seek Wisdom Like Silver

DOES HOLY SCRIPTURE PRAISE AVARICE?

AUGUSTINE: Another passage of Scripture exhorting us to love of wisdom says it should be sought after like money. Must we therefore think holy Scripture praises avarice? It is well known to what great efforts and pains lovers of money will patiently subject themselves, from what great pleasures they abstain, in their desire to increase their wealth or in their fear of diminishing it. With what great shrewdness they pursue gain, and how prudently they avoid losses; how they are usually afraid to take the property of others, and sometimes despise loss to themselves lest they lose more in its quest and litigation. Because these traits are well known, it is right for us to be exhorted so to love wisdom that we most eagerly seek it as our treasure, acquire more and more of it, suffer many trials, restrain desires, ponder the future, so that we may preserve innocence and beneficence. Whenever we act in this way we are in possession of true virtues, because our objective is true, that is, is in harmony with our nature in reference to salvation and true happiness. AGAINST JULIAN 4.3.18.⁷

LOVE GOD AS MUCH AS MONEY. AUGUSTINE: It's unfitting, it's insulting, that wisdom should be compared with money, but love is being compared to love. What I see here, after all, is that you all love money in such a way that when love of money gives the order, you undertake hard labor, you put up with starving, you cross the sea, you commit yourselves to wind and wave. I have something to pick on in the matter of what you love, but I have nothing to add to the love with which you love. "Love like that, and I don't want to be loved any more than that," says God. "I'm talking to the riffraff, I'm speaking to the greedy: You love money; love me just as much. Of course, I'm comparably better; but I don't want more ample love from you; love me just as much as you love money." SERMON 399.II.⁸

2:5 Divine Perception

WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING MUST PRECEDE THE FEAR OF GOD. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: Wisdom and understanding must precede, in order for the fear of God to coexist along with them. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 20.2.5.⁹

DIVINE SENSE HIGHER THAN HUMAN SENSE.

ORIGEN: Solomon says, "You will find a divine sense." For he knew that there were in us two kinds of senses, the one being mortal, corruptible and human, and the other immortal and intellectual, which here he calls "divine." By this divine sense, therefore, not of the eyes but of a pure heart, that is, the mind, God can be seen by those who are worthy. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.1.9.¹⁰

2:6 Knowledge and Understanding Come from the Lord

ZEAL FOR STUDY, ENDOWED WITH PIETY.

AUGUSTINE: Students of these revered writings should be advised not only to learn the kinds of expressions in the holy Scriptures, to notice carefully how they are customarily expressed there, and to remember them but also to pray that they may understand them, and this is chiefly and especially necessary. Indeed, in these books which they are studying earnestly, they read that "the Lord gives wisdom; and out of his mouth comes prudence and knowledge." It is from him that they have received that zeal for study, if it is endowed with piety. CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION 3.37-59.¹¹

2:11 Discretion and Understanding

THE GUIDANCE OF HOLY COUNSEL. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: We read in sacred Scripture, dearly beloved, that holy counsel should keep those who are solicitous for their soul's salvation,

⁷FC 35:183. ⁸WSA 3 10:465. ⁹SC 340:112. ¹⁰OPF 14. ¹¹FC 2:166-67.

as the divine Word puts it: "Holy counsel shall keep you." If holy counsel keeps a soul, that which is unholy not only fails to keep it but even kills it. Perhaps someone says, Who can always be thinking of God and eternal bliss, since all people must be solicitous for food, clothing and the management of their household? God does not bid us be free from all anxiety over the present life, for he instructs us through his apostle: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat."¹² The same apostle repeats the idea with reference to himself when he says, "We worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you."¹³ Since God especially advises reasonable thought of food and clothing, so long as avarice and ambition which usually serve dissipation are not linked with it, any action or thought is most rightly considered holy. The only provision is that those preoccupations should not be so excessive that they do not allow us to have time for God, according to the words: "The burdens of the world have made them miserable."¹⁴ Since bodily necessities are satisfied with little, while ambition is never appeased even if it obtains the whole world, let us reject wicked thoughts which spring from the poisonous root of passion. Let us, on the other hand, love only those which will help us obtain an eternal reward, so that what was said before may be fulfilled in us: "Holy counsel shall keep you." SERMON 45.1.¹⁵

2:14 Evildoers

SHOULD MOURN FOR THEMSELVES. GREGORY THE GREAT: "Seeing the city, [Jesus] wept over it, saying, 'If only at least you had known.'"¹⁶ He did this once when he proclaimed that [Jerusalem] would perish. Our Redeemer has not stopped doing this daily through his elect when he observes that certain persons have adopted corrupt habits after having lived good lives. He mourns for those who do not know why they are mourned for, who, in Solomon's words, "rejoice in doing evil, and delight in what is worse." If they recognized their

impending condemnation, they would mourn for themselves! FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 39.¹⁷

2:15 Those Whose Paths Are Crooked

THE MIND LIKE THE PATH MUST BE MADE STRAIGHT. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: What is the meaning of "Prepare the way of the Lord"?¹⁸ Make ready for the reception of whatever Christ may wish to enact; withdraw your hearts from the shadow of the law; cease from the types; think no more perversely. . . . "Make the paths of our God straight." For every path that leads unto good is straight and smooth and easy; but the other is crooked that leads down to wickedness those who walk therein. For of such it is written, "Whose paths are crooked, and the tracks of their wheels awry." Straightforwardness, therefore, of the mind is as it were a straight path, having no crookedness. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 6.¹⁹

2:20 Keep to the Paths of the Righteous

IT IS WE WHO HAVE MADE THE SMOOTH PATHS ROUGH. JOHN CASSIAN: It is plain, I say, that it is we, who make rough with the nasty and hard stones of our desires the right and smooth paths of the Lord; who most foolishly forsake the royal road paved with the fine pebbles of apostles and prophets, and trodden down by the footsteps of all the saints and of the Lord himself, and seek trackless and thorny places. Blinded by the allurements of present delights, we make our way with wounded feet and our wedding garment rent, through dark paths, overrun with the briars of sins, so as not only to be pierced by the sharp thorns of the brambles but actually laid low by the bites of deadly serpents and scorpions lurking there. CONFERENCE 24.24.²⁰

¹²Thess 3:10. ¹³1 Thess 2:9. ¹⁴The source is unknown. ¹⁵FC 31:226-27*. ¹⁶Lk 19:41-42. ¹⁷CS 123:359*. ¹⁸See Mt 3:3. ¹⁹CGSL 69. ²⁰NPNF 2 11:542*.



TEACHING THAT
MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN
PROVERBS 3:1-10

OVERVIEW: Even those who forget God's law are violating it (EVAGRIUS). God has given us free will, but we must exercise it by choosing to keep God's commandments (AUGUSTINE). Loyalty and faithfulness will not forsake you if your fasting for the sake of the gospel precept is accompanied by the act of anointing your head with the oil of mercy (ORIGEN). Ignorance accompanied by rashness, however, breeds false self-importance (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), when in fact you should fear the Lord and depart from evil because the name of "catholic" on its own is not enough to guarantee salvation (FULGENTIUS). We do not honor the Lord with our substance if we provide alms that have been procured at the cost of another (AUGUSTINE). Nor do we honor the Lord by our good works if we attribute them to our merits rather than to God's grace (BEDE). It is not enough to fulfill the righteousness of the old law without the moderating force of judgment (JOHN CASSIAN), and it is no honor to God to take evilly in order to give well (GREGORY

THE GREAT). After all, we hold our possessions by the revocable will of God, who gave them to us. God is willing to call them our own, so that we may be the ones who give them to others (SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER).

3:1 Keeping God's Commandments

HEARERS AND FOLLOWERS OF THE LAW. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: Those who forget the law are the ones who violate it; yet those who remember the law are the ones who live in accordance with the law. Likewise, those who observe the sayings of God are those who keep them, and those who destroy them are those who do not want to follow them. "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but it is the doers of the law who will be justified."¹ SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 27.3.1.²

¹Rom 2:13. ²SC 340:120; cf. Scholia on Prov 343.28.4, SC 340:434.

HUMANS DO HAVE FREE WILL. AUGUSTINE: What of this fact, that God in so many passages commands that all his precepts be kept and carried out? How can he command if there is no free choice? And what of that “blessed man” about whom the psalmist says that “his will has been according to the law of the Lord”?³ Does he not make it perfectly clear that it is by the will that a man takes his stand on the side of God’s law? Finally, there are many commandments that in one way or another refer by name to the will. For example, “Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁴ And there are similar passages, such as, “Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding”;⁵ and, “Do not cast off the counsels of your mother”;⁶ and, “Be not wise in your own conceit”;⁷ and, “Do not fall away from the correction of the Lord”;⁸ and, “Neglect not the law”; and, “Do not refrain from helping the needy”;⁹ and, “Plan no evil against your friends”;¹⁰ and, “Mind not the deceit of a woman”;¹¹ and, “He would not understand that he might do well”;¹² and, “They were unwilling to take correction.”¹³ What do such numerous passages from the books of the Old Testament show, except that a person’s will is possessed of free choice? ON GRACE AND FREE WILL 2.4.¹⁴

3:3 *Loyalty and Faithfulness*

OIL OF MERCY. ORIGEN: If you wish to fast according to the precept of the gospel, observe the evangelical laws on fasting in which the Savior commands this about fasting: “But if you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.”¹⁵ But if you ask how “to wash your face,” the apostle Paul teaches how “with uncovered face, you will contemplate the glory of the Lord and be transformed to this same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.”¹⁶ “Anoint even your head,” but take care that it not be with the oil of sin. For “the oil of the sinner will not anoint your head.”¹⁷ But “anoint your head” with the oil of exultation, “the oil of joy,”¹⁸ the oil of mercy, so

that, according to the command of wisdom, “mercy and faith may not forsake you.” HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 10.2.4.¹⁹

3:7 *Be Not Wise in Your Own Eyes*

IGNORANCE ACCOMPANIED BY RASHNESS

BREEDS FALSE SELF-IMPORTANCE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Ignorance is constantly, so to speak, accompanied by rashness and leads people on to attach great importance to their wretched fancies. Thus those who are the victims of this malady entertain a great idea of themselves and imagine themselves possessed of such knowledge as no one can gainsay. For they forget, it seems, Solomon, who says, “Be not wise in your own eyes,” that is, according to your own single judgment; and again, that “wisdom not put to the proof goes astray.” For we do not necessarily possess true opinions upon every individual doctrine that we hold, but often perhaps abandoning the right path, we err and fall into that which is not fitting. But I think it right that exercising an impartial and unprejudiced judgment, and not rendered rash by passion, we should love the truth, and eagerly pursue it. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 136.²⁰

FEAR THE LORD AND DEPART FROM EVIL.

FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: If there are any who are even in the catholic church and live evil lives, before they finish this life, let them hasten to give up the evil life, and let them not think that the catholic name is enough for salvation, if they do not do the will of God. . . . In Proverbs each one of us is commanded both to fear the Lord and to depart from evil. There it is said, “Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.” ON THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS 1.26.2.²¹

³Ps 1:2. ⁴Rom 12:1. ⁵Ps 32:9 (31:9 LXX, Vg). ⁶Prov 1:8. ⁷Prov 3:7. ⁸Prov 3:11. ⁹Prov 3:27. ¹⁰Prov 3:29. ¹¹Prov 5:2. ¹²Ps 36:3 (35:4 LXX). ¹³Prov 1:30. ¹⁴FC 59:253. ¹⁵Mt 6:17. ¹⁶2 Cor 3:18. ¹⁷Ps 141:5 (140:5 LXX). ¹⁸See Ps 45:7 (44:8 LXX). ¹⁹FC 83:206. ²⁰CGSL 540. ²¹FC 95:143.

3:9 Honor the Lord with Your Substance

GOD DOES NOT APPROVE ALMS FURNISHED AT ANOTHER'S COST. AUGUSTINE: God approves of that alms which is furnished by just labors, as is written: "Honor the Lord with your labors and sacrifice to him with the fruits of your justice." For God abominates and refuses that alms which is furnished to him at the cost of another's tears. What profit accrues to you if one person blesses you while many curse you; what good does an alms bring to you when it is furnished from the possessions of another? In truth, need we fear that God does not have the goods with which you may feed his poor without plundering your neighbor? ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE 12.²²

NOT BY MERIT BUT BY GRACY. BEDE: We are commanded to honor the Lord not only with the substance of money that we extend to the poor and with all the good works we do, with the substance or fruits of the universal heavenly grace we receive, which is to seek his praise in all things rather than our own. [Not only the aforesaid,] but one honors the Lord with his substance and first fruits who attributes every good work not to his own powers and merits, but to supernatural grace, mindful of the word: "For without me, you can do nothing."²³ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.3.9.²⁴

FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS. JOHN CASSIAN: "Honor the Lord from your righteous labors, and offer to him the fruits of your righteousness; that your barns may be full of an abundance of wheat, and your vats may overflow with wine." Know that as you are faithfully carrying out this service, you have fulfilled the righteousness of the old law, under which those who then lived if they transgressed it inevitably incurred guilt, while if they fulfilled it they could not attain to the height of perfection. CONFERENCE 21.2.²⁵

MODERATE FORCE OF JUDGMENT. JOHN CAS-

SIAN: Our Lord wants nothing done for his honor and glory without it being tempered by judgment, for "the honor of a king loves judgment."²⁶ Therefore Solomon, the wisest of men, urges us not to let our judgment tilt to either side, saying: "Honor God with your righteous labors and offer to him of the fruits of your righteousness." For we have in our conscience an uncorrupt and true judge who, when all others are wrong, is the only person not deceived as to the state of our purity. CONFERENCE 21.22.²⁷

TAKING EVILLY DOES NOT HONOR GOD.

GREGORY THE GREAT: It is written, "Honor the Lord from your just labors." It is no honor to the Lord to take evilly in order to give well. Hence also it is said through Solomon, "Whoever offers a sacrifice of the substance of the poor is as though he slew a son in his father's sight."²⁸ LETTER 106.²⁹

STEWARDSHIP. SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER: We receive only the use of those possessions which we hold. We make use of the wealth loaned to us by God. We are, as it were, tenants by the revocable will of the grantor. When departing from this world, whether we like it or not, we leave everything behind on earth. Since we are tenants only of this sort, why do we attempt to take away and alienate from God's ownership what we cannot take with us? Why do we not use in good faith the little things given us by God? We hold property so long as he has allowed, we hold so long as he has permitted, he who has given us all.

What is more right, what is more proper, than when a thing is separated from him who had its use, that its possession revert to him who granted it for usage? Even the very words of God through the tongue of sacred Scripture order this, saying to one and all of us, "Honor the Lord from out of

²²FC 16:33-34. ²³Jn 15:5. ²⁴CCL 119B:40. ²⁵NPNF 2 11:503*. ²⁶Ps 99:4 (98:4 LXX). ²⁷NPNF 2 11:511-12*. ²⁸Sir 34:24. ²⁹NPNF 2 13:25**.

your substance.” And elsewhere he says, “Repay your debt.”³⁰ How tender and condescending is our Lord God, who invites us to expend the wealth of our earthly substance! He says, “Honor the Lord from out of your substance.” Though all we have received from God is his own property, he calls it ours so that we may be the ones who give it to others. Thus, he calls the proprietorship

of possession ours so that there may be a greater reward for work, because, wherever effort spent seems to be on what is one’s own, the worker necessarily has a greater return. *FOUR BOOKS OF TIMOTHY TO THE CHURCH* 1.5.³¹

³⁰See Sir 4:8. ³¹FC 3:278-79**.

G O D ’ S D I S C I P L I N E

P R O V E R B S 3 : 1 1 - 1 2

OVERVIEW: Because God’s grace complements our free will, punishment often comes to us for a good purpose and suffering often comes for the sake of justice (AUGUSTINE). We must be patient at God’s chastisement (TERTULLIAN), for the Lord disciplines whom he loves and then makes all well (CLEMENT OF ROME). God did not spare from discipline even his only Son (AUGUSTINE). Illness, too, can be a punishment for sin (BASIL), and discipline from the Lord enables our progress toward salvation (CASSIODORUS) just as chastisement from priests can also enable our correction (CYPRIAN). Even the continuation of discipline, moreover, can mean that hope is not terminated or lost (JEROME). Opposition to sound doctrine, however, breeds opposition to discipline (VALERIAN).

3:12 The Lord Reproves Those Whom He Loves

GOD’S GRACE COMPLEMENTS OUR FREE WILL. AUGUSTINE: What clearer evidence is there for pointing to God’s grace than in the case where

we receive what we ask for in prayer? For if our Lord had said, “Watch that you enter not into temptation,”¹ he would appear to have merely given an admonition to man’s will, whereas when he added the words “and pray,” he made it clear that it is God who helps us so that we do not fall into temptation. It is to human free will that these words have been directed: “Son, do not fall away from the correction of the Lord.”² *ON GRACE AND FREE WILL* 4.9.³

PUNISHMENT FOR A GOOD PURPOSE. AUGUSTINE: What here and now is the punishment of those who go astray? Some affliction perhaps, and some scourging that is for the purpose of either correcting or testing. Either, you see, people are corrected for their sins to avoid their incurring, uncorrected, severer punishments, or else their faith is being tested, to see with what endurance or what patience it remains intact under the Father’s chastisement. [In either case,]

¹See Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38; Lk 22:40. ²Prov 3:11 Vg. ³FC 59:261.

not grumbling angrily at the Father when he chastises and rejoicing at his caresses; but so rejoicing at his caresses that one also thanks him for chastising; because “he chastises every son whom he receives.”⁴ SERMON 113A.4.⁵

SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF JUSTICE.

AUGUSTINE: “Whom the Lord loves, he chastises; and he scourges every son whom he accepts.”⁶ . . . For, it is just that we who were dismissed from the pristine happiness of paradise because of our bold appetite for pleasures should be taken back through the humble endurance of difficulties, fugitives through our own evildoing, returning through suffering evils, there acting contrary to justice, here suffering for justice sake. ON PATIENCE 14.11.⁷

BE PATIENT AT GOD’S CHASTISEMENT. TERTULLIAN: If we believe some blow of misfortune is struck by God, to whom would it be better that we manifest patience than to our Lord? In fact, more than this, it befits us to rejoice at being deemed worthy of divine chastisement: “As for me,” he says, “those whom I love I chastise.”⁸ Blessed is that servant upon whose amendment the Lord insists, at whom he deigns to be angry, whom he does not deceive by omitting his admonition! ON PATIENCE 11.4.⁹

THE LORD DISCIPLINES WHOM HE LOVES.

CLEMENT OF ROME: We must accept correction, dear friends. No one should resent it. Warnings we give each other are good and thoroughly beneficial. For they bind us to God’s will. This is what the holy Word says about it: “The Lord has disciplined me severely and has not given me up to death. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and punishes every son he accepts.”¹⁰ . . . Do not refuse the Almighty’s warning. For he inflicts pain and then makes us all well again. He smites, but his hands heal. 1 CLEMENT 56.¹¹

GOD DID NOT SPARE HIS ONLY SON. AUGUSTINE: It is written, after all, “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and scourges every son whom he

receives.”¹² Let us not fall away, then, under the lash, so that we may rejoice in the resurrection. So true is it, after all, that he scourges every son whom he receives, that he did not spare his only Son but handed him over for us all. So fixing our gaze on him, who was scourged without any sin to deserve it, and who died for our offenses and “rose again for our justification,”¹³ let us not be afraid of being cast aside when we are scourged, but rather [let us] be confident that we will be received when we are justified. SERMON 157.3.¹⁴

ILLNESS AS PUNISHMENT FOR SIN. BASIL THE GREAT: Not all sicknesses for whose treatment we observe medicine to be occasionally beneficial arise from natural causes, whether from faulty diet or from any other physical origin. Illness is often a punishment for sin imposed for our conversion. . . . Consequently, when we who belong to this class [of sinners] have recognized our transgressions, we should bear in silence and without recourse to medicine all the afflictions which come to us, in accordance with the words, “I will bear the wrath of the Lord because I have sinned against him.”¹⁵ THE LONG RULES 55.¹⁶

ENABLING PROGRESS TOWARD SALVATION. CASSIODORUS: [The Lord] visits with a rod when he imposes stern punishment. In the same spirit Paul when writing to the Corinthians said, “What will you? Shall I come to you with a rod? Or in charity and in the spirit of meekness?”¹⁷ He also visits us with stripes when he takes lighter vengeance on us; for a rod strikes us in one way, but whips flick us in another. Clearly each of these befalls Christian people according to the nature of their sin, enabling them to make progress toward salvation. As Solomon puts it: “For whom the Lord loves, he chastises; he whips every son whom he

⁴See Heb 12:6. ⁵WSA 3 4:173*. ⁶See Heb 12:6. ⁷FC 16:248. ⁸See Rev 3:19; Heb 12:6. ⁹FC 40:212. ¹⁰See Ps 118:18 (117:18 LXX); Heb 12:6. ¹¹LCC 1:69. ¹²See Heb 12:6. ¹³Rom 4:25. ¹⁴WSA 3 5:111. ¹⁵Mic 7:9. ¹⁶FC 9:334-35. ¹⁷1 Cor 4:21.

accepts."¹⁸ EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 88.33.¹⁹

PRIESTS ALSO CHASTISE FOR THE SAKE OF CORRECTION. CYPRIAN: If God chastises whom he loves, and chastises that he may correct, brethren also, and priests particularly, do not hate but love those whom they chastise that they may correct, since God also prophesied before through Jeremiah and pointed to our own time saying, "I will give you pastors according to my own heart, and they shall nourish you, feeding you with discipline."²⁰ THE DRESS OF VIRGINS I.²¹

HOPE IS NOT TERMINATED. JEROME: The father schools only him whom he loves. The master rebukes only the pupil who he sees has a more zealous talent. Once the doctor stops trying to cure, he gives up hope. Your response may well be, "As Lazarus endured evils in his life, so I shall gladly endure torments now, so that glory may be stored up for me in the future; for the Lord will not punish the same sin twice."²² The reason why Job, a holy and spotless man, a man just in his own day, suffered so grievously, is described in his book. LETTER 68.²³

OPPOSITION TO SOUND DOCTRINE BREEDS OPPOSITION TO DISCIPLINE. VALERIAN: Many persons opposed to sound doctrine find fault with justice. They regard disciplinary control as haughtiness and attribute a just punishment to an overbearing nature. However, there is no haughtiness unless something unjust is ordered; and there is no overbearance except in the one who spurns discipline. Discipline, therefore, is a teacher of religion and of true piety; she does not threaten in order to inflict pain or chastise in order to work injury.

In fact, when discipline is angered she corrects the habits of people, and when she is aroused she keeps them under control, as Solomon tells us. . . . Indeed, there is nothing which correction fails to remedy or save. If anyone is wise enough to accept correction, he neither loses the pleasantness of friendship [with his corrector] nor runs the risk of condemnation. HOMILY I.I.²⁴

¹⁸See Heb 12:6. ¹⁹ACW 52:362-63. ²⁰Jer 3:15. ²¹FC 36:31-32.

²²Nah 1:9 LXX. ²³MFC 17:97. ²⁴FC 17:299.



WISDOM IS MORE PRECIOUS
THAN JEWELS
PROVERBS 3:13 - 20

OVERVIEW: Eternal rewards, such as length of life, are in wisdom's right hand, whereas the things that perish, such as riches and glory, are in the left (CASSIODORUS, JEROME). Likewise the left hand of God symbolizes earthly prosperity, whereas the right hand of God stands for eternal happiness (GREGORY THE GREAT). The left hand of Christ, however, can refer to the church in its present life here and now (BEDE). The tree of life, by contrast, can indicate wisdom, or Christ (ORIGEN, JEROME), or Jesus (EPHREM), or the Bread by which humankind lives forever (ORIGEN). It also indicates the knowledge of good and evil (HILARY) as well as the cross and baptism (CAESARIUS). Likewise Christ, as God's wisdom, is known by many different names (ORIGEN). The Father did not make the heavens without the Son (AMBROSE), a process that also involved the Word or Christ, as proper Son of God (ATHANASIUS). Even the establishing of the church is related to God's creative activity (BEDE).

3:13-15 *Those Who Find Wisdom and Understanding*

THE NECESSARY PREREQUISITE TO FINDING WISDOM. BASIL THE GREAT: The souls of those who are about to speak with wisdom should first be cleansed through divine fear. For to distribute the mysteries of salvation to the general public and to receive all persons equally, including those whose life is not adorned with purity and those who have not been examined and prepared to make reasonable use of the mysteries, is like pouring one's most precious ointment into a filthy vessel. HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 4.¹

3:16 *Riches of Virtue and Glories of Faith*

LEFT AND RIGHT. CASSIODORUS: As Proverbs has it, "Length of days and years of life are in his² right hand," and this means eternal blessedness, whereas "In his³ left hand are riches and glory," denoting the good things of this world, though there is no doubt that these can be bestowed by him. Moreover, it is his right side to which the saints are allotted when separated from the rest to obtain their rewards, whereas the left side is that mentioned when sinners are to be condemned to eternal punishment; for the saints have longed for things heavenly, whereas sinners have sought worldly goods. We also read that sinners have given the left hand's role to their right hand; our prophet is to say of them in Psalm 143: "Their mouth has spoken vanity, and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity."⁴ But the true use of the right hand is where the bestowal of the Lord's grace is demonstrated. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 120.5.⁵

A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT. JEROME: The careful reader will easily perceive how great a difference there is between the right and the left side of wisdom when he has taken note of what she is reported to hold in her right hand and in her left, for Scripture says, "Long life is in her right hand, in her left are riches and honor." You see eternity and everlasting life in wisdom's right hand. But the perishable and fleeting things of time, creatures that are gone the very instant we think we have them in our grasp—riches and honor—are in her left. This is consistent with the fact that on the day of judgment,

¹PG 31:393. ²KJV, RSV "her," i.e., wisdom. ³KJV, RSV "her," i.e., wisdom. ⁴Ps 144:8 (143:8 LXX). ⁵ACW 53:268-69.

some will stand on the right and others on the left: sheep, naturally, and saints on his right, but goats and sinners on his left.⁶ **HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 61 (PSALM 15).**⁷

GOD'S RIGHT HAND EMBRACES THE

CHURCH. GREGORY THE GREAT: The church says by the voice of the elect, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me."⁸ The left hand of God—that is, prosperity in the present life—the church has put under her head, in that she presses it down in the intentness of her highest love. But the right hand of God embraces her, because in her entire devotion she is encompassed with his eternal happiness. Therefore, it is said again through Solomon, "Length of days is in her right hand, but in her left hand riches and glory." In speaking, then, of riches and glory being placed in her left hand, he showed the manner in which they are to be esteemed. Thus the psalmist says, "Save me with your right hand."⁹ He does not say, "with your hand," but "with your right hand" to indicate that it was eternal salvation that he sought. Again it is written, "Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemies."¹⁰ For the enemies of God, though they prosper in his left hand, are dashed to pieces with his right; since for the most part the present life elevates the bad, but the coming of eternal bliss condemns them. **PASTORAL RULE 3.26.27.**¹¹

CHRIST'S LEFT HAND INDICATES THE

CHURCH. BEDE: When the left hand of Christ is interpreted as referring to something good, the present life of holy church is understood. Hence it is written, "Length of days is in her right hand, in her left riches and glory." Length of days in her right hand [refers to] our Redeemer's wisdom because in the fatherland of the dwelling on high unfailing light is granted to the elect of both angels and human beings. Riches and glory are in her left hand, because we are restored during [our time of] exile in our journey [on this earth] by both the riches of the virtues and the glory of our faith,

until we come to our eternal [resting place]. Of his glory the apostle says, "And we glory in our hope of the glory of the children of God, and not only this, but we also glory in our tribulations";¹² and of these riches he says, "Because in everything you have become rich in him, with all speech and knowledge."¹³ **HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 2.21.**¹⁴

3:18 The Tree of Life

THE TREE OF LIFE IS WISDOM. ORIGEN: I turn to the most wise Solomon as a witness when he said about wisdom, "The tree of life is for all who embrace it." Therefore, if "wisdom is the tree of life," without a doubt, there is another tree of prudence, another of knowledge and another of justice. For logically it is not said that only wisdom, of all the virtues, was worthy to be called "the tree of life" but that the other virtues by no means received names of a similar sort. Therefore, "the trees of the field will give their fruit."¹⁵ **HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 16.4.3.**¹⁶

THE TREE OF LIFE IS CHRIST. ORIGEN: These things must be understood to be said figuratively; for Christ himself is called "the tree of life." Just as by other things Christ is disclosed to be priest and victim and altar, and one understanding is not prevented by the other, and in their own passages each thing is perceived figuratively concerning him, so also now in the figures of mysteries a diversity of roles taken from one and the same thing will not get in our way.¹⁷ **HOMILIES ON JOSHUA 8.6.**¹⁸

WATER'S BITTERNESS IS REMOVED BY BAPTISM. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: What is that tree which the Lord pointed out? Solomon shows us when he says of wisdom, "She is a tree of life to all who embrace her." If the tree of Christ's wisdom is put into the law, showing us how circum-

⁶See Mt 25:33. ⁷FC 57:30. ⁸Song 2:6. ⁹Ps 108:6 (107:7 LXX). ¹⁰Ex 15:6. ¹¹NPNF 2 12:55*. ¹²Rom 5:2-3. ¹³1 Cor 1:5. ¹⁴CS 111:213-14. ¹⁵Lev 26:4. ¹⁶FC 83:268. ¹⁷Heb 5:6; 1 Cor 5:7. ¹⁸FC 105:92*.

cision should be spiritually understood and how the sabbath and the law are to be observed, then the bitter water becomes sweet. When the bitterness of the law is changed into the sweetness of spiritual understanding, then the people of God can drink. . . . For this reason it is certain that if one wants to drink of the letter of the law without the tree of life, that is, without the mystery of the cross, the faith of Christ or spiritual understanding, he will die because of the excessive bitterness. Paul the apostle knew this when he said, "The letter kills."¹⁹ In other words, the bitter water plainly kills if it is not changed into sweetness by the Spirit. For this reason the tree is cast into the water, so that it may be turned into sweetness. It is true, brethren, the bitterness is removed from the water when the tree of the cross is joined to the sacrament of baptism. *SERMON 102.2.*²⁰

JESUS IS THE TREE OF LIFE. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Risen is the light of the kingdom, in Ephrata the city of the king. The blessing wherewith Jacob blessed, to its fulfillment came today! That tree likewise, [the tree] of life, brings hope to mortal men! Solomon's hidden proverb had today its explanation! Today was born the child, and his name was called Wonder!²¹ For a wonder it is that God as a babe should show himself. *HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY I.*²²

THE TREE OF LIFE IS ALSO THE NEEDFUL BREAD. ORIGEN: It is just this needful bread that seems to me to be otherwise termed in Scripture a "tree of life." If a person stretches his hand to it and takes of it, he will live forever.²³ And under a third name this tree is termed "wisdom of God." In Solomon's words: "She is a tree of life to all that take hold of her, and to those that lean on her as on the Lord she is safe. *ON PRAYER 2.27.10.*"²⁴

TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL. HILARY OF POITIERS: In the book of Genesis,²⁵ where the lawgiver depicts the paradise planted by God, we are shown that every tree is

fair to look upon and good for food. It is also stated that there stands in the midst of the garden a tree of life and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Next, [we are told] that the garden is watered by a stream that divides into four heads. The prophet Solomon teaches us what this tree of life is in his exhortation concerning wisdom: "She is a tree of life to all them that lay hold upon her and lean upon her." This tree then is living; and not only living, but, furthermore, guided by reason. Guided by reason, that is, in so far as to yield fruit, and not casually nor unseasonably, but in its own season. And this tree is planted beside the rills of water in the domain of the kingdom of God, that is, of course, in paradise and in the place where the stream as it issues forth is divided into four heads. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS I.14.*²⁶

THE TREE OF LIFE IS NOT ONLY WISDOM BUT ALSO CHRIST. JEROME: This tree of life was planted in the Garden of Eden, and in Eden there rose a river that separated into four branches.²⁷ . . . Likewise, we read in Solomon, . . . "She is a tree of life to those who grasp her," [and here] he is speaking of wisdom. Now, if wisdom is the tree of life, wisdom itself, indeed, is Christ. You understand now that the man who is blessed and holy is compared to this tree, that is, he is compared to wisdom. Consequently, you see, too, that the just man, that blessed man who has not followed in the counsel of the wicked—who has not done that but has done this—is like the tree that is planted near running water.²⁸ He is, in other words, like Christ, inasmuch as he "raised us up together, and seated us together in heaven."²⁹ You see, then, that we shall reign together with Christ in heaven; you see, too, that because this tree has been planted in the Garden of Eden, we have all been planted there together with him. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS I (PSALM I).*³⁰

¹⁹2 Cor 3:6. ²⁰FC 47:104-5. ²¹Is 9:6. ²²NPWF 2 13:223. ²³See Gen 2:9; 3:22. ²⁴Curtis 17*. ²⁵Gen 2:9. ²⁶NPWF 2 9:239*. ²⁷Gen 2:9-10. ²⁸See Ps 1:1-3. ²⁹Eph 2:6. ³⁰FC 48:7.

3:19 By Wisdom the Lord Founded the Earth**CHRIST, AS GOD'S WISDOM, IS UNDERSTOOD BY MANY DIFFERENT NAMES.**

ORIGEN: You will find it said in Proverbs, "God by wisdom founded the earth, and by prudence he prepared the heaven." Thus there is a certain prudence of God which one does not seek [except] in Christ Jesus. For all such [virtues], insofar as they are of God, are Christ: he is the wisdom of God, he is the power of God, he is the righteousness of God, he is sanctification, he is redemption.³² In this way he is the prudence of God. But though there is one substance, for differences in the aspects the names are many. You do not understand the same thing about Christ when you understand him as wisdom and when you understand him as righteousness. For when he is wisdom, you mean the knowledge of things divine and human, but when he is righteousness, he is that power which allots to every person according to worth. And when he is sanctification, he is what enables those faithful and dedicated to God to become holy. In this way also then you will understand him as prudence, when he is the knowledge of what is good and evil, and what is neither. HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 8.2.1.³³

THE FATHER AND THE SON MADE THE HEAVENS.

AMBROSE: Paul declares that it was said of the Son: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands."³⁴ Whether therefore the Son made the heavens, as also the apostle would have it understood, while he himself certainly did not alone spread out the heavens without the Father; or as it stands in the book of Proverbs, "the Lord in wisdom has founded the earth, in understanding he has prepared the heavens," it is proved that neither the Father made the heavens alone without the Son, nor yet the Son without the Father. ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH 5.2.29.³⁵

WISDOM IS THE WORD OR CHRIST, THE

PROPER SON OF GOD. ATHANASIUS: Solomon says, "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens." And this wisdom is the Word, and by him, as John says, "all things were made"³⁶ [and without him not one thing was made]. This Word is Christ, "for there is one God the Father, from whom are all things. We are for him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through him."³⁷ If all things are through him, he himself should not be reckoned with the "all things." Whoever dares to say that he, through whom are all things, is one of all the things surely will have the same speculation about God, from whom are all things. If anyone flees from this as absurd and excludes God from the "all things," it would follow that even the only-begotten Son, since he is proper to the Father's substance, must be excluded from the "all things." And if he is not one of the "all things," then it is not right to say about him "There was once when he was not" and "He was not before he was begotten." Such terms are fittingly used of creatures, but the Son himself is such a one as is the Father, of whose substance the Son is a proper offspring, Word and wisdom. This is peculiar to the Son in relation to the Father, and this shows that the Father is peculiar to the Son; so that we may neither say that God was ever wordless or that the Son was ever nonexistent. For how else could he be a Son, unless from God? Or how could he be Word and wisdom unless he is always peculiar to [God]? FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS 1.6.19.³⁸

ESTABLISHING HIS CHURCH. BEDE: God the Father created all things through the Son. But he founded the earth by wisdom figuratively³⁹ when he established his holy church in firmness of faith through the Son. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.3.19.⁴⁰

³²See 1 Cor 1:24, 30. ³³FC 97:76-77. ³⁴Heb 1:10; cf. Ps 102:25 (101:26 LXX). ³⁵NPNF 2 10:288*. ³⁶Jn 1:3. ³⁷1 Cor 8:6. ³⁸TTC 82-83**. ³⁹Latin *typice*. ⁴⁰CCL 119B:42.



THE WISE INHERIT HONOR,
BUT FOOLS DISGRACE
PROVERBS 3:21-35

OVERVIEW: Just as philosophy was to the Greeks what the law was to the Hebrews, a guide to righteousness, so now it serves as a tutor escorting persons to Christ (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). If one believes in God's providence, there is no reason to be anxious (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). Virtually every page of Scripture attests that God offers grace to the humble (AUGUSTINE). To be obedient to God, for example, one should be careful not to oppose the bishop (IGNATIUS). Arrogance must be countered by humility (CLEMENT OF ROME). God's grace is greater than worldly friendship (BEDE), and God is

stern to the arrogant but kind to the humble (JEROME). The wise inherit, but the wicked are disgraced like fools (HIPPOLYTUS).

3:23 *Your Foot Will Not Stumble*

GREEK PHILOSOPHY IS STILL A USEFUL GUIDE. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Before the Lord's coming, philosophy was an essential guide to righteousness for the Greeks. At the present time, it is a useful guide toward reverence for God. It is a kind of preliminary education for those who are trying to gather faith through dem-

onstration. "Your foot will not stumble," says Scripture, if you attribute good things, whether Greek or Christian, to Providence. God is responsible for all good things: of some directly, like the blessings of the Old and New Covenants, of others indirectly, like the riches of philosophy. Perhaps philosophy too was a direct gift of God to the Greeks before the Lord extended his appeal to the Greeks. For philosophy was to the Greek world what the Law was to the Hebrews, a tutor escorting them to Christ. So philosophy is a preparatory process; it opens the road for the person whom Christ brings to his final goal. STROMATEIS 1.5.28.1-3.¹

3:25 *Be Not Afraid of Panic or Ruin*

GOD MAKES PROVISIONS FOR US. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: If you believe that God makes provision for you, why be anxious and concerned about temporal affairs and the needs of your flesh? But if you do not believe that God makes provision for you, and for this reason you take pains to provide for your need separately from Him, then you are the most wretched of all men. Why even be alive or go on living in such a case? "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will nourish thee,"² and you shall never be dismayed at any terror that overtakes you.

A man who has dedicated himself once and for all to God goes through life with a restful mind. Without non-possessiveness the soul cannot be freed from the turmoil of thoughts; and without stillness of the senses she will not perceive peace of mind. Without entering into temptations, no man will ever gain the wisdom of the Spirit; and without assiduous reading, he will know no refinement of thoughts. Without tranquility of thoughts the intellect will not be moved in hidden mysteries; and without the confidence that comes through faith, the soul cannot dare to withstand temptations with boldness. Moreover, without actual experience of God's protection, the heart cannot hope in Him; and if the soul does not taste Christ's suf-

ferings consciously, she will never have communion with Him. ASCETICAL HOMILIES 5.³

3:34 *God Shows Favor to the Humble*

SCRIPTURE TESTIFIES. AUGUSTINE: There is hardly a page in the holy books in which it is not shown that God resists the proud but to the humble offers grace.⁴ CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION 3.23.33.⁵

SUBMISSION TO GOD AND THE CHURCH.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: Make no mistake about it. If a person is not inside the sanctuary, he is deprived of the Bread [of God]. For if the prayer of one or two has great avail, how much more is that of the bishop and of the whole church. Anyone, therefore, who fails to assemble with the others has already shown his pride and set himself apart. For it is written, "God resists the proud."⁶ Let us be careful, therefore, not to oppose the bishop, so that we may be obedient to God. EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS 5.⁷

ARROGANCE MUST BE RESISTED BY HUMILITY.

CLEMENT OF ROME: Since, then, we are a holy portion, we should do everything that makes for holiness. We should flee from slandering, vile and impure embraces, drunkenness, rioting, filthy lusts, detestable adultery and disgusting arrogance. "For God," says Scripture, "resists the arrogant but gives grace to the humble." We should attach ourselves to those to whom God's grace has been given. We should clothe ourselves with concord, being humble, self-controlled, far removed from all gossiping and slandering, and justified by our deeds, not by words. I CLEMENT 30.⁸

GOD GIVES GRACE GREATER THAN WORLDLY FRIENDSHIP.

BEDE: The Lord gives greater grace

¹FC 85:41-42*. ²Ps 55:22 (54:23 LXX). ³AHSIS 45. ⁴See Jas 4:6; Mt 23:12; 1 Pet 5:5. ⁵ACD 99. ⁶Cf. Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5. ⁷FC 1:89**. ⁸LCC 1:57.

than does the friendship of the world, because this grants earthly goods for a time and things that are to be lost with sorrow; he bestows the eternal joy of life. On what sort he bestows this grace, however, he explains in succession. Wherefore he says, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." God indeed punishes thieves, perjurers, dissolute persons, and other sinners, as despisers of his commandments. But he is said particularly to resist the proud, because they certainly are punished with a greater penalty who trust in their own strength, who neglect to be made subject to divine power by repenting, who refuse to seek the help of grace from above, as if they are sufficient by themselves to achieve salvation. But, on the other hand, he gives grace to the humble, because they who in the midst of the wounds of their vices humbly put themselves in the hands of the true physician rightly receive the gift of the hoped-for cure. . . . He will give grace, however, to the meek, because he bestows both the perfection of their good work and the gifts of a blessed everlasting life on those who humbly follow him. COMMENTARY ON JAMES 4.6.⁹

GOD IS STERN TO THE ARROGANT BUT KIND TO THE HUMBLE. JEROME: Candidly, I say to you, God hates all sin without exception: lying, perjury, theft, robbery, adultery, fornication; and if anyone should be caught in any of these acts, he would not be able to raise his eyes, and we would look upon him as one accursed. Yet, the proud man commits a far worse sin than adultery, and still we continue to converse with him. The fornicator may say, My flesh overcame me; youth was too much for me. I am not advocating that you yield to such a sin, for God hates that as well as any other; but, in com-

paring evils, I maintain that whatever other wrong a man may commit, theft, for example, he can always find an excuse for it. What excuse does he give? I committed the theft because I was in need, I was dying from hunger, I was sick. What can the proud man say? Realize how evil pride is from the very fact that there is no excuse for it. Other vices harm only those who commit them; pride inflicts far more injury upon everyone. I am saying all this lest you consider pride a trifling sin. What, in fact, does the apostle say? "Lest he incur the condemnation passed on the devil."¹⁰ The one who is puffed up with his own importance falls into the judgment of the devil. On the strength of Holy Writ, therefore, I declare, "When God is dealing with the arrogant he is stern, but to the humble, he shows kindness," so that we may shun all sin, most of all pride. HOMILY ON OBEDIENCE.¹¹

3:35 *Honor and Disgrace*

THE WISE INHERIT, BUT THE WICKED ARE DISGRACED LIKE FOOLS. HIPPOLYTUS: They will not simply obtain glory but inherit wisdom. The wicked, again, even though they are exalted, are exalted only so as to have greater dishonor. For as one does not honor someone who is ugly and misshapen, if he exalts him, but only dishonors him the more by making his shame manifest to a larger number; so also God exalts the wicked, in order that he may make their disgrace obvious. For pharaoh was exalted, but only to have the world as his accuser. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.¹²

⁹CS 82:50-51. ¹⁰See 1 Tim 3:6. ¹¹FC 57:256. ¹²ANF 5:172*; TLG 2115.053, 2 pat. 1.1.

THE COMMAND TO
OBTAIN WISDOM
PROVERBS 4:1-9

OVERVIEW: The command to follow wisdom comes from Paul as well as from Solomon (ATHANASIUS). Both the stag and the serpent, in their own ways, serve as models in the search for wisdom. We must therefore pray the Lord to open this treasury to us (EPHREM THE SYRIAN). Wisdom increases with age, whereas all other bodily excellences decay with longevity (JEROME). To observe the virtues is to honor wisdom (HIPPLYTUS). To yearn for wisdom is to love it (PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS). Wisdom is capable of tasting and apprehending the quality of spiritual foods (ORIGEN). “Spiritual marriage” in love of wisdom, therefore, is a commendable alternative (GREGORY OF NYSSA).

4:1-2 Listen and Follow

SAME SORT OF TEACHING AS FROM PAUL. ATHANASIUS: Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “You, therefore, follow me.”¹ Let us follow him then, because that commandment has been passed down to us. The admonition originally given to the church at Corinth reaches to all Christians of all time in every place. For the apostle Paul was “a teacher of all nations in faith and truth.”²

As a matter of fact, we get the same sort of teaching from all the saints of old. Solomon, for

example, used proverbs, saying, “Hear, my children, the instruction of a father and pay attention to get understanding, for I give you a good gift. Do not forsake my word, for I was an obedient son to my father, and beloved in the sight of my mother.” LETTER 2.1.³

THE GENTLE DISPOSITION OF THE STAG.

AMBROSE: Many indeed have complained over human weakness and frailty, but the holy Job and holy David have done so in a fashion superior to the rest. The former is straightforward, forceful, sharp, and displays a loftier style, as one who has been provoked by severe afflictions. The other is ingratiating and calm and mild, of a gentler disposition, so that he truly reflects the disposition of the stag which he set out as a model for his imitation.⁴ And do not be disturbed if I should appear to praise such a mighty prophet under the likeness of a wild animal, when there is read to you the maxim given to the apostles, “Be wise as serpents, guileless as doves.”⁵

But granted that likenesses of that sort find support from holy models, and that the stag is by nature harmless and gentle, still, I think that the stag which the prophet is setting out for imita-

¹1 Cor 4:16. ²1 Tim 2:7. ³NPNF 2 4:510*. ⁴See Ps 42:1 (41:1 LXX). ⁵Mt 10:16.

tion in this passage is that stag of which Solomon, that apologist for paternal thought, said in Proverbs: “Let the loving stag and the graceful fawn confer with you.”⁶ THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 4.1.1-2.⁷

4:5 Get Wisdom and Insight

OPEN UP AND PAY ATTENTION. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Open up the treasury door for us, Lord, at the prayers of our supplications; let our prayers serve as our ambassador, reconciling us with your Divinity. Listen, all who are wise, pay attention, all who are learned, acquire understanding and knowledge, seeing that you are instructed and wise. HYMNS PRESERVED IN ARMENIAN I.I.⁸

WISDOM ALONE INCREASES WITH AGE.

JEROME: Almost all bodily excellences alter with age, and while wisdom alone increases all other functions decay. Fasting, sleeping on the ground, moving from place to place, hospitality to travelers, pleading for the poor, perseverance in standing at prayer, the visitation of the sick, manual labor to supply money for almsgiving—all acts, in short, of which the body is the medium decrease with its decay.

Now there are young men and men of riper age who, by toil and ardent study, as well as by holiness of life and constant prayer to God, have obtained knowledge. I do not speak of these, or say that in them the love of wisdom is cold, for this withers in many of the old by reason of age. What I mean is that youth, as such, has to cope with the assaults of passion, and amid the allurements of vice and the tinglings of the flesh is stifled like a fire fed with wood too green and cannot develop its proper brightness. But when men have employed their youth in commendable pursuits and have meditated on the law of the Lord day and night, they learn with the lapse of time, fresh experience and wisdom come as the years go by, and so from the pursuits of the past their old age—their old age, I repeat—reaps a harvest of delight. Hence that wise man of

Greece,⁹ perceiving, after the expiration of one hundred and seven years, that he was on the verge of the grave, is reported to have said that he regretted extremely having to leave life just when he was beginning to grow wise. LETTER 52.3.¹⁰

4:6-8 To Love and Embrace

TO OBSERVE THE VIRTUES IS TO HONOR

WISDOM. HIPPLYTUS: What is meant by “exalt her”? Surround her with holy thoughts, for you have need of larger defense, since there are many things to imperil such a possession. But if it is in our power to fortify her, and if there are virtues in our power which exalt the knowledge of God, these will be her bulwarks, as, for example: practice, study, and the whole chain of other virtues. The one who observes these honors wisdom, and the reward is to be exalted with her and to be embraced by her in the chamber of heaven. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.¹¹

YEARNING FOR WISDOM. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS: Some of our writers on sacred matters have thought the term *yearning* to be more divine than “love.” The divine Ignatius writes, “He for whom I yearn has been crucified.” In the introductory Scriptures you will note the following said about the divine wisdom: “I yearned for her beauty.”¹² So let us not fear this title of “yearning” or be upset by what anyone has to say about these two names, for, in my opinion, the sacred writers regard “yearning” and “love” as having one and the same meaning. DIVINE NAMES 4.12.¹³

DEEPER MEANING OF LOVE. ORIGEN: Therefore, in both these and in many other places, you will find that the divine Scripture avoids the word “love” and inserted “charity” and “affection.” Nonetheless, here and there he uses the proper word “love” and invites and stirs up souls to him,

⁶See Prov 5:19 LXX. ⁷FC 65:389. ⁸CS 101:36. ⁹Theophrastus. ¹⁰LCC 5:316-17*. ¹¹ANF 5:172**; TLG 2115.053,4.1. ¹²Wis 8:2. ¹³PDCW 81*.

as when he speaks in Proverbs about Wisdom: "Fall in love with her and she will save you; embrace her and she will exalt you; honor her that she may embrace you." But also in that book that is called the Wisdom of Solomon it has been written about Wisdom herself, "I have become a lover of her beauty."¹⁴ But I think that he he has inserted the word "love" only where there seems to be no opportunity for misunderstanding. For what fickleness or shame could anyone detect in the love of wisdom or in him who professes that he is a lover of wisdom? For if he had said that Isaac had fallen in love with Rebekah or Jacob with Rachel, some shameful passion could have been understood through these words to have transpired among the holy people of God. This misunderstanding would especially be common among those who do not know how to ascend from the letter to the spirit. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.¹⁵

THE ROLE OF TASTE AND SIGHT IN SPIRITUAL LOVE. ORIGEN: Just as taste and sight are different perceptions so far as the body is concerned, so, in accordance with the divine perceptions mentioned by Solomon, the visual and contemplative power of the soul is one thing, but that which is capable of tasting and apprehending the quality of spiritual foods is another.¹⁶

And . . . the Lord is capable of being tasted, being food for the soul, insofar as he is the bread of life which came down from heaven,¹⁷ and is capable of being seen, insofar as he is wisdom, of

whose beauty he confesses to be a lover who says, "I became a lover of her beauty,"¹⁸ and he commands us, "Love her, and she will preserve you." For this reason it is said in the Psalms, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."¹⁹ COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 20.405-6.²⁰

WISDOM WILL HONOR YOU IF YOU EMBRACE HER. GREGORY OF NYSSA: If anyone is going to obey Solomon and take true wisdom as the companion and sharer of his life, concerning which he says, "Love her, and she will safeguard you," and "Honor her, in order that she may embrace you," he will worthily prepare himself for this longing, keeping festival in a pure garment, rejoicing with those in this marriage, in order not to be rejected because of being clothed as a married person.

It is clear that the eagerness for this kind of marriage is common to men and women alike, for since, as the apostle says, "There is neither male nor female,"²¹ and Christ is all things for all human beings, the true lover of wisdom has as his goal the divine One who is true wisdom, and the soul, clinging to its incorruptible bridegroom, has a love of true wisdom which is God. Now, what spiritual marriage is and toward what goal the pure and divine love looks has been sufficiently revealed in what we have said before. ON VIRGINITY 20.²²

¹⁴Wis 8:2. ¹⁵Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.68.22. ¹⁶See Wis 7:22-23.

¹⁷See Jn 6:51. ¹⁸Wis 8:2. ¹⁹Ps 34:8 (33:9 LXX). ²⁰FC 89:288**.

²¹Gal 3:28. ²²FC 58:64.



THE STRAIGHT PATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS PROVERBS 4:10-27

OVERVIEW: There is only one way of truth, but different paths come from different places (CLEM-ENT OF ALEXANDRIA). To follow this path, one should gird oneself with purity (PETER CHRYSOLOGUS) and follow the way of light (GREGORY OF NYSSA), keeping out the demons (ORIGEN). The real enemies are not flesh and blood (ATHANASIUS) but sins of the mind (GERONTIUS OF PETRA). We must not listen to the serpent within (MACARIUS), for evil thoughts are the source of all sin (ORIGEN). Therefore we must guard our heart and our mouth (AMBROSE) and sever the old bonds of attachment. We must guard our heart with constant vigilance (BASIL), neither lusting nor lingering (CAESARIUS), and seeking others' help if needed (BEDE). We should follow the divinely inspired Scriptures and fix our gaze straight ahead (CYRIL OF ALEXAN-DRIA), forseeing what outcome awaits (BEDE) but remembering always that sin lies within us (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). The straight paths run toward our goal, the prize of our heavenly calling in Christ

(CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), and they are available even to those who limp (ORIGEN). God gives us grace and free will to make our paths straight (AUGUSTINE), so we must neither swerve nor deviate in either direction (AUGUSTINE, JOHN CASSIAN). Indeed, the good Shepherd will guide us (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS).

4:10-11 *One Way, Many Paths*

MORE THAN ONE PATH OF SALVATION? CLEM-ENT OF ALEXANDRIA: There is only one way of truth, but different paths from different places join it, just like tributaries flowing into a perennial river. So these are really inspired words: "Hear, my son, and accept my words, to have many paths of life. I am teaching you the ways of wisdom, so that its springs may never fail you"—that is, those which spurt from the same soil. He is not merely affirming that there is more than one path of salvation for a single righteous person. He adds that there are

plenty of righteous people and plenty of routes for them. He explains this as follows: “The paths of the righteous shine like light.”¹ STROMATEIS 1.5.29.1-3.²

4:16 Sleeplessness of the Wicked

CINCTURE OF PURITY. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: Let your loins be girded about. Virtue should serve as a girdle in the place where passion should be checked. One who drops off the girdle of virtue cannot overcome the vices of the body. So girded with the cincture of purity—it is the badge of membership in the Christian army—let us cut away the dissolute cowardice of the flesh. Alert while watching our king, let us have no part in the restless sleep of worldly-minded people. For the wicked, Scripture says, “cannot sleep unless they have done wrong.” SERMON 22.³

4:18 The Path of the Righteous Is the Way of Light

PARTICIPATION IN THE TRUE LIGHT. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The person who removes himself from all hatred and fleshly odor and rises above all low and earthbound things, having ascended higher than the whole earth in his aforementioned flight, will find the only thing that is worth longing for. Having come close to beauty, he will become beautiful himself. Through his participation in the true light, he will himself be in a state of brightness and illumination. For just as at night the multitudinous glowing objects of the air which certain people call “shooting stars” . . . just as this earthly air, when it is forced upwards by the wind, becomes light-like, being changed in the clarity of the ether, so it is with the mind of man. After leaving this muddy and dusty life, it is purified through the power of the Spirit, becomes light-like, and is mixed with the true and lofty purity, and glows and is filled with rays and becomes light in accordance with the promise of the Lord who declared that the just will shine like the sun. ON VIRGINITY II.⁴

4:23 Keeping the Heart with Vigilance

NECESSARY TO EXCLUDE THE DEMONS. ORIGEN: We who knew these and similar sayings wish to observe this precept with the mystical meaning, namely, “Keep your heart with all diligence,” that nothing of a demoniacal nature may enter into our minds or any spirit of our adversaries turn our imagination whither it chooses. But we pray that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God may shine in our hearts, and that the Spirit of God may dwell in our imaginations, and lead them to contemplate the things of God; for “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”⁵ AGAINST CELSUS 4.95.⁶

OUR ENEMIES ARE NOT FLESH AND BLOOD. ATHANASIUS: Living thus, let us watch constantly and, as it is written, keep our heart with all watchfulness, for we have terrible and crafty enemies, the wicked demons, and we wrestle against them, as the apostle said: “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness on high.”⁷ LIFE OF ST. ANTHONY 21.⁸

GUARD YOUR HEART. GERONTIUS OF PETRA: Many people who are tempted by bodily delights do not sin with the body but lust with the mind: they keep their bodily virginity but lust in the soul. It is good then, my beloved, to do what is written: “Let everyone keep a close guard upon his heart.” SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS 5.2.⁹

DO NOT LISTEN TO THE SERPENT WITHIN. MACARIUS: Scripture enjoins everyone to “guard his own heart with all diligence,” so that anyone, guarding the word within him like a paradise, may enjoy the grace not to listen to the serpent

¹Prov 4:18; RSV “path,” LXX “paths” (*hodoi*). ²FC 85:42*. ³FC 17:68*. ⁴FC 58:40-41*. ⁵See Rom 8:14. ⁶ANF 4:539. ⁷Eph 6:12. ⁸FC 15:155. ⁹LCC 12:60.

that creeps around inside, enticing him with things that lead to pleasure whereby anger that slays a brother is engendered and the soul, that gives birth to it, itself dies. But may he have the grace rather to listen to the Lord saying, “Be concerned with faith and hope through which love of God and of man is engendered which bestows eternal life.” . . .

For in a proportionate measure the word of God comes to each person. As long as a person possesses the word, he is held by the word and as long as he keeps it, so long he is guarded. FIFTY SPIRITUAL HOMILIES 37.1.¹⁰

EVIL THOUGHTS ARE THE SOURCE OF ALL SIN. ORIGEN: The spring and source, then, of every sin are evil thoughts; for, unless these gained mastery, neither murders nor adulteries nor any other such thing would exist. Therefore, each person must keep his own heart with all watchfulness; for when the Lord comes in the day of judgment, “He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”¹¹ COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 11.15.¹²

GUARDING OUR HEART AND OUR MOUTH. AMBROSE: Let us then guard our hearts, let us guard our mouths. Both have been written about. In this place we are bidden to take heed to our mouth; in another place you are told, “Keep your heart with all diligence.” If David took heed, will you not take heed? If Isaiah had unclean lips—who said, “Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man, and have unclean lips”¹³—if a prophet of the Lord had unclean lips, how shall we have them clean? . . .

Your possession is your mind, your gold your heart, your silver your speech: “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the fire.”¹⁴ A good mind is also a good possession. And, further, a pure inner life is a valuable possession. Hedge in, then, this possession of yours, enclose it with thought, guard it with thorns, that is, with pious care, lest the fierce passions of the flesh should

rush upon it and lead it captive, lest strong emotions should assault it, and, overstepping their bounds, carry off its vintage. Guard your inner self. DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 1.3.10-II.¹⁵

THE NEED TO SEVER THE OLD BONDS. BASIL THE GREAT: Whoever, therefore, would be truly a follower of God must sever the bonds of attachment to this life, and this is done through complete separation from and forgetfulness of old habits. We must wrest ourselves from both fleshly ties and worldly society, being transported, as it were, to another world in our manner of living, as the apostle said: “But our commonwealth is in heaven.”¹⁶ Without this it is impossible for us to achieve our goal of pleasing God, inasmuch as the Lord said specifically, “So likewise every one of you that does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.”¹⁷ And having done this, we should watch over our heart with all vigilance. THE LONG RULES 5.¹⁸

CONSTANT VIGILANCE IS NEEDED. BASIL THE GREAT: Believe these words of mine that proceed from the fraternal charity of my heart. Have recourse to older men who make themselves difficult of access and in no way harm the young by their charm of countenance but animate them to virtuous deeds by sayings from Proverbs. “With all watchfulness, keep your heart”; for, like golden treasure, it is the object of the constant vigilance of thieves, night and day, and in an unguarded moment it is stolen without your being aware of it. See that the adversary does not seduce you into the sin of our first parent and cast you with all speed out of the paradise of delight. ON RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD.¹⁹

NEITHER LUST NOR LINGER. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Let us listen to the prophet when he says, “With all watchfulness keep your heart,” and

¹⁰TWG 188. ¹¹1 Cor 4:5. ¹²ANF 9:444*. ¹³Is 6:5. ¹⁴Ps 12:6 (11:7 LXX, Vg). ¹⁵NPNF 2 10:2-3. ¹⁶Phil 3:20. ¹⁷Lk 14:33. ¹⁸FC 9:242-43**. ¹⁹FC 9:24.

“Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity.”²⁰ When someone lays hold of coals of fire but immediately throws them away they do not hurt him. But if he wants to hold on to them longer, he cannot get rid of them without injury. Similarly, if a man gazes lustfully and by lingering over it allows the evil of lust in his heart to get a hold on his thoughts, he cannot shake them off without injury to his soul. *SERMON 41.5.*²¹

BE VIGILANT AND SEEK OTHERS’ HELP IF NEEDED. BEDE: Solomon convinces us to chastise all these kinds of evil thoughts when he says, “Guard your heart with all vigilance, for life comes forth from it.” Following his suggestion, let us act quickly, that if we transgress in any way in our thoughts by consenting to carry out something wicked, we may swiftly wipe away this [transgression] by confession and fruits worthy of repentance.²² If we perceive that we are being tempted by delight in committing sin, let us drive away this noxious delight by our frequent prayers and tears and by our frequent recollection of everlasting bitterness. If we see that we are not capable of ridding ourselves of it on our own, let us seek the help of our brothers, that we may accomplish by their advice and intercession what we are unable to do by our own strength. *HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 2.12.*²³

4:25 *Looking Directly Forward*

FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: It is necessary that, before other things, you have a sound mind within yourselves and that you be mindful of holy Scripture addressing you and saying, “Let your eyes look straight ahead.” . . . To slip away from the rightness of holy doctrines would be nothing else except to sleep in death. We depart from this rightness when we do not follow the divinely inspired Scriptures. *LETTER 55.3.*²⁴

FORESEE WHAT OUTCOME AWAITS. BEDE: Solomon, advising the wise hearer, says, “And let

your eyes anticipate your footsteps,” which is to declare clearly that in all our actions we should take care to foresee with earnest intent what outcome awaits us, we should examine skillfully what is done according to the will of God and what opposes it. *COMMENTARY ON 2 PETER 1:9.*²⁵

BUT SIN IS WITHIN US. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Someone will say, “What, then, is sin? Is it an animal? An angel? A demon? What is this which infects us?” Rest assured it is not an enemy attacking from without but an evil springing up within you. “Let your eyes look straight ahead,” and there exists no evil desire. If you do not steal the property of others, robbery is at an end. Be mindful of the judgment and neither fornication nor adultery nor murder nor any wickedness will prevail over you. It is when you forget God that you begin to entertain evil thoughts and commit wicked deeds. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES 2.2.*²⁶

4:26 *Watch Where You Step*

STRAIGHT PATHS FOR THOSE WHO LIMP. ORIGEN: “Invite the poor,”²⁷ he says, those who are poor in words, so that you can make them rich. Invite “the crippled,” those whose minds are injured, so that you can heal them. Invite “the lame,” those who limp in their reason, so that they can make “straight paths.”²⁸ Invite the blind, who do not have the faculty of contemplation, so that they can see the true light.²⁹ *FRAGMENTS ON LUKE 209 (Lk 14:12-14).*³⁰

THE STRAIGHT PATHS RUN TOWARD THE GOAL. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: We remember holy Scripture crying out, “Make straight the path for your feet, and direct your ways.” They who honor the straight paths “run toward the goal to the prize of the heavenly calling in Christ.”³¹ But those who pay no heed to the apos-

²⁰Ps 119:37 (118:37 LXX). ²¹FC 31:207-8*. ²²Mt 3:8; Lk 3:8. ²³CS 111:116*. ²⁴FC 77:16. ²⁵CS 82:128**. ²⁶FC 61:97*. ²⁷Lk 14:13. ²⁸Cf. Heb 12:13. ²⁹Jn 1:9. ³⁰FC 94:211. ³¹Phil 3:14.

toloc and evangelical tradition and honor the newer, useless and truly ridiculous invention of their own mind, let them hear from all, "Pass not beyond the ancient bounds which your fathers have set."³² LETTER 31.3.³³

4:27 Do Not Swerve

GOD GIVES US GRACE AND FREE WILL.

AUGUSTINE: Mark well the counsel which the Holy Spirit gives us by Solomon: "Make straight paths for your feet, and order your ways aright. Turn not aside to the right hand nor to the left, but turn away your foot from the evil way; for the Lord knows the ways on the right hand, but those on the left are perverse. He will make your ways straight, and will direct your steps in peace." Now consider, my brothers, that in these words of holy Scripture, if there were no free will, it would not be said, "Make straight paths for your feet, and order your ways; turn not aside to the right hand, nor to the left." Nor yet, were this possible for us to achieve without the grace of God, would it be afterwards added, "He will make your ways straight and will direct your steps in peace." LETTER 215.5.³⁴

TURN TO NEITHER HAND. AUGUSTINE: Let us hold fast, then, the confession of this faith, without faltering or failure. One alone is there who was born without sin, in the likeness of sinful flesh, who lived without sin amid the sins of others, and who died without sin on account of our sins. "Let us turn neither to the right hand nor to the left." For to turn to the right hand is to deceive oneself, by saying that we are without sin; and to turn to the left is to surrender oneself to one's sins with a sort of impunity, in I know not how perverse and depraved a recklessness. ON

THE MERITS AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND ON INFANT BAPTISM 2.57.³⁵

THE GOOD SHEPHERD WILL GUIDE US.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: We must really walk on the King's highway³⁶ and take care not to turn aside from it either to the right hand or to the left, as the Proverbs say. For such is the case with our passions, and such in this matter is the task of the good shepherd, if he is to know properly the souls of his flock, and to guide them according to the methods of a pastoral care which is right and just, and worthy of our true Shepherd. IN DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT, ORATION 2.34.³⁷

DO NOT DEVIATE IN EITHER DIRECTION.

JOHN CASSIAN: And so one who wishes to go along the King's highway by means of the "arms of righteousness which are on the right hand and on the left" ought by the teaching of the apostle to pass through "honor and dishonor, evil report and good report."³⁸ And with such care [such a person ought] to direct his virtuous course amid the swelling waves of temptation, with discretion at the helm and the Spirit of the Lord breathing on us, since we know that if we deviate ever so little to the right hand or to the left, we shall presently be dashed against most dangerous crags. And so we are warned by Solomon, the wisest of men: "Turn not aside to the right hand or to the left." That is, do not flatter yourself on your virtues and be puffed up by your spiritual achievements on the right hand; nor, swerving to the path of vices on the left hand, seek from them for yourself (to use the words of the apostle) so as to "glory in your shame."³⁹ INSTITUTES II.4.⁴⁰

³²Prov 22:28. ³³FC 76:123. ³⁴NPNF 1 5:440*. ³⁵NPNF 1 5:67.

³⁶Num 20:17. ³⁷NPNF 2 7:212*. ³⁸2 Cor 6:7-8. ³⁹Phil 3:19.

⁴⁰NPNF 2 11:276*.



WARNINGS TO EXERCISE
DISCRETION
PROVERBS 5:1-14

OVERVIEW: Your heart will not slip away if you guard your thoughts (GREGORY THE GREAT). At the beginning righteousness can seem bitter, but it will be sweet at the end (ORIGEN). Even the knowledge of doctrines can seem like honey dripping from a smooth tongue, when in reality it may be only the vanity of an expert theologian who is also a shameless fornicator (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). It is possible to commit adultery with one's eyes (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). There are only two roads, one leading to death and one to life (CAESARIUS). What promises to be love may result only in slavery (CHRYSOSTOM). It is better to seek rest as the result of labor rather than to settle for labor as the result of rest (CAESARIUS). Practical advice assists us on the flight away from evil (AMBROSE). Immediate gratification lasts only an instant (ATHANASIUS). We are created in the image and likeness of our Creator, so we must not waste our honor or our years (GREGORY THE GREAT).

5:1 Be Attentive to Wisdom

GUARD YOUR THOUGHTS. GREGORY THE GREAT: "Attend to my wisdom, and bow your ear to my prudence, that you may guard your thoughts. For, indeed, nothing is more fugitive than the heart, which deserts us as often as it slips away through evil thoughts. Therefore, the psalmist says, "My heart has failed me."¹ Yet, when he returns to himself, he says, "Your servant has found his heart to pray to you." When, therefore, thought is kept under guard, the heart which was inclined to fly away is found. PASTORAL RULE 3.14.15.²

5:3-4 Dripping with Honey but Bitter as Wormwood

¹Ps 40:12 (39:13 Vg). ²NPNF 2 12:37*

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS BITTER AT THE BEGINNING, SWEET AT THE END. ORIGEN: "In the end," [Solomon] says, "you will find what seemed sweet in the beginning to be more bitter than gall and sharper than the edge of a sword." But the nature of righteousness is the opposite: In the beginning, it seems more bitter, but in the end, when it produces fruits of virtue, it is found to be sweeter than honey. HOMILIES ON JOSHUA 14.2.³

THE EXPERT THEOLOGIAN WHO IS ALSO A SHAMELESS FORNICATOR. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: What does it profit a man to be an expert theologian if he is a shameless fornicator; or to be nobly temperate but an impious blasphemer? The knowledge of doctrines is a precious possession. There is need of a vigilant soul, since many there are who would deceive you by philosophy and vain deceit.⁴ The Greeks, indeed, by their smooth tongue lead men astray, for honey drops from the lips of a harlot. CATECHETICAL LECTURES 4.2.⁵

SINNERS ARE PLEASED FOR A WHILE. ATHANASIUS: Even when the sinner looks for gratification, he doesn't find the fruit of his sin pleasant. As the wisdom of God says in another place, "Bread of deceit is pleasant to a man, but after he eats it, his mouth will be filled with gravel."⁶ And, "Honey drips from the lips of an adulteress, and for a time it tastes sweet, but in the end you will find it more bitter than gall and sharper than a two-edged sword." So he eats and is quite pleased for a little while. Then, when it is too late, when he has cut off his soul from God, he rejects it. But the fool does not know that those who are cut off from God shall perish. LETTER 7.5.⁷

TWO ROADS LEADING TO DEATH OR LIFE. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: In a very short time [the devil] leads the proud and wicked to death on a broad and spacious path. Christ our Lord, on the contrary, leads the humble and obedient to life on the straight and narrow path. Both of these roads, the wide one and the narrow one,

have an end and are very short. Labor is not long on the narrow road, nor is joy lengthy on the broad one. Those whom the broad way of wickedness delights, after brief joy will have endless punishment. Those who follow Christ on the narrow way, after brief tribulations will merit to reach eternal rewards. If a layman who is in the world possesses pride, it is a sin for him. If a monk is proud, it is a sacrilege. You ought to show yourselves living so holy a life, so justly and piously in such a way that your merits may not only suffice for you but also find pardon in this world for other sinners. If we do not bridle our tongue, our religion is not true but false;⁸ and it would have been better not to have made a vow than after the vow not to do what was promised. SERMON 233.7.⁹

NOT LOVE, BUT SLAVERY. CHRYSOSTOM: The harlot knows not how to love, but only to ensnare. Her kiss has poison, and her mouth a pernicious drug. And if this does not immediately appear, it is the more necessary to avoid her on that account, because she veils that destruction, and keeps that death concealed, and does not permit it to become manifest from the outset. So if any one pursues pleasure and a life full of gladness, let him avoid the society of fornicating women, for they fill the minds of their lovers with a thousand conflicts and tumults, setting in motion against them continual strifes and contentions, by means of their words and all their actions. And just as it is with those who are the most virulent enemies, so the object of their actions and schemes is to plunge their lovers into shame and poverty and the worst extremities. And in the same manner as hunters when they have spread out their nets, they try to drive the wild animals into them, in order that they may put them to death. So also it is with these women. HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES 14.10.¹⁰

³FC 105:133. ⁴See Col 2:8. ⁵FC 61:120*. ⁶Prov 20:17. ⁷NPNF 2 4:525**. ⁸See Jas 1:26. ⁹FC 66:198*. ¹⁰NPNF 1 9:435*.

REST AS A RESULT OF LABOR RATHER THAN LABOR AS A RESULT OF REST. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Let us reflect on what is written concerning dissipation and evil desires: “The lips of an adulteress are sweet for a time,” it says, “but in the end she is more bitter than gall.” Now since our life in this world is known to be, as it were, a road, it is necessary for us to reach rest as the result of our labor rather than labor as the result of rest. It is better for us to work for a short time on the way, in order that afterwards we may be able happily to reach eternal joy in our [home country], with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. SERMON 231.6.¹¹

5:8 Do Not Even Go Near

ADULTERY WITH THE EYES. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: We should also be particularly careful of our eyes, for it is better to slip with the feet than with the eyes. The Lord offers a remedy for this weakness, indeed, with curt words: “If your eye scandalizes you, cut it out,”¹² thereby tearing lust up by the roots. Melting glances, and sly looks out of the corner of the eye, which is what is also called winking, are nothing more than adultery with the eyes, since lust operates at a distance through them. The sight sins before the rest of the body does. “The eye, seeing beautiful things, gladdens the heart,” that is, when it knows how to see what is right it gives joy, “but he that winks with the eye deceitfully shall cause men sorrow.”¹³ CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 3.II.69-70.¹⁴

A GOOD FLIGHT FROM EVIL. AMBROSE: Your

flight is a good one if your heart does not act out the counsels of sinners and their designs. Your flight is a good one if your eye flees the sight of cups and drinking vessels, so that it may not become envious as it lingers over the wine. Your flight is good if your eye turns away from the woman stranger, so that your tongue may keep the truth. Your flight is a good one if you do not answer the fool according to his folly.¹⁵ Your flight is good if you direct your footsteps away from the countenance of fools. Indeed, one swiftly goes astray with bad guides; but if you wish your flight to be a good one, remove your ways far from their words. FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD 9.56.¹⁶

5:9 Honor and Years Wasted

IMAGES OF THE CREATOR, OR BODIES OF CLAY? GREGORY THE GREAT: For who are more alien to us than evil spirits, who are separated from the lot of the heavenly country? And what honor is ours, though made in bodies of clay, that we are yet created after the image and likeness of our Maker? Or who is more cruel than the apostate angel, who has both afflicted himself with the pain of death through pride, and still, though lost himself, brought death to the human race? He who, being made after the image and likeness of God, gives his honor to aliens therefore devotes the seasons of his life to the pleasures of evil spirits. He also surrenders his years to the cruel one who spends the space of life accorded him after the will of the ill-dominieering adversary. PASTORAL RULE 3.I2.I3.¹⁷

¹¹FC 66:188-89. ¹²Mt 5:29. ¹³Prov 15:30. ¹⁴FC 23:252-53. ¹⁵Cf. Prov 26:4. ¹⁶FC 65:322. ¹⁷NPNF 2 12:34**.



INTIMATE AFFECTION
SHOULD NOT BE DISPERSED
PROVERBS 5:15-23

OVERVIEW: Drink from your own cistern, and make use of your own resources (AMBROSE, ORIGEN, BASIL, JOHN CASSIAN). You are not merely watering the earth but enlightening human souls (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). Since love is a gift of the Spirit, even if you appear pious yet follow evil ways, you cannot love (AUGUSTINE). The hind and the doe indicate a bond of affection that should be imitated by humans (HIPPOLYTUS). To run with a foreign woman is like being content with secular education rather than the Word of the Lord (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). We can easily be caught in our own sin (AUGUSTINE), in which case we are punished by ourselves (SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER). Therefore we ourselves must wash ourselves clean, and then we shall be happy (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). But those who sin and have no discipline will perish (CHRYSOSTOM).

5:15-17 *Your Cistern for Yourself Alone*

SEARCH YOURSELF AND BEAR YOUR OWN

FRUIT. AMBROSE: Bear fruit for your own joy and delight. In yourself lies the sweetness of your charm, from you does it blossom, in you it sojourns, within you it rests, in your own self you must search for the jubilant quality of your conscience. For that reason he [Solomon] says, “Drink water out of your own cistern and the streams of your own well.” SIX DAYS OF CREATION 3.12.49.¹

YOUR OWN WELL. ORIGEN: Attempt, O hearer, to have your own well and your own spring, so that you too, when you take up a book of the Scriptures, may begin even from your own understanding to bring forth some meaning, and in accordance with those things which you have learned in the church, you too attempt to drink from the fountain of your own abilities. You have the nature of “living water” within you.² There are within you perennial veins and streams flowing with rational understanding, if only they have

¹FC 42:103-4. ²See Gen 26:19.

not been filled with earth and rubbish. But get busy to dig out your earth and to clean out the filth, that is, to remove the idleness of your natural bent and to cast out the inactivity of your heart. *HOMILIES ON GENESIS 12.5.*³

USE YOUR OWN RESOURCES. BASIL THE GREAT: “Drink water out of your own cistern,” that is, examine your own resources, do not go to the springs belonging to others, but from your own streams gather for yourself the consolations of life. Do you have metal plates, clothing, beasts of burden, utensils of every kind? Sell them; permit all things to go except your [soul’s] liberty. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 12 (PSALM 14).*⁴

YOU WILL BE LIKE A FLOWING SPRING. JOHN CASSIAN: “Drink the waters from your own wells, fresh water from your own source.” . . . As the prophet Isaiah declares, “You will be like a well-watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters will never fail. And places emptied for ages will be built up in you. You will lift up the foundations laid by generation after generation. You will be called the builder of fences, the one who turns the pathways toward peace.”⁵ . . . And so it will happen that not only the whole thrust and thought of your heart but even all the wanderings and the straying of your thoughts will turn into a holy and unending meditation on the law of God. *CONFERENCE 14.13.*⁶

NOT MERELY WATERING THE EARTH. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Let us return to the sacred Scriptures and “drink water from our own cisterns and running water from our own wells.” Let us drink of the living water, “springing up unto life everlasting.”⁷ . . . Not visible rivers merely watering the earth with its thorns and trees, but enlightening souls. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES 16.II.*⁸

THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE REMAIN STRANGERS TO GOD. AUGUSTINE: “Let the fountain of

your water be your own and let no stranger share with you.” For all who do not love God are strangers, are antichrists. And although they enter the basilicas, they cannot be numbered among the sons of God. That fountain of life does not belong to them. Even an evil person can have baptism; even an evil person can have prophecy. We find that king Saul had prophecy; he was persecuting the holy David and was filled with the Spirit of prophecy and began to prophesy.⁹ Even an evil person can receive the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord, for about such it has been said, “He who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself.”¹⁰ Even an evil person can have the name of Christ, that is, even an evil person can be called Christian; and about these it has been said, “They profaned the name of their God.”¹¹ Therefore, even an evil man can have all these mysteries. But he cannot have love and be evil. This, then, is the peculiar gift; it is the unique fountain. For drinking of this the Spirit of God encourages you; for drinking of himself the Spirit of God encourages you. *TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 7.6.*¹²

5:19 *The Hind and the Doe*

BOND OF AFFECTION AND CONSTANCY. HIP-POLYTUS: He shows also, by the mention of the creature [the hind], the purity of that pleasure; and by the doe he intimates the quick responsive affection of the wife. And whereas he knows many things to excite, he secures them against these, and puts upon them the indissoluble bond of affection, setting constancy before them. And as for the rest, wisdom, figuratively speaking, like a stag, can repel and crush the serpentine doctrines of the heterodox. *FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.*¹³

5:20 *Be Not Infatuated with a Loose Woman*

³FC 71:183*. ⁴FC 46:184. ⁵Is 58:11-12. ⁶JCC 168. ⁷Jn 4:14. ⁸FC 64:81. ⁹See 1 Kings 19:20-24. ¹⁰1 Cor 11:29. ¹¹See Ezek 36:20. ¹²FC 92:221. ¹³ANF 5:173*; TLG 2115.013.10.2.

DO NOT SETTLE FOR SECULAR EDUCATION. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: When Scripture says, “Do not keep going steady with a foreign woman,” it is advising us to make use of secular education but not to settle there permanently. Each generation received beneficial gifts at the appropriate points, but they were in preparation for the Word of the Lord. STROMATEIS 1.5.29.9.¹⁴

5:22 *Snared by Our Iniquity*

THE INDIVIDUAL CAUGHT IN HIS OWN SIN. AUGUSTINE: Let those who are bound fear, those who are loosed fear. Let those who are loosed be afraid of being bound; those who are bound pray to be loosed. “Each one is tied up in the threads of his own sins.” And apart from the church, nothing is loosed. SERMON 295.2.¹⁵

PUNISHED BY OURSELVES. SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER. I have previously said that we are punished by God because of our sins, and now I say that we are punished by ourselves. Both are true. We are, indeed, punished by God, but we act so that he has to punish us. Since we ourselves cause our own punishment, who doubts that we punish ourselves for our own crimes? For, whoever gives cause for his punishment punishes himself, according to the saying, “Each one is bound by the rope of his own sins.” Therefore, if evil people are bound by the ropes of their own sins, each and every sinner, doubtless, binds himself when he sins. THE GOVERNANCE OF GOD 8.1.¹⁶

WASH YOURSELVES CLEAN! CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Clothed as you are in the rotten garments of your offenses and “held fast in the meshes of your

own sins,” listen to the prophet’s voice saying, “Wash yourselves clean! Put away the misdeeds of your souls from before my eyes,”¹⁷ that the angelic choir may chant over you: “Happy [are] they whose faults are taken away, whose sins are covered.”¹⁸ CATECHETICAL LECTURES I.I.¹⁹

5:23 *Death for Lack of Discipline*

FATE OF THOSE WHO SIN AND HAVE NO DISCIPLINE. CHRYSOSTOM: “He will perish here with those who have no discipline; and he will be driven out of the abundance of his fatness.”²⁰ One who becomes the prey of sin and lacks discipline will experience the same things. Indeed the one who consorts with murderers becomes a murderer. See what bitter kind of death he [Solomon] designates when he says that he [the wicked person] will die with such companions. It is indeed horrible to depart from life with a bad reputation. Depravity—what he [Solomon] calls “fatness”—multiplies so that the flesh is destroyed completely by the works of flesh, keeping one away from the very kind of life that could save him. He [the wicked person] perishes because of imprudence, not because of lustful desires: he had a legitimate means to satisfy his desire, that is, his wife. Therefore nobody is allowed to accuse nature, but only human intemperance which is not proper to nature. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 5.23.²¹

¹⁴FC 85:43. ¹⁵WSA 3 8:198. ¹⁶FC 3:226. ¹⁷See Is 1:16. ¹⁸Ps 32:1 (31:1 LXX). ¹⁹FC 61:91*. ²⁰Chrysostom diverges from LXX. ²¹PG 64:669-72.



A FATHER TO HIS SON
 PROVERBS 6:1-15

OVERVIEW: There is a responsibility involved in watching over the soul of one's neighbor. Indeed, to be watchful means going without sleep or slumber, being vigilant with eyes both within and round about (GREGORY THE GREAT). Imitate the industry of the ant (AMBROSE). Labor in proportion to your strength (BASIL). Store up for the winter (AUGUSTINE). A monastery is in many ways like a colony of "the ants of God" (AUGUSTINE, JEROME). Moreover, the ant and the bee are similar (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Both are worth imitating (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), both are models of selflessness, and the bee also is serious about the future (CHRYSOSTOM). The bee

represents a unique situation (SHENOUTE), whereby one can even speak of "spiritual honey" (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The wax symbolizes creation, the honey contemplation (EVAGRIUS). The consequences of idleness are poverty and trouble (CHRYSOSTOM).

6:1-2 To Become Surety for Your Neighbor

RESPONSIBILITY INVOLVED IN GIVING

SURETY. GREGORY THE GREAT: To be surety for a friend is to take charge of the soul of another on the surety of one's own behavior. Your hand is bound to a stranger, and your mind is bound with

the care of a responsibility which you previously did not hold. But you are snared with the words of your mouth and caught with your own speeches, because, while you are compelled to speak good things to those who are committed to you, you must yourself observe the things that you say. You are therefore snared with the words of your mouth, being constrained by the requirement of reason not to let your life be relaxed to what agrees not with your teaching. Thus before the strict Judge you are compelled to accomplish as much in deed as it is plain you have required of others by your words. PASTORAL RULE 3.4.5.¹

6:3-4 To Be Watchful Means No Sleep and No Slumber

VIGILANT EYES WITHIN AND ROUND ABOUT.

GREGORY THE GREAT: Whoever is put over others for an example of life is admonished not only to keep watch himself, but also to arouse his friend. For it is not enough for him to keep watch by living well, if he do not also remove from the indolence of sin the person he is set over. For it is well said, "Give not sleep to your eyes, nor let your eyelids slumber." To give sleep to the eyes is to cease from earnestness and thus to neglect altogether the care of our charges. The eyelids slumber when our thoughts, weighed down by sloth, connive at what they know should be reprov'd. To be fast asleep is neither to know nor to correct the deeds of those committed to us. To slumber, rather than to sleep, is to know what things are to be blamed and still through laziness of mind not to amend them by appropriate rebukes. Yet the eye through slumbering passes into the deepest sleep; since for the most part, when one who is over others does not cut off the evil that he recognizes, he eventually, as his negligence deserves, will not even recognize what is done wrong by his charges. Therefore, those who are over others must be warned to watch earnestly within and round about and to strive to become living creatures of heaven. PASTORAL RULE 3.4.5.²

6:6 The Tiny Ant

IMITATE THE INDUSTRY OF THE ANT.

AMBROSE: The ant is a tiny creature, yet it ventures to achieve things beyond its strength. It is not driven to labor as a slave is. Rather, without compulsion and with freedom of foresight, it lays up provision for a future day. Scripture admonishes us to imitate the industry of the ant: "Go to the ant, you sluggard, and consider her ways and be wiser than she." [The ant] has no land under cultivation. Yet, without a taskmaster to urge it on as it looks after its stock of food, what a harvest has it in store for itself—a harvest gathered from the results of your labors! While you may frequently be in need, it wants for nothing. There are no granaries closed to the ant, no guards impassable, no stores of grain untouchable! The guard sees and dares not prohibit the theft. The owner gazes on his loss and exacts no punishment! Over the plain moves the dark column. The paths are aglow with the concourse of voyagers and particles of grain which cannot be seized by their narrow jaws are being heaved along by their shoulders! The owner of the crop beholds all this and blushes to refuse such trifles to cooperative industry such as this! SIX DAYS OF CREATION 6.4.16.³

LABOR IN PROPORTION TO YOUR STRENGTH.

BASIL THE GREAT: Why should we dwell upon the amount of evil there is in idleness, when the apostle clearly prescribes that he who does not work should not eat.⁴ As daily sustenance is necessary for everyone, so labor in proportion to one's strength is also essential. . . . The Lord couples sloth with wickedness, saying, "Wicked and slothful servant."⁵ Wise Solomon, also, praises the laborer not only in the words already quoted, but also, in rebuking the sluggard, associating him by contrast with the tiniest of insects: "Go to the ant, O sluggard." We have reason to fear,

¹NPNF 2 12:27**. ²NPNF 2 12:27**. ³FC 42:236*. ⁴2 Thess 3:10. ⁵Mt 25:26.

therefore, lest, perchance, on the day of judgment this fault may also be alleged against us, since he who has endowed us with the ability to work demands that our labor be proportioned to our capacity. *THE LONG RULES* 37.⁶

THE PARABLE OF THE ANT OF GOD. AUGUSTINE: [The sluggard] has not imitated the ant. He has not gathered to himself grains while it was summer. What do I mean by “while it was summer”? While he had quietude of life, while he had this world’s prosperity, when he had leisure; when he was being called happy by all, while it was summer. He should have imitated the ant, he should have heard the Word of God, he should have gathered together grains, and he should have stored them within. But there came the trial of tribulation, there came upon him a winter of numbness, a tempest of fear, the cold of sorrow, whether it were loss, or any danger to his safety, or any bereavement of his family; or any dishonor and humiliation. In winter; the ant falls back upon that which in summer it has gathered together; and within its secret store, where no one can see, it is replenished by its summer toils. When for itself it was gathering together these stores in summer, every one saw it: when on these it feeds in winter, no one sees. What does this mean?

See the ant of God. He rises day by day, he hastens to the church of God, he prays, he hears a reading, he chants a hymn, he digests that which he has heard, he thinks to himself about all this, and inside he is storing up grains gathered from the threshing floor. You who hear those very things which even now are being spoken, do just this. Go forth to the church, go back from church, hear a sermon, hear a reading, choose a book, open and read it. All these things are seen when they are done. That ant is treading his path, carrying and storing up in the sight of those who see him. But in due time there comes the winter. For whom does it not come? There happens to be loss, or bereavement. Others perchance, who know not what the ant has stored up inside to

eat, pity the ant as being miserable. *EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS* 67.3.⁷

A COLONY OF ANTS IS LIKE A MONASTERY.

JEROME: [Let us ponder] Solomon’s sending us to learn wisdom from the ants, urging the sluggard to profit by their example. I began to weary of my capacity and to yearn for the cells of the monastery and to desire the comfort of the solicitude of those ants in whose community all worked together and where, since nothing belonged to anyone, all possessed all things in common. *LIFE OF MALCHUS* 7.⁸

6:8 *The Ant and the Bee*

HOW TO ORDER A MONASTERY AND DISCIPLINE A KINGDOM.

JEROME: Construct also hives for bees, for to these the proverbs of Solomon send you, and you may learn from the tiny creatures how to order a monastery and to discipline a kingdom. *LETTER 125.II.*⁹

THE ANT AND THE BEE COMPARED.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Scripture says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard, and become wiser than he.” The ant at the time of harvest lays up an ample and varied store of food against the threat of winter. “Or go to the bee and learn her diligence.” For she feeds over the whole meadow to produce a single honeycomb. *STROMATEIS* 1.6.33.5-6.¹⁰

THE ANT AND THE BEE ARE WORTH IMITATING.

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: There is the busy ant to rouse the indolent and sluggish; for when a man spends an idle youth, then he is instructed by the irrational creatures, being chided by the sacred Scripture, which says, “Go to the ant, O sluggard, and considering her ways, emulate her and become wiser than she.” For when you observe [the ant] treasuring up food for itself in good season, imitate it, and treasure up for your-

⁶FC 9:307. ⁷NPNF 1 8:282*. ⁸FC 15:294. ⁹NPNF 2 6:248. ¹⁰FC 85:46.

self the fruits of good works for the world to come. And again, “Go to the bee and learn how industrious she is”; how, hovering above flowers of all kinds, it gathers the honey for your use, that you also, by ranging over the sacred Scriptures, may lay hold of salvation for yourself. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES 9.13.*¹¹

BOTH ARE MODELS OF SELFLESSNESS. *CHRYSOSTOM:* Are you unwilling to learn from the Scriptures which teach that it is good to labor, and that he who will not work ought neither to eat?¹² Learn this lesson from the irrational creatures! . . . You should receive from this creature [the ant] the best exhortation to industrious living. Marvel at your Lord, not only because he has made heaven and the sun, but also because he has made the ant. For although this creature is small, it affords much proof of the greatness of God’s wisdom. Consider then how prudent the ant is, and consider how God has implanted in so small a body such an unceasing desire for work!

But while you learn industry from this creature, you should take from the bee at the same time a lesson of neatness, industry and social concord! For it is not more for itself, than for us, that the bee labors and toils every day, which is indeed a thing especially proper for a Christian: not to seek his own things but the things of others. As then the bee traverses all the meadows that it may prepare a banquet for others, so also, O man, you should do likewise. *HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES 12.5.*¹³

THE BEE IS SERIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

CHRYSOSTOM: “Go to the bee.” Run to the church and learn the works of light which are done in it, and how the church in holiness accomplishes what it does. See how sensible and chaste it represents itself before kings and private citizens alike. Both the rich and the poor respect its prescription for their own salvation—although it is certainly weak and despised in this world. But when the church puts its faith in Christ it is exalted. In Christ, in fact, there is a rich and luxu-

rious banquet for the time which he has appointed. The church does not look so much at what is present but rather envisions plans for the future. It prepares supplies in the summer and stores a great crop at harvest. Notice, I say, how the bee is solicitous about the future. You also should enjoy security in this life, but be careful lest, with the coming of winter, your house may be found empty and deprived of food. Notice how the bee treats everyone equally: not only is it useful to kings but to private citizens as well. Its medicine cures both alike; it serves nature but does not look for reward. You also should imitate it by valuing not so much the person but the nature of the works done. And does the bee have any beauty in its body? Not at all! For this reason, in order that lazy people might not find excuses in their weakness, Solomon chose the weakest among animals so that he might take away from them any excuses. The bee is pleasing to everybody, even to those who have no means or properties. Every day in the fields and in the cities we hear everyone speak countless praise of this insect. *COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 6.8.*¹⁴

UNIQUE SITUATION OF THE BEE. *SHENOUTE:* The bee alone, however, is collected and honored, as divine wisdom says: “It is in honor and in love among all.” . . . Furthermore, the bee is loved by merit, for his labors are given for the delight of kings and [all] humans. *TO THE GENTILE PHILOSOPHER.*¹⁵

SPIRITUAL HONEY. *CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA:*

Come, therefore, and let us also, wandering, as it were, around some intellectual meadow, gather the dew let fall by the Holy Spirit upon the divine message of the gospel, that so being enriched in mind we may bring forth the spiritual honey, even the word profitable and useful to all who thirst after the communication of the divine doctrines,

¹¹FC 61:192. ¹²2 Thess 3:10. ¹³NPNF 1 9:420*. ¹⁴PG 64:672-73.

¹⁵CSCO 96:23.

whether they be noble and illustrious, or obscure and private persons in a humble rank of life. For it is written, "Good words are as honeycomb; and their sweetness is healing to the soul."¹⁶ COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 62.¹⁷

THE PRACTICAL AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: By "ant" Solomon seems to indicate the practical way, while the "bee" designates contemplation of creation and of the Creator. Both the pure and the impure, the wise and the foolish apply [this saying] for the benefit of their souls. It seems to me that the wax corresponds to the realities of creation, while the honey symbolizes the contemplation thereof. And while wax perishes, as it is written, "Heaven and earth will pass away,"¹⁸ the honey does not perish. By the same token, the words of Christ our Savior do not pass away, about which Solomon says, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, their sweetness is health to the soul."¹⁹ Also, David says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"²⁰ SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 72.6.8.²¹

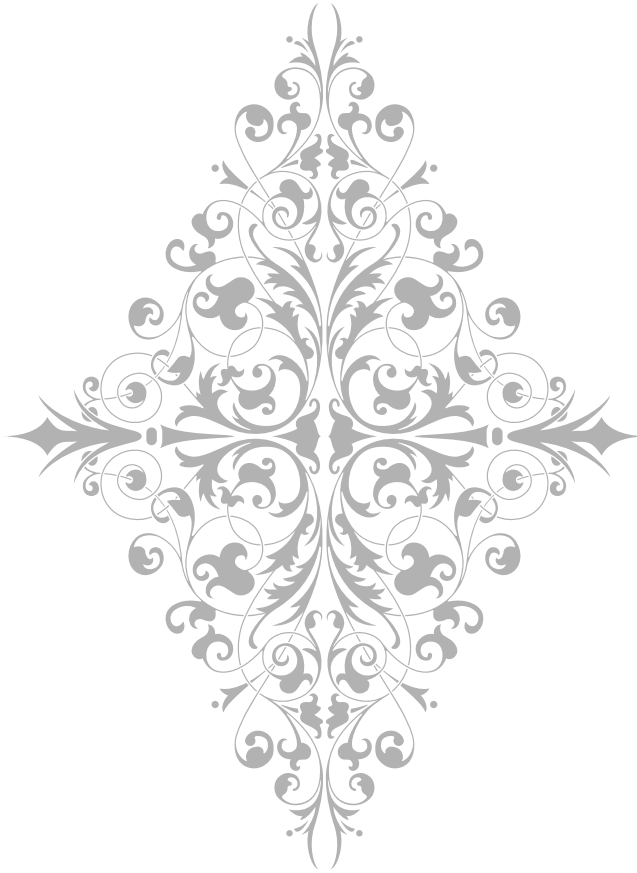
6:11-14 *Consequences of Idleness*

POVERTY COMES FROM IDLENESS. CHRYSOSTOM: "And poverty will come upon you like an evil traveler, and want like a good runner." Nothing is worse than poverty. It comes immediately to the idle and even overtakes strong runners in its speed. Poverty is just like need: poverty is lack

of knowledge; need is lack of virtue. Can you see the absolute excellence of work? Will you not be taught by instinct? Learn then from an attempt at doing something. Or, do you want to appear even more irrational? Then run away from poverty. Is work at first difficult? Then look to its results. Is idleness sweet? Then consider what comes out of it in the end. So let us not look at the beginning of things, but let us also see where they end up. The one who goes out of his house does not want to stop along the way, but already at the beginning of his journey is thinking about the end. Because he starts out this way, his beginning will bring him to the end. But you do quite the opposite. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 6.II.²²

TROUBLES ARE INSTIGATED. CHRYSOSTOM: "All the time this kind of man stirs up troubles in the city." Indeed! The words "all the time" are quite strong! In fact, even when such a person intends to command something good, his method of command is still full of suspicion. He leads people to fight and troubles secure cities with riots. This kind of a person has no peaceful spirit, nor has he listened to Jesus, who said, "How blessed are the peacemakers."²³ COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 6.I4.²⁴

¹⁶Prov 16:24. ¹⁷CGSL 266. ¹⁸Mt 24:35. ¹⁹Prov 16:24. ²⁰Ps 119:103 (118:103 LXX). ²¹SC 340:168-70. ²²PG 64:673. ²³Mt 5:9. ²⁴PG 64:673.





WARNINGS AGAINST SINS AND MISDEEDS PROVERBS 6:16 — 7:27

OVERVIEW: Sin can come from evil actions or an impure heart (CHRYSOSTOM). Discord is the worst of the seven sins (BEDE). God's law will be our lamp and our light (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). Concerning adultery, there are as many snares as there are sins, and as many hunters as there are snares (JEROME). There is a natural attraction of opposite sexes (LEANDER OF SEVILLE), but danger can come even from mere touch (JEROME). Fire and hot coals can bring trouble, but a cheap harlot even more (CAESARIUS). Temptations first enter one's mind, then into one's prayer life, and then into reality (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). Brief pleasure is not worth eternal punishment (CAESARIUS), and God is never pleased with an outward display of goodness and daring (BABAI). Some misdeeds are worse than others, as stealing for avarice is worse than stealing for hunger (SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER). Also, destruction of

the soul by adultery must be distinguished from satisfaction of hunger by theft. (CHRYSOSTOM). Yet the creed remains on the table of our hearts, collected out of Scripture (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), and wisdom, our sister, is widely available to us (ORIGEN). The seduction of the innocent but foolish young man, however, continues to remind us that worldly pleasure is contrary to nature (AMBROSE, BEDE).

6:16-19 Warnings Against Seven Sins

EVIL ACTIONS THROUGH MEMBERS OF THE BODY. CHRYSOSTOM: "A proud eye, an unjust tongue, hands that shed just blood." He [Solomon] emphasizes evil actions through members of the body used wickedly. As the eye, the tongue and the hands act in the body, in the same manner reflection, impulse and decision act

in the soul. And, he [Solomon] did not enumerate these things to us without reason, but in order that we might learn to be moderate through them. Those who, while drinking the blood of the Lord, yet remain polluted with iniquity are shedding the blood of the just. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 6.17.¹

AN IMPURE HEART MAKES THE LIMBS

IMPURE. CHRYSOSTOM: “A heart that forges evil thoughts.” Indeed, since the heart was impure, it also made the limbs impure, so that it shed the poison to its extremities. . . . By “brothers” he [Solomon] means those who have obtained the grace of adoption and are subjected to Christ our father. When unjust or lustful thoughts come to them, these thoughts try to trouble them. In fact, they inflame them to anger which causes hatred, and to evil desires which bring about immoral actions. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 6.18.²

DISCORD IS THE WORST OF THE SEVEN. BEDE:

The six capital crimes enumerated here are nevertheless like minor faults when compared with the sowing of discord, since the deed that fractures the unity and fraternity which were achieved by the grace of the Holy Spirit is surely a greater sin. For anyone can raise his eyes boastfully, lie with the tongue, pollute himself with murder, plot to harm his neighbor, subject his members to other offenses, and give false testimony against another. But it must not be thought that what he names with his lying tongue is all the same, for he is able to tell a lie without doing so against a neighbor. For, in his book about lying,³ blessed Augustine teaches that there are eight kinds of lies. Each reprobate, I say, can bring evil upon himself or upon others yet without harming the peace of the church. But what Donatus and Arius and their followers do is more serious, who destroy the harmony of fraternal unity by sowing discord. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.6.17-19.⁴

6:23 A Lamp and a Light

THE LAW OF GOD ILLUMINATES US. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Solomon also writes that “the commandment of the law is a lamp and a light.” This sensible light that is in the world, by falling on our bodily eyes, dispels the darkness. So also the law of God, when admitted into the mind and heart of people, illuminates it thoroughly and does not allow it to fall against the stumbling blocks of ignorance or be caught in the thickets of sin. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 55.⁵

6:26-28 Warnings Against Adultery

AS MANY SNARES AS SINS, AS MANY HUNTERS AS SNARES. JEROME:

We read in Proverbs, “The eyes of the harlot, the snare of the sinner.” “Anyone who even looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery in his heart.”⁶ There are as many snares as there are sins; as many hunters as there are snares. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 68 (PSALM 90).⁷

ATTRACTION OF OPPOSITE SEXES. LEANDER

OF SEVILLE: When different sexes are placed together, they derive pleasure from those instincts with which they were born, and the natural flame is lighted by unnatural contact if it touches something inflammable. Who can ever take fire to his bosom and not be burned? Fire and tow⁸ are as objects naturally opposite, but when brought together, they nourish flames. The sex of a man and of a woman is different, but, if they are brought together, the result will be what is provoked by the law of nature. THE TRAINING OF NUNS 2.⁹

DANGER COMES FROM THE MERE TOUCH.

JEROME: We must notice the apostle’s prudence. He did not say, it is good not to have a wife, but it is good not to touch a woman: as though there were danger even in the touch, as though he who

¹PG 64:673. ²PG 64:673-76*. ³*Ad Consentium Contra Mendacium* (CSEL 41:469-528). ⁴CCL 119B:55. ⁵CGSL 240**. ⁶Mt 5:28. ⁷FC 57:83. ⁸See Is 1:31. ⁹FC 62:198.

touched her would not escape from her who “hunts for the precious life” and causes the young man’s understanding to fly away. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? As then he who touches fire is instantly burned, so by the mere touch the peculiar nature of man and woman is perceived, and the difference of sex is understood. **AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.7.**¹⁰

FIRE AND HOT COALS BRING TROUBLE. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Solomon warns us against familiarity with such people when he says, “Can a man hide fire in his bosom, and his garments not burn? Or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?” And again: “The price of a harlot is scarce the half of one loaf: but the woman catches the precious soul of a man.” Oh, how great is the wickedness and how deplorable the perversity, when a dissolute man for the sake of momentary lustful pleasure sells to the devil the soul which Christ redeemed with his blood! Truly lamentable and miserable is the condition whereby what brings delight passes away at once, while what causes torture endures without end. The assault of passion disappears in a moment, but the shame of the unfortunate soul abides. **SERMON 41.3.**¹¹

FIRST IN ONE’S MIND, THEN IN ONE’S PRAYER LIFE, THEN IN REALITY. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: Do not voluntarily make trial of your mind with lewd reflections which tempt you, because in this way wise men have been darkened and made fools. Do not store a flame in your bosom.

Without harsh tribulations of the flesh it is difficult for untrained youth to be held under the yoke of sanctification. The beginning of the intellect’s darkening (once a sign of it is visible in the soul) is to be seen, first of all, in slothfulness with regard to the services¹² and prayer. For except the soul first fall away from these, she cannot be led in the way of error; but as soon as she is deprived

of God’s help, she easily falls into the hands of her adversaries. And again, whenever the soul becomes heedless of virtue’s labours, she is inevitably drawn to what is opposed to them. **ASCETICAL HOMILIES 2.**¹³

BRIEF PLEASURE IS NOT WORTH ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: “The price of a loose woman is scarcely a loaf of bread; but if she is married, she is a trap for your life.” Notice how great sin is, that on account of the space of one hour, in which an unhappy soul is joined to a prostitute, he renders himself alien to eternal life and makes himself liable to punishment by eternal fire. Even if that unfortunate delight of pleasure should stretch out over the space of a hundred years, it would not be right, and the unhappy soul would suffer eternal punishments in return for the pleasure of a hundred years. **SERMON 189.4.**¹⁴

GOD IS NOT PLEASED BY THE OUTWARD DISPLAY OF GOODNESS AND DARING. BABAI: “Can someone put fire in his lap without his clothes getting burned? Or can he walk over coals of fire without his feet getting scorched?”

Do not do anything out of the ordinary or adopt a singular way of life as long as you are with many brothers in the monastery. Otherwise when you imagine you are making progress you are in fact retrogressing, and you will be like the man who harvests and then scatters the grain, or the man who plants and then pulls up.

Try to ensure as far as possible that it is not men but God who sees your labors and good works. If they are visible to your fellow men, then the moment they are seen, they are flawed. For there is a path which appears to men to be good, but its tracks are those of death. Your religious life will be unacceptable if you show someone your good deeds.

It is very easy for someone to hide bread in the grass and then eat it, but to hide grass in bread

¹⁰NPNF 2 6:350*. ¹¹FC 31:206. ¹²Liturgical services in church.

¹³AHSIS 12. ¹⁴FC 66:19*.

and live off that is something only the discerning is able to do. It is good to hide one's good deeds: a man whose actions only God sees has reached a high [level]. *LETTER TO CYRIACUS* 27-30.¹⁵

6:30-32 Some Misdeeds Are Worse Than Others

STEALING FOR AVARICE IS WORSE THAN STEALING FOR HUNGER. *SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER*: If slaves are thieves, they are perhaps forced to steal through want. Even though the customary allowances are given, these allowances satisfy custom rather than sufficiency and thus fulfill the law without fulfilling the need. Their indulgence makes their fault less blameworthy, because the guilt of the thief who is unwillingly forced into theft is excusable. Holy Scripture seems to excuse in part the offense of the needy when it says, "The fault is not so great when a man has stolen, for he steals to feed his hungry soul." *THE GOVERNANCE OF GOD* 4.3.¹⁶

SATISFACTION OF HUNGER BY THEFT BUT DESTRUCTION OF SOUL BY ADULTERY. *CHRYSTOSTOM*: Not every sin brings the same penalty, but those which are easiest to be amended bring upon us the greatest punishment. Solomon indeed intimated this when he said, "It is not wonderful if anyone be taken while stealing, for he steals that he may satisfy his soul that is hungry, but the adulterer by lack of understanding destroys his own soul." But what he means is to this effect. The thief is a grievous offender, but not so grievous a one as the adulterer. For the former, though he has a sorry reason for his conduct, yet at the same time has to plead the necessity arising from indigence. But the latter, when no necessity compels him, by his mere madness rushes into the abyss of iniquity. *HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES* 10.II.¹⁷

7:3 The Tablet of Your Heart

THE CREED IS COLLECTED FROM SCRIPTURE. *CYRIL OF JERUSALEM*: These articles of our faith

were not composed out of human opinion but are the principal points collected out of the whole of Scripture to complete a single doctrinal formulation of the faith. And in like manner as the mustard seed contains numbers of branches-to-be within its tiny grain, so also this creed embraces in a few phrases all the religious knowledge contained in the Old and New Testaments together. Look now, brethren, and "hold the traditions,"¹⁸ which are now being imparted to you, and "write them on the table of your hearts." *CATECHETICAL LECTURES* 5.12.¹⁹

7:4 Wisdom Our Sister

WISDOM NO LONGER EXCLUSIVE. *ORIGEN*: It is proper that until we reach maturity, virtue of the soul be within us and personal, but when we reach full maturity so that we are capable also of teaching others, let us then no longer enclose virtue within our bosom as a wife but as a sister, let us unite her also with others who wish her. For to those who are perfect the divine Word says, "Say that wisdom is your sister." *HOMILIES ON GENESIS* 6.I.²⁰

7:6-23 An Innocent but Foolish Young Man

THE SEDUCTION OF WORLDLY PLEASURE CONTRARY TO NATURE. *AMBROSE*: She endeavors to steal the hearts of young men—a woman restless at home, a wanderer in the public squares, prodigal of kisses, indifferent to shame, gaudy in her dress and countenance. Since she is unable, indeed, to assume a beauty that is true to nature, she affects what is the opposite to truth—an external show of meretricious arts. . . . She attacks the citadels of men's hearts while uttering such words as these as a war cry: "I have vowed victims for peace, this day I have paid my vows. Therefore I am come out to meet you, desirous to see you, and I have found you. I have

¹⁵CS 101:148.* ¹⁶FC 3:95. ¹⁷NPNF 1 9:411*. ¹⁸2 Thess 2:15.

¹⁹LCC 4:124. ²⁰FC 71:122-23.*

woven my bed with cords. I have covered it with tapestry from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with saffron and my home with cinnamon. Come and let us wrestle with desire.” Here in the words of Solomon we behold the very picture of a wanton [woman]. What other than worldly pleasure is more characteristic of a prostitute who makes her entrance stealthily into the house, first making tentative explorations with her eyes and then entering quickly, while you concentrate the gaze of your soul outward on the public square, that is, on the streets frequented by passersby and not inward on the mysteries of the law? She has contrived to trap us in a room devoted to the associations of common life by such solid chains that a person, although held in bondage, finds herself at ease there. As she reclines there she covers her body with coverlets of fraud and deceit so as to allure the souls of young men, alleging the absence of a husband, that is to say, her disregard for the law. The law does not exist for sinners, for, if it were present, it would not have been ignored. Hence we read: “For my husband is not at home, he is gone a very long journey. He took with him a bag of money.” What is the meaning of this, if not that the rich believe that there is nothing that money cannot control and that the law is something that can be sold for profit? Pleasure dissipates its fragrance because it has not the fragrance of Christ.²¹ Pleasure looks for treasures, it promises kingdoms, it assures lasting loves, it pledges undreamed of intimacies, instruction without a guardian and conversation without

hindrance. Pleasure promises a life bereft of anxiety, a sleep devoid of disturbance and wants that cannot be satiated. We read: Entangling him with many words and alluring him with the snares of her lips, she led him even to her home. He was beguiled and followed her. . . . Everything there was confused and contrary to the order of nature. CAIN AND ABEL 1.4.14.²²

HE WILL COME HOME. ORIGEN: In these words, “after many days he will return home,” Paul (who in the spirit perceived the plan of the divine economy) refers to the last enemy which is to be destroyed, that is, death.²³ That enemy is the man of wickedness that Solomon will describe as one who took in his hand “a bag of money,” that is, humanity. When [humanity] sins again and again, it allows itself to disregard the fear of God. It [only] becomes distressed when the human race is brought to the point of trials. Otherwise, if it never envisioned any fear of God at all, it would have perished in an instant. EXPOSITION ON PROVERBS, FRAGMENT 7.20.²⁴

A FINAL COMMENT. BEDE: Uncircumcised in smell and touch are those who are steeped in ointment and various odors, who pursue the embraces of a harlot, sprinkling their bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS I.II.²⁵

²¹2 Cor 2:15. ²²FC 42:370-71*. ²³1 Cor 15:26. ²⁴PG 17:181. ²⁵CS 110:110.



THE CALL OF WISDOM PROVERBS 8:1-21

OVERVIEW: Meanings of words are distinct and different (HILARY). Wisdom examines the levels of advice, aware of the usefulness of varied methods of persuasion (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). We are indebted to the Greeks and the barbarians, to the wise and the foolish (ORIGEN). There is a concord and harmony in the law and the prophets (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA), and in the gospel, which presents words and symbols, having outward and inward significance (ORIGEN). Wisdom, which is better than precious jewels, is an incomparable blessing that comes to us from above by means of holy Scripture (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). Even kings and rul-

ers have nothing without wisdom (BEDE). Those who deny the truth of faith have not even received salvation in baptism (FULGENTIUS). Discipline, even instruction and knowledge, is always to be preferred to silver or gold (BASIL).

8:4 *The Call Goes Out*

MEANINGS OF WORDS ARE DISTINCT AND DIFFERENT. HILARY OF POITIERS: In the first place, while wisdom addresses everyone, it warns the simple to understand subtlety and the unlearned to apply their heart, in order that the zealous and attentive reader may evaluate the

meanings of words that are distinct and different. It teaches, therefore, that all things are to be done, understood, praised and grasped according to its methods and plans. *ON THE TRINITY* 12.44.¹

THREE METHODS OF ADVICE AND PERSUASION. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: When the educator says in one of the passages of Solomon's work, "O men, to you I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Hear, for I will speak of great things," and the rest of the passage, he is making use of persuasion—persuasion to something that is useful. Since advice is called for when there is a question of free acceptance or rejection, he is here advising what will lead to salvation. . . . There are three possible methods of giving advice. The first is to take examples from times gone by, such as the punishments the Jews met with after they had worshiped the golden calf,² or when they had committed fornication,³ or after similar misdeeds. The second method is to call attention to some conclusion drawn from present events, as a conclusion readily grasped by the mind, such was the answer given by the Lord to those who asked him, "Are you the Christ, or should we look for another?" "Go," he said, "report to John that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead rise, and blessed is he who is not scandalized in me."⁴ . . . Finally, the third method of advice is drawn from future events, in which things that are to come put us on our guard; an example is that saying that those falling into sin "will be put forth into the darkness outside, there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth,"⁵ and sayings of the same import. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that the Lord calls humankind to salvation by using progressively every kind of treatment. *CHRIST THE EDUCATOR* I.IO.90-91.⁶

8:5-7 Learn Prudence and Pay Attention

WE ARE DEBTORS. ORIGEN: Those among us who are ambassadors of Christianity sufficiently

declare that they are debtors to Greeks and barbarians, to wise men and fools (for they do not deny their obligation to cure the souls even of foolish persons), in order that as far as possible they may lay aside their ignorance and endeavor to obtain greater prudence, by listening also to the words of Solomon: "O fools, be of an understanding heart," and "Whoever is the most simple among you, let him turn unto me."⁷ Wisdom exhorts those who are empty of understanding in the words, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mixed for you. Forsake folly that you may live, and correct understanding in knowledge."⁸ *AGAINST CELSUS* 3.54.⁹

DENIAL OF SALVATION IN BAPTISM. FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: "For my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips." Therefore, they who do not hold the truth of the faith in heart and mouth do not receive salvation in baptism. Because of this, although they have the appearance of piety which consists in the sacrament of baptism, by refusing the power of piety they receive neither life nor salvation. *LETTER* 7.¹⁰

8:9-11 All Things Are Right in Scripture

CONCORD AND HARMONY OF LAW AND PROPHETS. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: [Jesus] "spoke all things in parables, and without a parable he spoke nothing" [to the apostles];¹¹ and if "all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made,"¹² consequently also prophecy and the law were by him and were spoken by him in parables. "But all things are right," says the Scripture, "before those who understand," that is, those who receive and observe, according to the church's rule of faith, the exposition of the Scriptures explained by him. And the church's rule is the concord and harmony of the law and the prophets in the cove-

¹FC 25:532*. ²See Ex 32:26-28. ³See Num 25:4-9. ⁴Mt 11:3-6. ⁵Mt 8:12. ⁶FC 23:79-80. ⁷Prov 9:4. ⁸Prov 9:5-6. ⁹ANF 4:485-86*. ¹⁰FC 95:480. ¹¹Mt 13:34. ¹²Jn 1:3.

nant delivered at the coming of the Lord. Knowledge is then followed by practical wisdom and practical wisdom by self-control, for it may be said that practical wisdom is divine knowledge and exists in those who share in God's life, while the self-control that is mortal, which is present in those who philosophize, is not yet wise. STROMATEIS 6.15.¹³

CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM. ORIGEN: That which John calls an eternal gospel,¹⁴ which would properly be called a spiritual gospel, clearly presents both the mysteries presented by Christ's words and the things of which his acts were symbols, to those who consider "all things face to face" concerning the Son of God himself. Consistent with these matters, we understand that just as one is a Jew outwardly and circumcised, there being both an outward and inward circumcision, so it is with a Christian and baptism. COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 1.40.¹⁵

PREFER DISCIPLINE OVER SILVER. BASIL THE GREAT: "Accept discipline, not silver," so that at a time of calamity or physical illness or domestic trouble, you would think nothing at all perverse of God, but accept the blows meted out by him with great patience as though you were being castigated for your sins. Thus, conscious of being disciplined, say, "I will bear the wrath of the Lord because I have sinned against him."¹⁶ HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 5.¹⁷

INCOMPARABLE BLESSING. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: It is written that "wisdom is better than stones of costly price; and all precious things are not comparable to her." For the wisdom that comes from above, from God, is an incomparable blessing. When we attain to it by means of the holy Scripture, which is inspired of God, and gain the divine light to dwell in our minds, we then advance without wandering, and we come toward whatever is useful for our spiritual profit. Come, therefore, and let us now also scrupulously examine the meaning of the Gospel lessons. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 133.¹⁸

8:15 *By Me Kings Reign*

EVEN KINGS AND RULERS HAVE NOTHING WITHOUT WISDOM. BEDE: Those whom it calls "kings" are the apostles and other saints, like the lawmakers and authors of both Testaments and the subsequent writers of the church. They have learned first how to rule themselves, and then the church that was put under their care. Those whom it calls "rulers" are governors and other powerful leaders of the faithful. But none of these would have anything were it not through wisdom, for he says, "Without me, you can do nothing."¹⁹ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.8.15-16.²⁰

¹³ANF 2:509*. ¹⁴See Rev 14:6. ¹⁵FC 80:42*. ¹⁶Mic 7:9. ¹⁷PG 31:397. ¹⁸CGSL 525*. ¹⁹Jn 15:5. ²⁰CCL 119B:60.

THE LORD CREATED WISDOM
AT THE BEGINNING
PROVERBS 8:22

OVERVIEW: During the Arian controversy, this verse was among the most contested passages of Scripture.¹ The classic Christian consensus rejected the Arian view that the Son was a creature, and not of the same substance as God. The Son was begotten of the Father before all creatures (JUSTIN MARTYR). Just as the world was created by Christ, so wisdom was created by God (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). The Son is the first offspring from the Father but was not created (ATHENAGORAS). God's Word or reason is a Second Person called wisdom, who is first-begotten and only-begotten and who created all things "in" or "of" the beginning but not "at" the beginning (TERTULLIAN).

There are two natures of Christ, human and divine, that correspond to Christ as wisdom and as firstborn, for in him we have an invisible image of the invisible God, whose likeness has always existed. His existence is incorporeal, yet living and animate, comprised of the principles of the universe, according to which creation has come into existence by participation in wisdom—which is Christ. But the spiritual beauty of this wisdom can be seen only by spiritual eyes (ORIGEN). It is a key question, however, whether this wisdom is made or begotten (MARIUS VICTORINUS). He was indeed begotten before all ages, but this is not the same as the unbegotten (EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA). From the very beginning God the Word was self-sufficient. God the Word and the human who was raised from the dead are distinguishable but not separable (EUSTATHIUS OF ANTIOCH).

"Creation," however, is a term indicating relationship and need not imply material substance (DIDYMUS). By the prophecy of the incarnation, in fact, creation was for the sake of creation (AMBROSE). That which was assumed in the incarnation was our created nature (GREGORY OF NYSSA). The cause of the Lord's manhood was absolute and unoriginate (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS), but this was not merely a higher class of creation (HILARY OF POITIERS). Creation, therefore, was a corporeal and visible thing, yet still

the wisdom of the Father. If he was the Son he could not have been a creature, whereas if he was a creature then he could not have been the Son. Another way of putting this is to say that he was the creator of things created, true God in the flesh and true flesh in the Word. There never was a "when" when he did not exist (ATHANASIUS). A distinction must be made between birth and creation, although they both pertain to wisdom (HILARY OF POITIERS). The Word by which all things were made was created man in the beginning of his ways (AUGUSTINE). Already at the beginning of creation, therefore, wisdom had a role in it (BEDE).

8:22 *The First of His Acts of Old*

THE SON WAS BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL CREATURES. JUSTIN MARTYR: If you have followed me closely, you can see that Scripture declares that the Son was begotten of the Father before all creatures, and everybody will admit that the Son is numerically distinct from the Father. DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO 129.²

THE WORLD CREATED BY CHRIST, AND WISDOM CREATED BY GOD. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: O Lord Almighty, you have created the world by Christ, and . . . you have also appointed festivals for the rejoicing of our souls, that we might come into the remembrance of that wisdom which was created by you; how he submitted to be made of a woman on our account; he appeared in life, and demonstrated himself in his baptism; how he that appeared is both God and man; he suffered for us by your permission, and died, and rose again by your power: on which account we solemnly assemble to celebrate the feast of the resurrection on the Lord's day and rejoice on account of him

¹In the book of Proverbs, this verse received the greatest volume of comments from the writers of the early church, especially because of its implications for Christian doctrine. A representative selection is presented here in approximate chronological order so that the historical development can also be traced, and further observations are offered in the introduction to this volume. ²FC 6:348-49.

who has conquered death and has brought life and immortality to light. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 7.2.36.³

THE SON, THE FIRST OFFSPRING FROM THE FATHER, WAS NOT CREATED. ATHENAGORAS: [The Son] is the first offspring of the Father. I do not mean that he was created, for, since God is eternal mind, he had his Word within himself from the beginning, being eternally wise.⁴ Rather did the Son come forth from God to give form and actuality to all material things, which essentially have a sort of formless nature and inert quality, the heavier particles being mixed up with the lighter. The prophetic Spirit agrees with this opinion when he says, “The Lord created me as the first of his ways, for his works.”

Indeed we say that the Holy Spirit himself, who inspires those who utter prophecies, is an effluence from God, flowing from him and returning like a ray of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear those called atheists who admit God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit, and who teach their unity in power and their distinction in rank? . . . We affirm, too, a crowd of angels and ministers, whom God, the maker and creator of the world, appointed to their several tasks through his Word. He gave them charge over the good order of the universe, over the elements, the heavens, the world, and all it contains. A PLEA REGARDING CHRISTIANS 10.⁵

GOD'S WORD OR REASON IS A SECOND PERSON CALLED WISDOM WHO IS FIRST-BEGOTTEN AND ONLY-BEGOTTEN. TERTULLIAN: This power and disposition of the divine intelligence is set forth also in the Scriptures under the name of *sophia*, “wisdom,” for what can be better entitled to the name of wisdom than the reason or the Word of God? Listen therefore to wisdom herself, constituted in the character of a Second Person: “At the first the Lord created me as the beginning of his ways, with a view to his own works, before he made the earth, before the mountains were settled; moreover, before all the hills he

begat me”—that is to say, he created and generated me in his own intelligence. . . . By proceeding from himself he became his first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things;⁶ and his only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to himself, from the womb of his own heart. AGAINST PRAXEAS 6-7.⁷

CREATION “IN” OR “OF” THE BEGINNING. TERTULLIAN: Since all things were made by the wisdom of God, it follows that when God made both the heaven and the earth *in principio*, that is to say “in the beginning,” he made them in his wisdom. If, indeed, beginning had a material signification, the Scripture would not have informed us that God made so and so *in principio*, at the beginning, but rather *ex principio*, of the beginning, for he would not have created “in,” but “of,” matter. When wisdom, however, was referred to, it was quite right to say, “in the beginning.” AGAINST HERMOGENES 20.⁸

HUMAN AND DIVINE NATURES OF CHRIST, WHO IS ALSO CALLED “WISDOM.” ORIGEN: First we must know this, that in Christ there is one nature, his deity, because he is the only-begotten Son of the Father, and another human nature, which in very recent times he took upon him to fulfill the divine purpose. . . . He is called “wisdom,” as Solomon said. . . . He is also called “firstborn,” as the apostle Paul says: “who is the firstborn of all creation.”⁹ The firstborn is not, however, by nature a different being from wisdom but is one and the same. Finally, the apostle Paul says, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁰ ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.2.1.¹¹

AN INVISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD. ORIGEN: If he is an “image of the invisible God,”¹² he is an invisible image, and I would dare to add that as he is a likeness of the Father there is no

³ANF 7:474. ⁴Gk *logikos*, adjectival form of *logos*, “Word.” ⁵LCC 1:309. ⁶Col 1:15. ⁷ANF 3:601*. ⁸ANF 3:488*. ⁹Col 1:15. ¹⁰I Cor 1:24. ¹¹OPF 15. ¹²Col 1:15.

time when he did not exist. . . . Let the man who dares to say "There was a time when the Son was not" understand that this is what he will be saying: "Once wisdom did not exist, and word did not exist, and life did not exist." ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 4.4.1.¹³

CREATION HAS COME INTO EXISTENCE BY PARTICIPATION IN THE WISDOM THAT IS CHRIST. ORIGEN: But if someone is able to comprehend an incorporeal existence comprised of the various ideas which embrace the principles of the universe, an existence which is living and animate, as it were, he will understand the wisdom of God which precedes all creation, which appropriately says of herself, "God created me the beginning of his ways for his works." It is because of this creation that the whole creation has also been able to subsist, since it has a share in the divine wisdom according to which it has been created, for according to the prophet David, God made "all things in wisdom."¹⁴

Many creatures, on the one hand, have come into existence by participation in wisdom, while they do not apprehend her by whom they have been created. Very few, however, comprehend not only the wisdom concerning themselves, but also that concerning many beings, for Christ is all wisdom.

But each of the wise participates in Christ to the extent that he has the capacity for wisdom, insofar as Christ is wisdom, just as each one who possesses power has obtained greater power to the extent that he has shared in Christ, insofar as Christ is power. COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 1.244-46.¹⁵

A SPIRITUAL BEAUTY SEEN ONLY BY SPIRITUAL EYES. ORIGEN: What must we say of wisdom which "God created as the beginning of his ways for his works"? Her Father rejoiced at her, rejoicing in her manifold spiritual beauty which only spiritual eyes see. Wisdom's divine heavenly beauty invites the one who contemplates it to love. COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 1.55.¹⁶

MADE OR BEGOTTEN? MARIUS VICTORINUS: Solomon says, "You have made me above your ways." For, concerning spiritual generation, he immediately adds, "He has begotten me before all things."¹⁷ LETTER TO CANDIDUS 4.29.¹⁸

BEGOTTEN BEFORE ALL AGES, BUT NOT THE SAME AS UNBEGOTTEN. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: The divine and perfect essence existing before things begotten, the rational and first-born image of the unbegotten nature, the true and only-begotten Son of the God of the universe, being one with many names, and one called God by many titles, is honored in this passage under the style and name of wisdom, and we have learned to call him Word of God, light, life, truth, and, to crown all, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."¹⁹ Now, therefore, in the passage before us, he passes through the words of the wise Solomon, speaking of himself as the living wisdom of God and self-existent, saying, "I, wisdom, have dwelt with counsel and knowledge, and I have called upon understanding," and that which follows. He also adds, as one who has undertaken the government and providence of the universe: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes become great." Then saying that he will record the things of ages past, he goes on to say, "The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways for his works, he established me before time was." By which he teaches both that he himself is begotten, and not the same as the unbegotten, one called into being before all ages, set forth as a kind of foundation for all begotten things. And it is probable that the divine apostle started from this when he said of him: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, for all things were created in him, of things in heaven and things in earth."²⁰ For he is called "firstborn of every creature," in accordance with the words "The Lord created

¹³OFP 314-15. ¹⁴Ps 104:24 (103:24 LXX). ¹⁵FC 80:83. ¹⁶FC 80:45. ¹⁷Prov 8:25; Jn 1:3-4. ¹⁸FC 69:80. ¹⁹1 Cor 1:24. ²⁰Col 1:15.

me as the beginning of his road to his works.” And he would naturally be considered the image of God, as being that which was begotten of the nature of the unbegotten. And, therefore, the passage before us agrees when it says, “Before the mountains were established, and before all the hills, he begets me.”²¹

Hence we call him only-begotten Son, and the firstborn Word of God, who is the same as this wisdom. PROOF OF THE GOSPEL 5.1.²²

GOD THE WORD WAS SELF-SUFFICIENT FROM THE BEGINNING. EUSTATHIUS OF ANTIOCH: If, therefore, the Word began to exist at the time he passed through the mother’s womb and wore the bodily framework, it is clear that he was born of a woman. But if God the Word was from the very beginning with the Father, and we say that all things were made through him,²³ then the one who is and is the cause of all things that are made was not born of a woman but is, by nature, God, self-sufficient, unlimited and incomprehensible. But from a woman was born a human being, who was implanted in the virgin’s womb by the Holy Spirit. DISCOURSE ON THE TEXT “THE LORD CREATED ME IN THE BEGINNING OF HIS WAYS.”²⁴

DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD THE WORD AND THE HUMAN WHO WAS RAISED. EUSTATHIUS OF ANTIOCH: For the human being who died rises up on the third day; but when Mary strives with longing to touch his holy limbs, he objected and says to her, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’”²⁵ God the Word, who comes from heaven and lives in the bosom of the Father, did not utter the phrase “I have not yet ascended to my Father.” The Wisdom that embraces all things that exist did not say it either; this was spoken by the very human being who was formed out of all kinds of limbs, who had been raised from the dead, and who after death had not yet ascended to his Father but

reserved for himself the firstfruit of his passage. DISCOURSE ON THE TEXT “THE LORD CREATED ME IN THE BEGINNING OF HIS WAYS.”²⁶

“CREATION” INDICATES RELATIONSHIP. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: Since wisdom is already eternal, it is not subjected to time. The “beginning,” then, is yoked together with created things. But having existed before creation as wisdom, the Son of God—even though, he says, “The Lord created me”—this assertion [“The Lord created me”] must be understood as referring not to substance but to his relationship toward creatures. For [wisdom] says that its works were at the beginning of the creative and providential ways of God, that is, a “cause,” introducing still another way of speaking. The Son of God was made man when he assumed the form of a servant. He is eternal before the ages, as he is God the Word. It says he was “created” because he was born of Mary and was made flesh. For those desiring to walk like God and with God, consult this teacher, an example of perfect life, who gives his teaching to those who follow him. The fact that the word “to create” does not mean everywhere “to make substance” is confirmed by David, who says, “Create in me a pure heart, O God.”²⁷ He asks for such a creation not as if he does not have a heart; but since he had polluted it, he desires to have it back pure. Also Paul, when he speaks about creating out of the two a single new man,²⁸ does not mean from [two] human substances but rather the unity that results from concord. And so the interpreters proclaimed, “He created me.” COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 8.22.²⁹

PROPHECY OF INCARNATION MEANT THAT CREATION WAS FOR THE SAKE OF CREATION. AMBROSE: Hereby we are brought to understand

²¹Cf. Prov 8:25. ²²POG 1:231-32. ²³See Jn 1:1-3. ²⁴Quoted in Theodoret of Cyr, *Eranistes*, Dialogue 1.32; FC 106:74. ²⁵Jn 20:17.

²⁶Quoted in Theodoret of Cyr, *Eranistes*, Dialogue 3.12; FC 106:225-26. ²⁷Ps 51:10 (50:12 LXX). ²⁸Eph 2:15. ²⁹PG 39:1632.

that the prophecy of the incarnation, “The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works,” means that the Lord Jesus was created of the Virgin for the redeeming of the Father’s works. Truly, we cannot doubt that this is spoken of the mystery of the incarnation, forasmuch as the Lord took upon him our flesh, in order to save the works of his hands from the slavery of corruption, so he might, by the sufferings of his own body, overthrow him who had the power of death. For Christ’s flesh is for the sake of things created, but his Godhead existed before them, seeing that he is before all things, while all things exist together in him. His Godhead, then, is not by reason of creation, but creation exists because of the Godhead. *ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH* 3.7.46-47.³⁰

ASSUMED FROM OUR CREATED NATURE.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: The phrase “created me” refers not to the divine and the uncompounded but, as has been said, to that which had been assumed, in accordance with the divine plan, from our created nature. *AGAINST EUNOMIUS* 3.1.50.³¹

CAUSE OF THE MANHOOD WAS ABSOLUTE AND UNORIGINATE. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: In their eyes [of the Arians] the following is only too ready to hand: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways with a view to his works.” How shall we meet this? Shall we bring an accusation against Solomon or reject his former words because of his fall in afterlife? Shall we say that the words are those of wisdom herself, as it were of knowledge and the creator-word, in accordance with which all things were made? For Scripture often personifies many even lifeless objects; as, for instance, “the sea said” so and so;³² and, “the heavens declare the glory of God”; and again a command is given to the sword; and the mountains and hills are asked the reason of their skipping.³³ We do not allege any of these, though some of our predecessors used them as powerful arguments. But let us grant that the expression is

used of our Savior himself, the true wisdom. Let us consider one small point together. What among all things that exist is unoriginate? The Godhead. For no one can tell the origin of God, that otherwise would be older than God. But what is the cause of the manhood, which for our sake God assumed? It was surely our salvation. What else could it be? Since, then, we find here clearly both the “created” and the “begets me,” the argument is simple. Whatever we find joined with a cause we are to refer to the manhood, but all that is absolute and unoriginate we are to reckon to the account of his Godhead. *ON THE SON, THEOLOGICAL ORATION* 4(30).2.³⁴

NOT MERELY A HIGHER CLASS OF CREATION.

HILARY OF POITIERS: They attempt by a distortion of the sense and meaning to maintain that God was created rather than born because it was said, “The Lord created me for the beginning of his ways, for his works,” so that he belongs to the common order of created things, although in a higher class of creation, nor does he enjoy the glory of the divine birth, but the power of a mighty creature. *ON THE TRINITY* 1.35.³⁵

A CORPOREAL, VISIBLE THING, YET THE WISDOM OF THE FATHER. ATHANASIUS:³⁶ Salvation proceeds from the Savior, just as illumination does from the light. The salvation, then, which was from the Savior, being created new, did, as Jeremiah says, “create for us a new salvation,”³⁷ and as Aquila renders: “The Lord created a new thing in woman,” that is, in Mary. For nothing new was created in woman, save the Lord’s body, born of the Virgin Mary without intercourse, as also it says in the Proverbs in the person of Jesus, “The Lord created me, a beginning of his ways for his works.” Now he does not say “created me before his works,” lest any should take the text of

³⁰NPNF 2 10:249. ³¹Quoted in Theodoret of Cyr, *Eranistes*, Dialogue 1.52; FC 106:82. ³²Job 28:14. ³³Ps 19:1 (18:1 LXX); Zech 13:7; Ps 114:6 (113:6 LXX). ³⁴LCC 3:177-78. ³⁵FC 25:32. ³⁶May be attributed to Marcellus of Ancyra; cf. TLG 2041.004, 3.7.2-4.5.5. ³⁷Jer 31:22.

the deity of the Word.

Each text then which refers to the creature is written with reference to Jesus in a bodily sense. For the Lord's humanity was created as "a beginning of ways," and he manifested it to us for our salvation. For by it we have our access to the Father. For he is the way³⁸ which leads us back to the Father. And a way is a corporeal visible thing, such as is the Lord's humanity. Well, then, the Word of God created all things, not being a creature but an offspring. For he created none of the created things equal or like unto himself. But it is the part of a Father to beget, while it is a workman's part to create. Accordingly, that body is a thing made and created which the Lord bore for us, which was begotten for us,³⁹ as Paul says, "wisdom from God, and sanctification and righteousness, and redemption," while yet the Word was before us and before all creation, and is, the wisdom of the Father. STATEMENT OF FAITH 3-4.⁴⁰

IF SON THEREFORE NOT CREATURE, OR IF CREATURE THEN NOT SON. ATHANASIUS: Let them tell us, from what teacher or by what tradition they derived these notions concerning the Savior? We have read in the Proverbs, they will say, "The Lord created me a beginning of his ways unto his works." This Eusebius and his fellows used to insist on, and you write me word, that the present men also, though overthrown and confuted by an abundance of arguments, still were putting about in every quarter this passage, and saying that the Son was one of the creatures, and reckoning him with things originated. But they seem to me to have a wrong understanding of this passage. . . . If then Son, therefore not creature; if creature, not Son; for great is the difference between them, and Son and creature cannot be the same, unless his essence be considered to be at once from God and external to God. DEFENSE OF THE NICENE DEFINITION 3.13.⁴¹

THE HUMAN AND DIVINE ATTRIBUTIONS ARE REASONABLE. ATHANASIUS: "The Lord

created me in the beginning of his ways for his works." . . . He is called also in the Scriptures "servant," and "son of a handmaid," and "lamb" and "sheep," and it is said that he suffered toil and thirst and was beaten and has suffered pain. But there is plainly a reasonable ground and cause why such representations as these are given of him in the Scriptures. It is because he became man and the Son of man, and took upon him the form of a servant, which is the human flesh, for "the Word," says John, "was made flesh."⁴² And since he became man, no one ought to be offended at such expressions, for it is proper to man to be created and born and formed, to suffer toil and pain, to die and to rise again from the dead. And as, being Word and wisdom of the Father, he has all the attributes of the Father, his eternity, and his unchangeableness, and the being like him in all respects and in all things. And [he] is neither before nor after, but coexistent with the Father. And [he] is the very form of the Godhead, and is the creator and is not created (for since he is in essence like the Father, he cannot be a creature but must be the creator, for he himself has said, "My Father works hitherto, and I work."⁴³) So being made man, and bearing our flesh, he is necessarily said to be created and made, and that is proper to all flesh. LETTER TO THE BISHOPS OF EGYPT 17.⁴⁴

THE CREATOR OF THINGS CREATED. ATHANASIUS: The fact is, then, that the Word is not from things created but is rather himself their creator. For this reason did he assume a body created and human: so that, having renewed it as its creator, he might deify it in himself and thus might introduce all of us in that likeness into the kingdom of heaven. A man would not have been deified if joined to a creature, nor if the Son were not true God; neither would a man have been brought into the Father's presence if he had not been the

³⁸Jn 14:6. ³⁹See 1 Cor 1:30. ⁴⁰NPNF 2 4:85. ⁴¹NPNF 2 4:158*. ⁴²Jn 1:14. ⁴³Jn 5:17. ⁴⁴NPNF 2 4:232*.

Father's natural and true Word who had put on the body. Since we could have had nothing in common with what is foreign, we would not have been delivered from sin and from the curse if that which the Word put on had not been natural human flesh. So also, the man would not have been deified if the Word which became flesh had not been by nature from the Father and true and proper to him.

The union, therefore, was of just such a kind, so that he might unite what is man by nature, to him who is in the nature of the Godhead, thereby assuring the accomplishment of salvation and his deification. Let those, therefore, who deny that the Son is by nature from the Father and proper to his essence, deny also that he took true human flesh from the ever-virgin Mary. In neither case would it have been profitable to us men: if the Word were not by nature true Son of God, or if the flesh which he assumed were not true flesh. *FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS* 2.70.⁴⁵

TRUE GOD IN THE FLESH AND TRUE FLESH IN THE WORD. ATHANASIUS: Although the Word did indeed become flesh, it is to the flesh that affections are proper; and although the flesh bears divinity in the Word, it is to the Word that grace and power belong. He performed the Father's works, then, through the flesh; but nonetheless the affections of the flesh were exhibited in him. Thus, he inquired and then raised Lazarus; he chided his mother, saying, "My hour is not yet come";⁴⁶ and immediately he turned the water into wine. Indeed, he was true God in the flesh, and he was true flesh in the Word. Out of his works, therefore, he made known both his own Father, and himself, the Son of God. By the affections of the flesh he demonstrated that he bore a true body and that it was proper to him. *FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS* 3.41.⁴⁷

THERE WAS NEVER A "WHEN" WHEN HE DID NOT EXIST. ATHANASIUS: The Lord is God's true and natural Son, and he is known to be not just eternal but one who exists concurrently with the eternity of the Father. There are things which

are called "eternal" of which he is the creator, for in Psalm 23 it is written, "Lift up your gates, O rulers, and be lifted up, O everlasting doors."⁴⁸ It is apparent, though, that these everlasting doors also came into being through his agency. But if he is himself the creator of the things which are "everlasting," which of us can any longer doubt that he is more noble than these everlasting things and that he is made known as Lord not so much from his being eternal as from his being the Son of God? Being Son, he is inseparable from the Father, and there was never a "when" when he did not exist. He always existed. Moreover, since he is the image and radiance of the Father, he also possesses the Father's eternity. . . .

What is the basic meaning and purport of holy Scripture? It contains, as we have often said, a double account of the Savior. It says that he has always been God and is the Son, because he is the Logos and radiance and wisdom of the Father. Furthermore, it says that afterwards for us he took flesh of the Virgin Mary, the bearer of God, and became man. *FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS* 3.28-29.⁴⁹

BOTH GOD AND SERVANT. AUGUSTINE: According to the form of God it was said, "Before all the hills he has begotten me,"⁵⁰ that is, before all the most exalted creatures, and, "Before the morning star I have begotten you,"⁵¹ that is, before all the ages and temporal things. But according to the form of a slave it was said, "The Lord created me in the beginning of his ways." Because according to the form of God he said, "I am the truth," and according to the form of a slave, "I am the way." For since he himself, "the firstborn of the dead,"⁵² has laid out the road for his church to the kingdom of God, to eternal life, of which he is the head even to the extent of giving immortality to the body. He was, therefore, created in the beginning of the ways of God for his works. *ON THE TRINITY* 1.12.24.⁵³

⁴⁵FEF 1:330. ⁴⁶Jn 2:4. ⁴⁷FEF 1:332*. ⁴⁸Ps 24:7 (23:7 LXX). ⁴⁹TCC 86-87*. ⁵⁰Prov 8:25. ⁵¹Ps 110:3 (109:3 LXX). ⁵²Rev 1:5. ⁵³FC 45:36.

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH, THE ROAD TO GOD'S KINGDOM. AUGUSTINE: The beginning of his ways is the head of the church, which is Christ incarnate, through whom there was to be given us an example of living, that is, a certain way by which we might reach God. . . . So the Word by which all things were made was created man in the beginning of his ways. ON FAITH AND THE CREED 4.6.⁵⁴

THE ROLE OF WISDOM AT THE BEGINNING OF CREATION. BEDE: The Lord's "ways" are his works, through contemplation of which man has arrived at faith or knowledge of him. "For his invisible nature was seen by the rational creatures of the world through what he had made."⁵⁵ His ways are the illuminations through which he showed himself both to angelic spirits and to human minds. He possessed⁵⁶ wisdom at the beginning of his ways because he had the Son with whom he arranged all things at the beginning of the nascent created order. Yet, lest anyone think that the Son began to exist at the beginning of his ways or at any other time, it adds vigilantly, . . . "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God; all things were created through him."⁵⁷ Let them perish, therefore, who deny that "the power of God and the wisdom of God,"⁵⁸ clearly Christ, was begotten by the Father himself from the beginning and indeed before any beginning that could be thought or expressed. In another translation, this passage begins, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways in his works." The fathers understand this saying to be about the Lord's incarnation, maintaining that by the grace of a certain mystery it said "the Lord created me," and not "the Father created me." The flesh, they say, acknowledges the Lord, glory indicates the Father, creation confesses the Lord, and charity knows the Father who is the beginning.⁵⁹ It could also read "in the beginning of his ways"; for he himself said, "I am the way,"⁶⁰ because he began the journey of his church to the kingdom of God,

to eternal life, when he rose from the dead. It adds "in his works" because he was born from a virgin for the purpose of redeeming the works of the Father, receiving flesh to liberate the Father's works from slavery to corruption, for the flesh of Christ exists for the sake of his works, whereas his divinity precedes them. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.8.22-30.⁶¹

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN BIRTH AND CREATION. HILARY OF POITERS: Ignorance of prophetic diction and lack of skill in interpreting Scripture has led them into a perversion of the point and meaning of the passage, "The Lord created me for a beginning of his ways for his works." They labor to establish from it that Christ is created rather than born, as God, and hence partakes the nature of created beings, though he excel them in the manner of his creation and has no glory of divine birth but only the powers of a transcendent creature. We in reply, without importing any new considerations or preconceived opinions, will make this very passage of wisdom display its own true meaning and object. We will show that the fact that he was created for the beginning of the ways of God and for his works, cannot be twisted into evidence concerning the divine and eternal birth, because creation for these purposes and birth from everlasting are two entirely different things. Where birth is meant, there birth, and nothing but birth, is spoken of; where creation is mentioned, the cause of that creation is first named. There is a wisdom born before all things, and again there is a wisdom created for particular purposes. The wisdom which is from everlasting is one, the wisdom which has come into existence during the lapse of time is another. ON THE TRINITY 1.35.⁶²

⁵⁴LCC 6:357. ⁵⁵Rom 1:20. ⁵⁶Latin *possedit*. ⁵⁷Jn 1:1-3. ⁵⁸1 Cor 1:24. ⁵⁹Latin *caritas patrem novit principium*. Cf. Ambrose *De fide* 1.15. ⁶⁰Jn 14:6. ⁶¹CCL 119B:61-62. ⁶²NPNF 2 9:50*.



THE ONE WHO FINDS WISDOM
OBTAINS FAVOR FROM GOD
PROVERBS 8:23 - 36

OVERVIEW: Heretics have misinterpreted these passages of Scripture to their own ends (ATHANASIUS). He who created all things in himself submitted to become human so that the church might be constituted in him (DIDYMUS). The facts are that wisdom was established before time was begotten (HILARY OF POITIERS), the nature of divine begetting is continuous (Origen), and there was a beginning but will never be an ending (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Father, Son and Spirit are equal in creation and in worship (AMBROSE). The utterance of God's wisdom made the sky (PRUDENTIUS). In form and outline

the creation was always present (ORIGEN) and constituted one harmonious whole (AMBROSE). God gave us free will to find life in finding wisdom (AUGUSTINE).

8:23 Ages Ago

MISINTERPRETATION BY HERETICS. ATHANASIUS: Since the heretics, reading the next verse, take a perverse view of that also, because it is written, "He founded me before the world," namely, that this is said of the Godhead of the Word and not of his incarnate presence, it is necessary,

explaining this verse also, to show their error.

It is written, “The Lord in Wisdom founded the earth;¹ if then by wisdom the earth is founded, how can he who founds be founded? Indeed, this too is after the manner of proverbs. . . .

He says not, “Before the world he founded me as Word or Son,” but simply, “He founded me,” to show again, as I have said, that not for his own sake but for those who are built upon him does he here also speak, after the way of proverbs.

FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS

2.22.72-74.²

HE SUBMITTED TO BECOME HUMAN. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: [Solomon] says, “He laid down both the cause and foundation of creation.” Also it is written, “He created all things in himself, and he is before all things.”³ And the Lord says as well, “I am the beginning of the creation of God.”⁴ Indeed, desiring to be the foundation of the church, he submitted to becoming human so that the church might be constituted firmly in him. Desiring to give existence to creation, he adjusted himself to its rule by introducing the relationship we mentioned above, when he was made the beginning and cause of future things. However, it says, even if he was created according to these things, still “God begat me before everything,” the very one who is his Son. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 8.23.⁵

8:25 Brought Forth Before the Mountains Were Shaped

WISDOM WAS ESTABLISHED BEFORE TIME.

HILARY OF POITIERS: He who was established before time was already begotten, not only before the earth but also before the mountains and the hills. And because wisdom is certainly referring to itself in this passage, it says more than is heard. ON THE TRINITY 12.37.⁶

ONE SO BEGOTTEN IS ALWAYS BEGOTTEN.

ORIGEN: Let us consider [that] our Savior is a “reflection of glory.”⁷ The reflection of glory has

not been begotten just once and no longer begotten. But just as the light⁸ is an agent of reflection, in such a way the reflection of the glory of God is begotten. Our Savior is the wisdom of God.⁹ But the wisdom is the reflection of everlasting light.¹⁰ If then the Savior is always begotten—because of this he also says, “Before all the hills he begets me” (and not “Before all the hills he has begotten me,” but “Before all of the hills he begets me”)—and the Savior is always begotten by the Father, and likewise also if you have the Spirit of adoption,¹¹ God always begets you in him according to each work, according to each thought. And may one so begotten always be a begotten son of God in Christ Jesus, “to whom is the glory and the power for the ages of ages. Amen.”¹² HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 9.5.¹³

THE SOUL HAD A BEGINNING BUT WILL NEVER HAVE AN END.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: Whether he is eternally begotten or not, I do not yet say, until I have looked into the statement, “Before all the hills he begets me” more accurately. But I cannot see the necessity of their conclusion. For if, as they say, everything that is to come to an end had also a beginning, then surely that which has no end had no beginning. What, then, will they decide concerning the soul or the angelic nature? If it had a beginning, it will also have an end; and if it has no end, it is evident that according to them it had no beginning. But the truth is that it had a beginning and will never have an end. Their assertion, then, that that which will have an end had also a beginning, is untrue. ON THE SON, THEOLOGICAL ORATION 3(29).13.¹⁴

8:27-28 Creator of the Skies and the Deep

EQUAL IN CREATION AND IN WORSHIP.

¹Prov 3:19. ²NPNF 2 4:388*. ³Col 1:16-17. ⁴Jn 8:25. ⁵PG 39:1632. ⁶FC 25:526. ⁷Heb 1:3. ⁸Cf. Wis 7:26; 1 Jn 1:5. ⁹See 1 Cor 1:24. ¹⁰Wis 7:26. ¹¹See Rom 8:15 KJV. ¹²1 Pet 4:11. ¹³FC 97:93*. ¹⁴LCC 3:169.

AMBROSE: Learn also that the Father was with him, and he with the Father, when all things were being made. Wisdom says, "When he was preparing the heavens I was with him, when he was making the fountains of waters." And in the Old Testament the Father . . . showed that the Son was to be worshiped with himself as the maker of all things. As, then, those things are said to have been created in the Son, of which the Son is received as the Creator, so too when God is said to be worshiped in truth by the proper meaning of the word itself often expressed after the same manner it ought to be understood, that the Son too is worshiped. So in like manner is the Spirit also worshiped because God is worshiped in Spirit. Therefore the Father is worshiped both with the Son and with the Spirit, because the Trinity is worshiped. ON THE HOLY SPIRIT 3.II.85.¹⁵

THE UTTERANCE OF GOD'S WISDOM MADE THE SKY. PRUDENTIUS:

This Wisdom uttered made the sky,
The sky and light and all besides;
All by the Word's almighty power
Were fashioned, for the Word was God.

HYMNS FOR EVERY DAY II.¹⁶

8:30-31 Beside Him and Rejoicing in His Inhabited World

IN FORM AND OUTLINE THE CREATION WAS ALWAYS PRESENT. ORIGEN: We can therefore imagine no moment whatever when that power was not engaged in acts of well-doing. Whence it follows that there always existed [in God's wisdom] objects for this well-doing, namely, God's works or creatures, and that God, in the power of his providence, was always dispensing his blessings among them by doing them good in accordance with their condition and deserts. It follows plainly from this, that at no time whatever was God not creator, nor benefactor, nor providence. . . .

God the Father always existed, and he always had an only-begotten Son, who at the same time, according to the explanation we have given above, is called wisdom. This is that wisdom in whom God delighted when the world was finished, in order that we might understand from this that God ever rejoices. In this wisdom, therefore, who ever existed with the Father, the creation was always present in form and outline, and there was never a time when the prefiguration of those things which hereafter were to be did not exist in wisdom. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES I.4.3-4.¹⁷

ONE HARMONIOUS WHOLE. AMBROSE: We have that general seemliness; for God made the beauty of this world. We have it also in its parts; for when God made the light, and marked off the day from the night, when he made heaven, and separated land and seas, when he set the sun and moon and stars to shine upon the earth, he approved of them all one by one. Therefore this comeliness, which shone forth in each single part of the world, was resplendent in the whole, as the book of Wisdom shows, saying, "I existed, in whom he rejoiced when he was glad at the completion of the world." Likewise also in the building up of the human body each single member is pleasing, but the right adjustment of the members all together delights us far more. For thus they seem to be united and fitted into one harmonious whole. DUTIES OF THE CLERGY I.46.233.¹⁸

8:35 Finding Life in Wisdom

FREE WILL. AUGUSTINE: Man in paradise was capable of self-destruction by abandoning justice by an act of will; yet if the life of justice was to be maintained, his will alone would not have sufficed, unless he who made him had given him aid. But, after the fall, God's mercy was even more abundant, for then the will itself had to be freed from the bondage in which sin and death are the mas-

¹⁵NPNF 2 10:147. ¹⁶FC 43:79. ¹⁷OPF 42. ¹⁸NPNF 2 10:38.

ters. There is no way at all by which it can be freed by itself, but only through God's grace, which is made effectual in the faith of Christ. Thus, as it is written, even the will by which "the will itself is prepared by the Lord" so that we may receive the

other gifts of God through which we come to the Gift eternal—this too comes from God. ENCHIRIDION 28.106.¹⁹

¹⁹LCC 7:403-4*.



WISDOM CONTRASTED
TO A FOOLISH WOMAN
PROVERBS 9:1-18

OVERVIEW: The house of wisdom is the new Jerusalem, as well as the temple of Christ's body (HIPPLYTUS). Wisdom's seven pillars indicate the seven spirits mentioned by the prophet Isaiah (CHRYSOSTOM). But eating the bread and drinking the wine have a deeper meaning that relates to the church (AUGUSTINE). The sacrifice of bread and wine is a type of the Lord's sacrifice (CYPRIAN). In a deeper sense, also, the house that wisdom built is the Lord's flesh (GREGORY OF NYSSA), for the body was flesh from a real body, the same flesh as our own (LEO THE GREAT). The seven pillars, seven sacraments, sevenfold grace and seven churches are all connected (GREGORY THE GREAT). Thus, the house that wisdom built is the church and the pillars are its doctors (BEDE). The beasts that are killed are the prophets and martyrs slain by unbelievers, and the bread and wine at the table indicate the spiritual divine supper of the Christian eucharist (HIPPLYTUS). The table that wisdom has prepared, the wine that is mixed, have the capacity to restore the mind to its perfect state (ORIGEN). We can even speak of an "inebriation of grace," as contrasted to the drink of unbelief that was provided by Plato. At this banquet, however, Christ comes when you call upon him even if you are sleeping (AMBROSE). The heavenly food indicates not only the commandments and holy Scripture (DIDYMUS) but also Christ's body and blood (BEDE).

In the meantime, if a wise person is instructed or reprov'd, he will take the opportunity to learn from his correction and to profit from it (AUGUSTINE), and this is especially so if the admonition is done in charity (CAESARIUS). Although wisdom's beginning is the fear of the Lord, nonetheless the only place where God is not feared is where God is excluded (TERTULLIAN). The wise person must be useful to many; else he is not wise (HIPPLYTUS). The heretics, sad to say, use merely bread and water in their eucharists (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Another foolish example is that brazen woman who offers stolen waters and hidden bread, for in this case "bread" is being used in a bad sense

(AUGUSTINE). That woman's true desire, however, was for the bread that comes from heaven (JEROME), and thus a literal interpretation of Scripture does not suffice (GREGORY THE GREAT).

9:1 *Wisdom Has Built Her House*

HOUSE OF WISDOM IS THE NEW JERUSALEM. HIPPLYTUS: He intends the new Jerusalem, or the sanctified flesh. By the seven pillars he means the sevenfold unity of the Holy Spirit resting upon it. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.¹

HOUSE OF WISDOM IS THE TEMPLE OF CHRIST'S BODY. HIPPLYTUS: Christ, [Solomon] means, the wisdom and power of God the Father, has built his house, that is, his nature in the flesh derived from the virgin, even as [John] said beforetime: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."² [As likewise the wise prophet Solomon] testifies: Wisdom that was before the world, and is the source of life, the infinite "wisdom of God, has built her house" by a mother who knew no man—to wit, as he assumed the temple of the body. "And has raised her seven pillars," that is, the fragrant grace of the all-holy Spirit, as Isaiah says: "And the seven spirits of God shall rest upon him."³ [But others say that the seven pillars are the seven divine orders which sustain the creation by his holy and inspired teaching; namely, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the hierarchs, the hermits, the saints and the righteous.]⁴ FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.⁵

SEVEN PILLARS INDICATE SEVEN SPIRITS.

CHRYSOSTOM: "Wisdom has built her house, and has set seven pillars." Since wisdom is the Son of God, once he became man he built his house, that is, the flesh from the Virgin. He [Solomon] calls the seven pillars "the spirit of God, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel

¹ANF 5:173; TLG 2115.044.37-38. ²Jn 1:14. ³Is 11:2. ⁴Portions in brackets are not extant in the critical Greek text. ⁵ANF 5:175*; TLG 2115.045.37-38.

and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of the fear of God,"⁶ as Isaiah says. [Solomon] also calls the church "house" and the apostles "pillars." The wise individual is the one who is safe and self-sufficient, lacking nothing. As the house of wisdom is the church, the pillars are those who appear to be pillars in the church.⁷ COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 9.1.⁸

COME, EAT AND DRINK. AUGUSTINE: [Wisdom said] to the unwise, "Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you." In these words, surely, we recognize that the wisdom of God, the Father's coeternal Word, has built a house for himself, namely, a body in the virgin's womb. And to this body, as to the head, he has united the church as his members, has "slain" his martyrs as "victims," set his "table" with bread and wine in allusion to the priesthood according to Melchizedek, and called the weak and unwise. CITY OF GOD 17.20.⁹

A TYPE OF THE LORD'S SACRIFICE. CYPRIAN: The Holy Spirit through Solomon shows forth the type of sacrifice of the Lord, making mention of the immolated victim and of the bread and wine and also of the altar and of the apostles. "Wisdom," he says, "has built a house and she has set up seven columns. She has slain her victims, mixed her wine in a chalice, and has spread her table." . . . He declares the wine is mixed, that is, he announces in a prophetic voice that the chalice of the Lord is mixed with water and wine. LETTER 63.5.¹⁰

THE HOUSE IS THE LORD'S FLESH. GREGORY OF NYSSA: We say, therefore, that when he said in his previous discourse that wisdom built a house for itself, he is speaking enigmatically about the formation of the Lord's flesh. For true wisdom did not live in someone else's building but built a home for itself from the Virgin's body. AGAINST EUNOMIUS 3.1.44.¹¹

THE BODY WAS FLESH FROM A REAL BODY.

LEO THE GREAT: It was the Holy Ghost that gave fecundity to the Virgin, but it was from a body that a real body was derived. And when "Wisdom was building herself a house," "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,"¹² that is, in that flesh which he assumed from a human being and which he animated with the spirit of rational life. TOME 2.¹³

FROM THE SAME FLESH AS OUR OWN. LEO THE GREAT: We are his flesh, the flesh that had been taken up from the Virgin's womb. If this flesh had not been from ours, that is, had it not been truly human, the Word made flesh would not have dwelt among us. "He did" in fact "dwell among us,"¹⁴ however, for he made the nature of our body his own. "Wisdom built itself a house," not from just any material but from the substance that is properly ours. The fact that he had taken it on has been made clear from when it was said, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."¹⁵ SERMON 30.3.1.¹⁶

SEVEN PILLARS, SEVEN SACRAMENTS, SEVENFOLD GRACE, SEVEN CHURCHES. GREGORY THE GREAT: We may also not inappropriately interpret the "pillars of heaven" as the churches themselves. Being many in number, they constitute one catholic church spread over the whole face of the earth. So, too, the apostle John writes to the seven churches, meaning to denote the one catholic church replenished with the Spirit of sevenfold grace, and we know that Solomon said of the Lord, "Wisdom has built her a house; she has hewn out her seven pillars." And to make known that it was of the seven churches he had spoken, which sedulously introduced the very sacraments themselves also, he says, "She

⁶Cf. Is 11:2. The "spirit of piety," included by Chrysostom here and in LXX and Vg, is omitted from KJV and RSV. Thus, in addition to the spirit of God, the LXX and Vg enumerate seven spirits, as does Chrysostom, whereas the KJV and RSV name only six. ⁷Cf. Gal 2:9. ⁸PG 64:680. ⁹FC 24:75*. ¹⁰FC 51:205. ¹¹Quoted in Theodoret of Cyr, *Eranistes*, Dialogue 1.50; FC 106:81. ¹²Jn 1:14. ¹³LCC 3:363. ¹⁴Jn 1:14. ¹⁵Jn 1:14. ¹⁶FC 93:127.

has killed her sacrifices, she has mingled her wine, she has also set forth her table.” MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 4.17.43.¹⁷

HOUSE THAT WISDOM BUILT IS THE

CHURCH. BEDE: Because it had spoken sufficiently of the divinity of Christ, it goes on to speak of the humanity he assumed. “Wisdom has built her house,” therefore, because the Son of God created the man whom he received into the unity of his person.

“She has set up her seven pillars.” She erected churches throughout the world by the sevenfold grace of the Spirit to be his home, that is, the mystery of his incarnation, lest the memory for believing, worshiping and preaching be destroyed by the wickedness of the faithless, as though they remained together by supporting each other.¹⁸ Or at least the house of wisdom is the church of Christ, while the pillars are the doctors of the holy church filled by the sevenfold Spirit, such as James, Peter and John.¹⁹ Wisdom undoubtedly “raised up these pillars because it elevated the minds of preachers who were detached from love of the present age for the purpose of bearing the work of his church.”²⁰ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.9.1.²¹

9:2-5 Come and Eat

THE SPIRITUAL SUPPER OF THE CHRISTIAN EUCHARIST. HIPPOLYTUS: The phrase “she has killed her beasts” denotes the prophets and martyrs [who in every city and country] are slain like sheep every day by the unbelieving, in behalf of the truth, and cry aloud, “For your sake we are killed all the day long, we were counted as sheep for the slaughter.”²² And again, “she has mingled her wine in the bowl” [by which is meant that the Savior, uniting his Godhead like pure wine with the flesh in the Virgin, was born of her at once God and man without confusion of the one in the other].²³ And the phrase “She has furnished her table” [denotes the promised knowledge of the Triad²⁴].²⁵ . . .

And again, “She has sent forth her servants.” Wisdom, that is to say, has done so, [and it is Christ] who summons them with lofty announcement. “Whoever is simple, let him turn to me,” she says, alluding manifestly to the holy apostles who journeyed the whole world and called the nations to the knowledge of him [in truth, with their lofty and divine preaching]. And again, “To those who lack understanding she said” [denotes] those who have not yet obtained the power of the Holy Spirit. “Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mingled for you” [indicates that he gave his divine flesh and honored blood to us to eat and drink it for the remission of sins].²⁶ FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.²⁷

RESTORATION TO A PERFECT STATE. ORIGEN: “Wisdom has prepared her table, she has slain her victims, she has mingled her wine in the bowl and cries with a loud voice, Turn in to me and eat the bread which I have prepared for you, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you.” The mind, when nourished by this food of wisdom to a whole and perfect state, as man was made in the beginning, will be restored to the “image and likeness”²⁸ of God. [Thus], even though a man may have departed out of this life insufficiently instructed but with a record of acceptable works, he can be instructed in that Jerusalem, the city of the saints. That is, he can be taught and informed and fashioned into a “living stone,” a “stone precious and elect,”²⁹ because he has borne with courage and endurance the trials of life and the struggles after piety. There, too, he will come to a truer and clearer knowledge of the saying already uttered here, that “man does not live by bread alone but

¹⁷LF 21:306*. ¹⁸Latin *quasi sustendendo continerent*. ¹⁹Cf. Gal 2:9.

²⁰Gregory the Great *Morals on the Book of Job* 7.33.32; LF 31:587.

²¹CCL 119B:62. ²²Ps 44:22; Rom 8:36. ²³Alternate reading: “[Wisdom] gave the Holy Spirit in the church as wine.” ²⁴Gk *triados*.

²⁵Alternate reading: “He calls the table ‘truth’ because of the holy prophets.” ²⁶Portions in brackets either exist in alternate readings or are not extant in the critical Greek text. ²⁷ANF 5:175-76**; TLG 2115.045.39-44. ²⁸Gen 1:26. ²⁹1 Pet 2:4-6.

by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”³⁰ ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 2.II.3.³¹

INEBRIATION OF GRACE. AMBROSE: “Come, eat my bread and drink my wine which I have mingled for you.” Do you find delight in songs which charm the banqueter? Listen to the voice of the church, who exhorts us not only in canticles but in the Canticle of Canticles, “Eat, O friends, and drink and be inebriated, my brethren.”³² But this inebriation makes people sober. This inebriation is one of grace, not of intoxication. CAIN AND ABEL 1.5.19.³³

PLATO PROVIDED THE DRINK OF UNBELIEF. AMBROSE: “Come and eat of my bread and drink the wine which I have mixed for you.” Plato judged that the discourse over this bowl should be copied into his books,³⁴ he summoned forth souls to drink of it, but did not know how to fill them, for he provided not the drink of faith but that of unbelief. FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD 8.50.³⁵

HE COMES EVEN IF YOU ARE SLEEPING. AMBROSE: And so he comes; whether you eat or drink, if you call upon Christ he is present, saying, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine.” Even if you are asleep, he is knocking at the door. He comes, I say, frequently and reaches in through the window. Frequently (but not always and not to everyone) he comes to that soul which can say, “At night I had put off my garment.”³⁶ For in this night of the world the garment of corporeal life is first to be taken off as the Lord divested himself in his flesh that for you he might triumph over the dominions and powers of this world. ON VIRGINITY 9.55.³⁷

INDICATING THE COMMANDMENTS AND SCRIPTURE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The same food is called “meat,” “bread,” “milk” and “wine.” However, fools say that they take it as [simply] bread and mixed wine. But if it were really taken in that manner, how would we interpret the words:

“So men ate the bread of angels”:³⁸ Now “bread,” it seems to me, should be understood as the firm commandments of God and “wine” as the knowledge of God through meditation on holy Scripture; similarly also [the knowledge of] his divine body and his precious blood. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 9.5.³⁹

THE SACRAMENT OF CHRIST’S BODY AND BLOOD. BEDE: By divine eloquence, the nature of his divinity and humanity conjoined in Christ’s one person is expressed through this bread and mixed wine, as was said above. Or at least the sacrament⁴⁰ through which we are satiated at the table of his altar is clearly shown in the bread of his body and in the mixed wine of his most holy blood. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 1.9.5.⁴¹

9:8 *Reprove the Wise, for They Then Become Wiser*

REFLECTING IN SOLITUDE. AUGUSTINE: It happens regularly and it happens often that a man is cast down for a short time while he is being reprovved, that he resists and fights back. But afterwards he reflects in solitude where there is no one but God and himself, and where he does not fear the displeasure of others by being corrected, but does fear the displeasure of God by refusing correction. Thereafter, he does not repeat the act which was justly censured but now loves the brother, whom he sees as the enemy of his sin, as much as he hates the sin itself. LETTER 210.⁴²

ADMONISH IN CHARITY. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Let us always admonish each other in charity. As often as any one of us sins, let us willingly and patiently accept the reproof of a neighbor or a friend, because of what is said: “Reprove a wise

³⁰Mt 4:4. ³¹OPF 149. ³²Song 5:1. ³³FC 42:377. ³⁴Cf. Plato *Symposium* 213E. ³⁵FC 65:320. ³⁶Song 5:3. ³⁷AOV 27. ³⁸Ps 78:25 (77:25 LXX). ³⁹PG 39:1633. ⁴⁰Latin *mysterium*. ⁴¹CCL 119B:63. ⁴²FC 32:37.

man, and he will love you; rebuke a foolish man, and he will hate you.” Therefore I beseech you, brethren, to chide, rebuke and reprove those who you know are dancing, leading songs, uttering disgraceful words voluptuously or drunkenly on the holy feasts. SERMON 225.5.⁴³

9:10 *Wisdom’s Beginning Is the Fear of the Lord*

WHERE GOD IS EXCLUDED. TERTULLIAN: Discipline is an index to doctrine. [The heretics] say that God is not to be feared. So everything is free to them and unrestrained. But where is God not feared, except where he is not present? Where God is not present, there is no truth either; and where there is no truth, discipline like theirs is natural. But where God is present, there is the fear of God, there are decent seriousness, vigilant care and anxious solicitude, well-tested selection, well-weighed communion and deserved promotion, religious obedience, devoted service, modest appearance, a united church, and all things godly. PRESCRIPTIONS AGAINST HERETICS 43.⁴⁴

9:12 *Wise for Oneself*

THE WISE PERSON MUST BE USEFUL TO MANY. HIPPOLYTUS: Observe that the wise man must be useful to many, so that he who is useful only to himself cannot be wise. For great is the condemnation of wisdom if she reserves her power simply for the one possessing her. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.⁴⁵

9:17 *The Sweetness of Stolen Water*

BREAD AND WATER ARE USED BY HERETICS. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Scripture sets down bread and water in clear reference simply to the heresies that use bread and water in their offer-tory contrary to the rules of the church. There are some who actually celebrate the Eucharist with plain water. “Jump up; do not linger in her place.” Scripture is using the ambiguous word

place to designate the synagogue rather than the church. Then it adds, “In this way you will be crossing a foreign water,” regarding heretical baptism as foreign and improper, “and traversing a foreign river”—one which takes you astray and dumps you in the sea, where everyone who allows himself to be led away from the firm ground of the truth is deposited. STROMATEIS 1.19.96.1-4.⁴⁶

THE SEDUCTION OF THE SENSES. AUGUSTINE: I came upon that brazen woman, empty of prudence, who, in Solomon’s obscure parable, sits on a seat at the door outside her house and says, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” This woman seduced me, because she found my soul outside its own door, dwelling externally in the eye of my flesh and ruminating within myself on such food as I had swallowed through my physical senses. CONFES-SIONS 3.6.II.⁴⁷

AN EXAMPLE OF “BREAD” USED IN A BAD SENSE. AUGUSTINE: Bread is used in a good sense in “I am the living bread which came down from heaven,”⁴⁸ but in a bad sense in “hidden bread is more pleasant.” Many other things are used in the same way. Those examples that I have mentioned create little doubt as to their meaning, for things ought not to be used as examples unless they are clear. There are, however, instances in which it is uncertain whether the signification is to be taken in a good sense or in an evil sense. CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION 25.36.⁴⁹

TRUE DESIRE. JEROME: “The foolish and bold woman comes to want bread.” What bread? Surely that bread which comes down from heaven. And he immediately adds, “The earth-born perish in her house, rush into the depths of hell.” Who are the earth-born that perish

⁴³FC 66:155. ⁴⁴LCC 5:63*. See also Ancient Christian Commentary on Eccles 12:13. ⁴⁵ANF 5:173; TLG 2115.053.16.1. ⁴⁶FC 85:96.

⁴⁷LCC 7:68**. ⁴⁸Jn 6:51. ⁴⁹ACD 100.

in her house? They of course who follow the first Adam, who is of the earth, and not the second, who is from heaven. *AGAINST JOVINIANUS* 1.28.⁵⁰

LITERAL INTERPRETATION DOES NOT SUFFICE. *GREGORY THE GREAT*: What does water signify but human knowledge? This is in accord with Solomon's words implying the voice of heretics: "Stolen waters are sweeter." What does the Lamb's raw flesh indicate but his humanity that

has been thoughtlessly and irreverently disregarded? Everything which we think of profoundly we cook, as it were, in our minds. The flesh of the Lamb was not to be eaten raw or boiled in water, because our Redeemer is not to be judged merely a human being, nor are we to use human science to explain how God could have been made man. *FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES* 22.⁵¹

⁵⁰NPNF 2 6:367*. ⁵¹CS 123:171.





PROVERBS ABOUT
THE RIGHTEOUS AND
THE WICKED
PROVERBS 10:1 - 32

OVERVIEW: This chapter begins a new title and a new approach, no longer discussing individual components of good and bad but now describing each action in alternate verses (BEDE). For example, you should obey the bishop as a wise son to a glad father, and he should recognize that he has chosen such persons to be his priests (JEROME). Money payments, though, will not free anyone from sin (CHRYSOSTOM), and affluence does have its pitfalls (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The just, however, should be generous with their inheritance (CYPRIAN), and at some point the wickedness of the wicked will no longer re-

main because the Lord will overturn and reverse their life (EVAGRIUS). Prayer for the departed benefits the living (CHRYSOSTOM), and there is a reward for humility. The memory of John the Baptist will be blessed, as contrasted to the name of Herod (CAESARIUS). There is also a contrast between Absalom, who was treacherous, and David, who walked in integrity without guile (CHRYSOSTOM). To speak openly and boldly in refutation of error is to make peace (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Without charity nothing pleases God (CLEMENT OF ROME), and education, like charity, is an antidote to hatred (CLEMENT

OF ALEXANDRIA). Alms given in love are a way to cancel guilt (LEO THE GREAT), for riches in themselves are not evil (AMBROSE). The complete Word of God is not a multitude of words but a single Word of truth (ORIGEN). Silence is a virtue, especially in church (AMBROSE), and a discipline to be cultivated (EPHREM THE SYRIAN), because prolixity of words is an invitation to sin (BENEDICT). To speak many words, however, if they are in praise of God, is not sinful. Nonetheless, the tongue of the wicked is highly polluted and not choice silver at all (SHENOUTE). The righteous are saved, however, because they know how to avoid the storm (CHRYSOSTOM).

10:1-3 Contrasts Between Good Actions and Bad Actions

NEW TITLE SIGNIFIES A CHANGE OF APPROACH. BEDE: "The parables of Solomon." He provides a new title because he begins a new type of argumentation, one that will no longer discuss individual components of the good and the bad, as he had done previously, but will now describe the act of each one in alternate verses. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.10.1.¹

OBEY THE BISHOP AS A WISE SON TO A GLAD FATHER. JEROME: Be obedient to your bishop and welcome him as the parent of your soul. . . . In your case the bishop combines in himself many titles to your respect. He is at once a monk, a prelate and an uncle who has before now instructed you in all holy things. This also I say that the bishops should know themselves to be priests, not lords. Let them render to the clergy the honor which is their due that the clergy may offer to them the respect which belongs to bishops. . . . It is a bad custom which prevails in certain churches for presbyters to be silent when bishops are present on the ground that they would be jealous or impatient hearers. "If anything," writes the apostle Paul, "be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace. For you may all prophesy one by one that all may

learn and all may be comforted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace."² "A wise son makes a glad father," and a bishop should rejoice in the discrimination which has led him to choose such for the priests of Christ. LETTER 52.7.³

MONEY PAYMENT WILL NOT FREE ANYONE FROM SIN. CHRYSOSTOM: "Treasures bring no profit to the unrighteous." What then? Did not many avoid death by paying money? Certainly, but they did not get free from sin and in fact they prepared for themselves a life much worse than death. Therefore let us not put our confidence in wealth but in virtue. Indeed when justice comes to deadly sins, people are taken away by death. Would they not rather receive profit from being righteous than from treasures amassed on the earth, "where they grow rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal them?"⁴ Thus, justice not only saves those who possess it but also leads many others to desire it, and always transports them from death to eternal immortality. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 10.2.⁵

PITFALLS OF AFFLUENCE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: If a man cast his seed in ground that is fertile [only] in thorns, and fruitful in briars, and densely covered with useless stubble, he sustains a double loss; of his seed first, and also of his trouble. In order, therefore, that the divine seed may blossom well in us, let us first cast out of the mind worldly cares and the unprofitable anxiety which makes us seek to be rich. "For we brought nothing into the world, nor can we take anything out."⁶ For what profit is there in possessing superfluities? "Treasures profit not the wicked," as Scripture says, "but righteousness delivers from death." For immediately upon the possession of affluence, there run up, and, so to speak, forth-

¹CCL 119B:66. ²1 Cor 14:30-33. ³NPNF 2 6:93*. ⁴Mt 6:19. ⁵PG 64:681. ⁶1 Tim 6:7.

with hem us in, the basest wickednesses; profligate banquets, the delights of gluttony and carefully prepared sauces; music and drunkenness, and the pitfalls of wantonness; pleasures and sensuality, and pride hateful to God. But as the disciple of the Savior has said, "Everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of the world; and the world passes away, and its lust; but he that does the will of God abides for ever."⁷ COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 41.⁸

LET THE JUST BE GENEROUS WITH THEIR INHERITANCE. CYPRIAN: Do you fear that your patrimony may fail if you begin to act generously from it? For when did it happen that resources could fail a just person, when it is written, "The Lord will not afflict the soul of the just with famine." WORKS AND ALMSGIVING II.⁹

THE GREAT REVERSAL. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: If the life of the wicked is malicious and the Lord will overturn it, then it is clear that at some point the wicked will no longer be wicked. For, after that "reversal," "the Lord will pass the kingdom over to God the Father,"¹⁰ so that God may be "all in all."¹¹ SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 118.10.3.¹²

10:7 *Memory of the Blessed*

REMEMBERING THE DEPARTED BENEFITS THE LIVING. CHRYSOSTOM: "The memory of the just man will be praised." But he did not say this because he meant that the departed souls are helped by our praise. He said it because those who praise the departed derive the greatest benefits from remembering them. Since, therefore, we have so much to gain from keeping their memory sacred, let us not reject the wise man's words but rather let us heed them. AGAINST THE ANOMOEANS, HOMILY 6.3.¹³

THE REWARD FOR HUMILITY. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Those who are humble should thank God and remain in humility to the end of their lives.

Thus, the blessing of the angels and patriarchs and prophets and apostles and all the Scriptures will come upon them, as is given to all who persevere in humility. With those blessings they will reach eternal rewards, while there will be fulfilled in them the words "The blessing of the Lord is upon the head of the just." SERMON 48.6.¹⁴

THE MEMORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST WILL BE BLESSED. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: What wonder is it, dearest brethren, that a dancing girl killed the prophet [John the Baptist]? For we know that dissipation is always the enemy of justice and that error ceaselessly persecutes the truth. Wantonness, moreover, associates with cruelty. The head of the prophet is brought to the table of Herod; this dish was due to his inhumanity. Blessed John had told him that it was not right for him to take the wife of a man who was still living, and for this one admonition Herod had him thrown into prison. O how bitter reproof is to sinners! In order that wickedness may not be rebuked, it is multiplied. . . . Truly "the memory of the just will always be blessed, but the desire of the wicked shall perish." SERMON 218.4.¹⁵

10:9-10 *To Walk in Integrity and Speak Boldly*

CONTRAST BETWEEN ABSALOM AND DAVID. CHRYSOSTOM: Absalom was a treacherous man and "stole all men's hearts."¹⁶ Observe how great was his treachery. It is recorded, "He went about, and said 'Have you no judgment?'" wishing to conciliate everyone to himself. But David was guileless. What then? Look at the end of them both, look, how full of utter madness was the former! For inasmuch as he looked solely to the hurt of his father, in all other things he was

⁷Cf. 1 Jn 2:16-17. ⁸CGSL 180*. It has been noticed that Cyril in this commentary, whenever quoting 1 Jn 2:16, always omits the second half of the verse: "is not of the Father but is of the world." ⁹FC 36:237*. ¹⁰See 1 Cor 15:24. ¹¹1 Cor 15:28. ¹²SC 340:216. ¹³FC 72:165. ¹⁴FC 31:248-49. ¹⁵FC 66:126. ¹⁶2 Sam 15:6.

blinded. But not so David. For “he that walks uprightly, walks securely.” HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS 15.¹⁷

TO REFUTE ERROR IS TO MAKE PEACE. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: It follows that we must move rapidly to matters concerning what they call the standard educational curriculum, showing the extent of its usefulness, and concerning astrology, mathematics, magic and wizardry. The whole of Greece prides itself on these as supreme sciences: “Anyone who speaks openly to refute error is a peacemaker.” STROMATEIS 2.1.2.3-4.¹⁸

10:12 Love Covers All Wrongs

WITHOUT CHARITY NOTHING PLEASURES GOD. CLEMENT OF ROME: Who can explain the bond of the charity of God?¹⁹ Who can express the splendor of its beauty? The height to which charity lifts us is inexpressible. Charity unites us to God, “Charity covers a multitude of sins.”²⁰ Charity bears all things, is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing mean in charity, nothing arrogant. Charity knows no schism, does not rebel, does all things in concord.²¹ In charity all the elect of God have been made perfect. Without charity nothing is pleasing to God. I CLEMENT 49.²²

EDUCATION, LIKE CHARITY, IS AN ANTIDOTE TO HATRED. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Ignorance involves a lack of education and learning. It is teaching which implants in us the scientific knowledge of things divine and human. It is possible to live uprightly in poverty. It is also possible in wealth. We admit that it is easier and quicker to track down virtue if we have a preliminary education. It can be hunted down without these aids, although even then those with learning, “with their faculties trained by practice,”²³ have an advantage. “Hatred,” says Solomon, “stirs up strife, but education guards the paths of life.” STROMATEIS 1.6.35.3-5.²⁴

ALMS GIVEN IN LOVE CANCEL GUILT. LEO THE

GREAT: This remedy has been granted by God to human weakness: If someone contracts any guilt while living on this earth, almsgiving wipes it away. Almsgiving is a work of love, and we know that “love covers a multitude of sins.” SERMON 7.1.²⁵

10:15 A Strong City

RICHES THEMSELVES ARE NOT EVIL.

AMBROSE: Riches themselves are not to be censured. “The ransom of a man’s life are his riches,”²⁶ for one who gives to the poor ransoms his soul. Therefore, even in riches there is scope for virtue. You are like helmsmen on a great sea. If one steers his course well, he passes quickly over the sea to reach harbor. But one who does not know how to manage his property is drowned by his load. Thus it is written: “The wealth of the rich is a very strong city.” LETTER 59.²⁷

10:19 Sinfulness Usually Present When Words Are Many

THE COMPLETE WORD OF GOD IS A SINGLE WORD OF TRUTH. ORIGEN: How can teaching accomplish anything without a multitude of words,²⁸ understood in the simpler sense, since even wisdom herself declares to the perishing, “I stretched out words, and you did not heed.”²⁹ Paul appears to have continued teaching from early morning till midnight, when indeed Eutychus, overcome with deep sleep, fell down and troubled the audience since they thought he was dead.³⁰

If, then, the statement is true, “In a multitude of words you will not escape sin,”³¹ and it is also true that Solomon did not sin when he recited the many words about the subjects mentioned earlier, nor did Paul when he extended his teaching until midnight, one must inquire what the

¹⁷NPNF 1 13:122-23*. ¹⁸FC 85:158. ¹⁹See Col 3:14. ²⁰Cf. 1 Pet 4:8; Jas 5:20. ²¹See 1 Cor 13:4-7. ²²FC 1:47. ²³Heb 5:14. ²⁴FC 85:47. ²⁵FC 93:36. ²⁶Prov 13:8. ²⁷FC 26:355. ²⁸Cf. Eccles 12:12. ²⁹Cf. Prov 1:24 LXX. ³⁰See Acts 20:7-10. ³¹Prov 10:19 LXX.

multitude of words is, and from there make a transition to see what the many books are.

The complete Word of God which was in the beginning with God is not a multitude of words, for it is not words. It is a single Word consisting of several ideas, each of which is a part of the whole Word. . . .

Consequently, according to this understanding, we would say that he who utters anything hostile to religion is loquacious, but he who speaks the things of truth, even if he says everything so as to leave out nothing, always speaks the one Word. The saints are not loquacious, since they cling to the goal which accords with the one Word. COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 5.4-5.³²

SIN ENTERS WHEN VERBAL OUTPUT IS NOT LIMITED. AMBROSE: How does sin find entrance? We read, "In the multitude of words you shall not escape sin." When a multiplicity of words has come forth, sin has found an entrance, for in this very multiplicity of words what we utter is not in the slightest degree subject to measure. Because of lack of prudence we fall into error. In fact, to give expression to our thoughts without duly weighing our words is in itself a grave sin. CAIN AND ABEL 1.9.36.³³

SILENCE IS A VIRTUE, ESPECIALLY IN CHURCH. AMBROSE: The virtue of silence, especially in church, is very great. Let no sentence of the divine lessons escape you. If you give ear, restrain your voice, utter no word with your lips which you would wish to bring back, but let your boldness to speak be sparing. For in truth in much speaking there is abundance of sin. To the murderer it was said, "You have sinned, be silent,"³⁴ that he might not sin more; but to the virgin it must be said, "Be silent lest you sin." For Mary, as we read, kept in heart all things that were said concerning her Son.³⁵ So when any passage is read where Christ is announced as about to come or is shown to have come, do not make a noise by talking, but attend. Is anything more

unbecoming that the divine words should be so drowned by talking, as not to be heard, believed or made known, that the sacraments should be indistinctly heard through the sound of voices, that prayer should be hindered when offered for the salvation of all? CONCERNING VIRGINS 3.3.II.³⁶

SILENCE IS A DISCIPLINE TO BE CULTIVATED. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Stir up your soul, so that, by his wisdom, you may know what is fitting, and that, by his will, what is in the commandment may come to pass. One who is pleasing to the wicked is more evil than they. Impure words are only verbiage and empty noise. "Abundance of words will not go blameless." Abundance of words is the sign of no discipline. COMMENTARY ON TATIAN'S DIATESSARON 22.4.³⁷

PROLIXITY OF WORDS IS AN INVITATION TO SIN. BENEDICT: If, for the sake of silence, we ought sometimes not to speak what is good, then even more are we obliged to avoid all evil talk, for fear of the punishment due to sin. Therefore, frequent leave to talk is not to be granted to those who are advanced in perfection, even if the subject is good and holy and edifying. Because it is written, "In much talk you shall not avoid sin," and elsewhere, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue."³⁸ It belongs to the master to speak and teach, and it is the duty of the disciple to hear and obey. RULE OF ST. BENEDICT 6.³⁹

SPEAKING MANY WORDS IN PRAISE OF GOD IS NOT SINFUL. AUGUSTINE: I know that it is written, "In much speaking you shall not escape sin." Would that all my speaking were only the preaching of your word and the praise of you! Then I would not only escape sin, no matter how many words I spoke, but also obtain a good reward. For it could not have been sin that a man blessed of you commanded upon his own son in

³²FC 80:162-63. ³³FC 42:392-93. ³⁴Gen 4:7. ³⁵Lk 2:19. ³⁶NPNF 2 10:382-84*. ³⁷ECTD 335. ³⁸Prov 18:21. ³⁹LCC 12:300**.

the faith, to whom he wrote, "Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season."⁴⁰ In him who neither in season nor out of season kept back your word, none can say that there was not much speaking. And yet it was not much, when so much was needed. [But] deliver me, O God, from the multitude of words within my own soul. ON THE TRINITY 15.51.⁴¹

10:20 *The Tongue of the Righteous and the Mind of the Wicked*

THE TONGUE OF THE WICKED IS HIGHLY POLLUTED. SHENOUE: When I read the Proverbs today, I began with this sentence: "The tongue of the righteous is tried silver." I said, If the tongue of the righteous is choice silver, the tongue of the wicked is most polluted. What is more choice or what is holier than the tongue of a man who uses it to confess and preach God and his Christ and to give him praise, but then also to read his laws and to meditate on them day and night,⁴² and also to speak every good word? ON LANGUAGE.⁴³

10:25 *The Wicked Cannot Withstand the Tempest*

THE RIGHTEOUS ARE SAVED BY AVOIDING THE STORM. CHRYSOSTOM: "When the storm has passed by, the wicked are destroyed: the righteous, by avoiding it, are saved forever." When temptation attacks, the wicked easily sin. On the other hand, the righteous are saved for eternity when they conquer temptation through patience and a soul of gratitude toward God. Notice how safe righteousness is: the righteous are saved when they avoid evil, are on the defensive and stand firm constantly. The wicked, on the other hand, are thrown to the ground even when the disturbance or temptation has not attacked completely. Therefore those who ignore the just judgment of God easily sin. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 10.25.⁴⁴

⁴⁰2 Tim 4:2. ⁴¹LCC 8:180**. ⁴²Cf. Ps 1:2; Josh 1:8. ⁴³CSCO 96:66. ⁴⁴PG 64:685.





PROVERBS ABOUT THE
GODLESS AND THE UPRIGHT,
THE TRUSTWORTHY
AND THE TALEBEARERS
PROVERBS 11:1-31

OVERVIEW: A false balance can defraud one's soul of eternal life (AMBROSE). Disgrace comes with pride, whereas the wise are known for humility (BEDE). Money will not avert eternal punishment (BASIL). Those who have wealth should use it for mercy (SHENOUTE). Repetition of repentance, however, is pointless and superficial (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Although the hope of the wicked perishes when they die, the righteous can look forward to eternal glory (CHRYSOSTOM). For the correction of one's deeds many heads are better than one (BEDE). Money spent on others carries its own reward (LEO THE GREAT). Neither pierce your ears nor your nose, for such would be as inconsistent as a golden ring in a pig's snout (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). One's entire life can be stained by a single disorder of the soul (GREGORY OF NYSSA). The study of Scripture is pointless if one's works and thoughts are muddied (JOHN CASSIAN). The appellation of the name *Christian*, if used unworthily, is like a golden ring in the snout of a swine (SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER). To withhold from those in need is to decline to render mercy (SHENOUTE). To refrain from preaching is just like hiding corn, and it will be cursed by the people (GREGORY THE GREAT). Let your focus be upon the future rather than upon the present or the past (BEDE). Christ is the fruit of righteousness and the tree of life (HIPPLYTUS). The righteous are those who organize their lives in terms of righteousness (CHRYSOSTOM). Total conversion, from impiety and iniquity, is expected of us all (FULGENTIUS). Retribution on earth may be difficult for the righteous, but for sinners the penalty is damnation (BEDE).

11:1 *A False Balance or a Just Weight?*

A DECEITFUL BALANCE CAN DEFRAUD ONE'S SOUL OF ETERNAL LIFE. AMBROSE: Let each one weigh his words without fraud and deceit: "A deceitful balance is an abomination before the Lord." I do not mean that balance which weighs out another's pay (in trivial matters the flesh is deceitful). Before God that balance of words is

detestable which simulates the weight of sober gravity while practicing at the same time cunning fraud. God condemns especially the man who deceives his neighbor with treacherous injustice. He will have no gain from his clever skill. For what does it profit a man if he gains the wealth of the whole world but defrauds his own soul of the payment of eternal life?¹ LETTER 15.²

11:2 *Disgrace Comes with Pride, but Wisdom Comes with Humility*

MANY REASONS WHY PRIDE BRINGS DISGRACE. BEDE: "Where there is pride, there will also be disgrace" because the proud conduct themselves disgracefully through contempt or ignorance of discipline, or because they bring disgrace upon their neighbors, or, in any event, "because all who exalt themselves will be humbled."³ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.II.2.⁴

11:4 *Riches Do Not Profit, but Righteousness Delivers from Death*

MONEY WILL NOT AVERT ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. BASIL THE GREAT: [Solomon] leads toward understanding especially when he says, "Possessions are of no advantage in the day of wrath." For he infused your heart with the knowledge that an abundance of money will be of no help to you in that day, nor will it remove eternal punishment. And when he says, "The innocent will inherit the earth,"⁵ he clearly means the earth of which the meek are also heirs, for first the psalmist said, "But the meek will inherit the earth,"⁶ and then the Lord, when preaching about beatitude, said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will possess the earth."⁷ HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 14.⁸

WEALTH SHOULD BE USED FOR MERCY. SHENOUTE: I know why it is written: "Wealth will not

¹See Mt 16:26. ²FC 26:82. ³Lk 14:11. ⁴CCL 119B:70. ⁵Cf. Prov 2:21. ⁶Ps 37:11 (36:11 LXX). ⁷Mt 5:4. ⁸PG 31:416.

profit in the day of wrath.” This was said about the one who does not employ his wealth for mercy. Is not the power of wealth to be brought forth and used at a time of need? At the hour in which you return your spirit to the hands of God, you will understand that the full utility of your riches is to use them for the sake of mercy. For they were given to you by Jesus Christ, God and the Son of God. ON LANGUAGE.⁹

11:5 Righteousness Keeps One in the Straight Way

REPEATEDLY REQUESTING FORGIVENESS. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: To be repeatedly requesting forgiveness for offenses repeatedly committed is not repentance, only its appearance. “The righteousness of the blameless keeps their way straight,” proclaims Scripture, and again, “The righteousness of the innocent will set straight their way.” STROMATEIS 2.13.59.1.¹⁰

11:7 Hope Perishes When the Wicked Dies

THE RIGHTEOUS CAN LOOK FOR GLORY AFTER DEATH. CHRYSOSTOM: “When a righteous man dies, hope does not perish.” He hopes that his children will do well; he hopes to be provided with great things. This passage also transports us to thoughts of the resurrection or of our posterity. Or, since one who is righteous has delighted in all these things already, he will also enjoy their future consummation; or, finally, that he would have enjoyment of glory after death. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 9.7.¹¹

11:14 Failure for Lack of Guidance

MANY HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE. BEDE: Lest you think that a friend’s crime which you are unable to correct should be concealed, it rightly says that a people are corrupted without a governor but are saved where there is abundant counsel. [This is said] in order to show that the deed

you are unable to amend alone should be revealed to many, so that it may be corrected by the unanimous diligence of all. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.11.14.¹²

11:17 Kindness Benefits the Self, but Cruelty Hurts the Self

MONEY SPENT ON OTHERS CARRIES ITS OWN REWARD. LEO THE GREAT: Prayer rises up quickly to the ears of God when lifted up by the recommendation of [alms and fasting]. Since, as it has been written, “the merciful man benefits his own soul,” nothing belongs to each individual more than what has been spent on one’s neighbor. Part of those physical resources which are used to help the poor become transformed into eternal riches. Born from this generosity are funds which will not be able to be diminished through use nor damaged through decay. “Blessed are the merciful, for God will have mercy on them.”¹³ He who constitutes the very exemplar of this precept will also be the sum of their reward. SERMON 16.2.¹⁴

11:22 A Golden Ring in a Pig’s Snout

PIERCE NOT YOUR EARS OR YOUR NOSE. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Reason also forbids us to do violence to nature by piercing the lobes of the ear. Why not pierce the nostrils also? The Scriptures would then be accomplished indeed: “As a ring in the nose of the swine, so is beauty in a foolish woman.” To conclude, if anyone thinks he is decorated when he wears gold, then he is less than his gold, and he who is less than gold is not its master. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 3.11.56.¹⁵

DISORDER OF THE SOUL. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Let eagerness for virginity be put down as the foundation for the life of virtue, but let there be built upon this foundation all the products of virtue. If this is believed to be precious and befitting

⁹CSCO 96:67. ¹⁰FC 85:198. ¹¹PG 64:685. ¹²CCL 119B:71. ¹³Mt 5:7. ¹⁴FC 93:59-60. ¹⁵FC 23:244*.

to God, as it is, but one's whole life does not conform to it and is stained by the rest of the soul's disorder, then this is "the golden ring in the swine's snout" or the pearl trampled under the feet of the swine.¹⁶ ON VIRGINITY 18.¹⁷

IF ONE'S WORKS AND THOUGHTS ARE MUD-DIED. JOHN CASSIAN: As for those who seem to have some semblance of knowledge and those who do not abandon the sins of the flesh even when they apply themselves diligently to the reading and memorizing of Scripture, Proverbs has the following well-put statement: "The beauty of a woman of evil ways is like a golden ring in the snout of a pig." What use is it for a man to possess the jewel of heaven's words and to give himself over to that most precious loveliness of Scripture if he himself is stuck fast in muddied works and thoughts? CONFERENCE 14.16.¹⁸

THE APPELLATION CHRISTIAN USED UNWORTHILY. SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER: What is a holy appellation without merit but an ornament set in the mud? The holy Scriptures have testified to this in writing: "A golden ring in a swine's snout, a woman fair and foolish." And in us the appellation *Christian* is like a golden ornament. If we use it unworthily, we seem to be swine with an ornament. THE GOVERNANCE OF GOD 4.1.¹⁹

11:26 *Holding Back Grain*

TO WITHHOLD IS TO DECLINE MERCY. SHENOUTE: It is written, "Men speak evil of him who withholds wheat." One who withholds is without mercy. He does not gather for the sake of mercy. For, unless he gathers, with what can he bestow mercy? Is it not also true that men bless the person who expends and gives, as it is written here and there in the pages of sacred Scripture?²⁰ ON LANGUAGE.²¹

REFRAINING FROM PREACHING IS LIKE HIDING CORN. GREGORY THE GREAT: It is well said by Solomon, "He that hides corn shall be cursed

among the people." To hide corn is to retain with oneself the words of sacred preaching. And everyone that does so is cursed among the people, because through fault of his silence he is condemned in the punishment of the many whom he could have corrected. PASTORAL RULE 3.25.26.²²

11:28 *Trust Not in Riches but in Righteousness*

LET YOUR FOCUS BE ON THE FUTURE. BEDE: He who does not think of the future because he is longing for present goods will finally be lacking in both. But they who do good deeds in the present for the hope of future rewards will justly receive that for which they hope. The green leaf in the tree that does not yet have fruit to display surely signifies the future. And the righteous flourish like green leaves because, having been saved in hope through faith,²³ they do not cease to make progress in virtue by grace until they attain the fruit of their desired reward. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.II.28.²⁴

11:30 *Tree of Life Is the Fruit of the Righteous*

CHRIST IS THE FRUIT AND THE TREE. HIP-POLYTUS: The fruit of righteousness and the tree of life is Christ. He alone, as man, fulfilled all righteousness. And with his own underived life²⁵ he has brought forth the fruits of knowledge and virtue like a tree, whereof they that eat shall receive eternal life and shall enjoy the tree of life in paradise, with Adam and all the righteous. But the souls of the unrighteous meet an untimely expulsion from the presence of God, by whom they shall be left to remain in the flame of torment. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.²⁶

11:31 *Even the Righteous Receive Their Due*

¹⁶Mt 7:6. ¹⁷FC 58:56. ¹⁸JCC 170-71. ¹⁹FC 3:90. ²⁰Cf. Acts 20:35. ²¹CSCO 96:67. ²²NPNF 2 12:53*. ²³See Rom 8:24. ²⁴CCL 119B:73. ²⁵Gk *autozōē*. ²⁶ANF 5:173; TLG 2115.053.17.1.

THOSE WHO ORGANIZE THEIR LIVES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. CHRYSOSTOM: “If the righteous are saved with difficulty, where will the impious and sinners appear?” Consider that life is long, a lasting residence with many dangers. And he [Solomon] does not say these words about those who lived righteously. But if by any chance he said something about them, he would speak in the best of terms. Indeed if God has bestowed something upon us, what we have done with it will be examined, and who will be justified except the one who is purer than the sun? By “righteous” he [Solomon] means the one who organizes his life in righteousness. The one who hates God is “impious.” The “sinner” is the one who acts wickedly. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 11.31.²⁷

TOTAL CONVERSION IS COMMANDED OF US. FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: Conversion from both impiety and iniquity is commanded. For both provoke the wrath of God against one, because God detests and condemns both, as Paul says,

“The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and human wickedness.”²⁸ And Solomon says, as the blessed Peter had also inserted among his own words, “And if the righteous one is barely saved, when will the godless and the sinner appear?”²⁹ ON THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS 1.13.1.³⁰

DIFFICULTY FOR THE RIGHTEOUS BUT DAMNATION FOR SINNERS. BEDE: “If the righteous receives [retribution] on earth, how much more the wicked and sinner?” This is to say clearly, “If the frailty of mortal life is so great that not even the righteous who are to be crowned in heaven pass through this life without tribulations on account of the countless slips of [our] flawed nature, how much more do those who are cut off from heavenly grace await the certain outcome of their everlasting damnation? COMMENTARY ON I PETER 4:18.³¹

²⁷PG 64:689. ²⁸Rom 1:18. ²⁹Cf. 1 Pet 4:18. ³⁰FC 95:125-26. ³¹CS 82:113-14.





THE DISCIPLINE
OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM
PROVERBS 12:1-28

OVERVIEW: The crown of the husband is a good wife, but the husband is also the crown of the woman (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). The wife should be a companion in virtue as well as in life

(CHRYSOSTOM). Continue to be the person you have become by grace (GREGORY THE GREAT). Our attitude of mercy toward fellow human beings is paralleled by our merciful attitude toward ani-

mals (CHRYSOSTOM). Jesus has given us the way of reconciliation (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS), and for this reason we are called to love our enemies as well as our friends (CAESARIUS).

12:4-5 A Good Wife Is the Crown of the Husband

THE CROWN OF A HUSBAND IS HIS MARRIAGE. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: The crown of the woman must be considered the husband, and the crown of the husband is his marriage. For both, the flower of their union is the child who is indeed the flower that the divine cultivator culls from the meadow of the flesh. “The crown of old men is their children’s children and the glory of children is their father,”¹ it is said. Our glory is the Father of all, and the crown of the whole church is Christ. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.8.71.²

A WIFE SHOULD ALSO BE A COMPANION IN VIRTUE. CHRYSOSTOM: When you are going to take a wife, do not only look for a companion in life but also for a companion in virtue. It is inevitable that the husband of a depraved wife perishes in the same way. Therefore look for virtue and not for money. And a well-behaved wife will become a crown of glory because she is strong; [whereas] an evil wife, as if a worm dwells inside her heart, will cause destruction gradually and silently. And what is even more dreadful is that this does not appear externally, but this sort of wife injects the poison inside and consumes an unhappy soul. In the opposite way, virtue adorns the one who follows it, whereas iniquity makes the iniquitous even more detestable. “The reflections of the righteous are judgments.” They are, in fact, discreet and simple: either because the righteous always reflect on the judgments and commands of God or because they always turn judgments over inside their mind. Our mind sits like a judge, judging the different virtues and arguing with the opposing vices, approving one, condemning the other. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 12.4.³

12:7 When the Wicked Are Overthrown, They Are No More

CONTINUE TO BE THE PERSON YOU HAVE BECOME BY GRACE. GREGORY THE GREAT: Let us abandon the selves we have made by sinning. Let us continue to be the selves we have become by grace. You see a person who was proud: if he has turned to Christ he has become humble, he has abandoned himself. If a person of unrestrained desires has changed to a life of self-restraint, he has certainly denied what he was. If a miser, one who previously seized what belonged to others, has ceased to go around looking for gain and learned to be generous with what belongs to him, beyond any doubt he has abandoned himself. He is the generous person he was created to be, not the one he would become through his wickedness. This is why it is written, “Change the wicked, and they will be no more.” The wicked who have been changed will be no more, not because they will altogether cease to exist in their essential being. [Rather,] they will cease to exist in their guilty state of ungodliness. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 32.⁴

12:10 A Righteous Person Has Regard for Animals’ Lives

ONE’S ATTITUDE TOWARD ANIMALS. CHRYSOSTOM: “The righteous has pity upon the soul of his animals.” It is an exercise of human charity when someone, by means of his animals, becomes accustomed to show mercy upon his fellow human beings. Indeed he who has pity upon animals tends to have much more pity upon his brothers. . . . Do the righteous have pity upon the souls of their animals? Absolutely. Certainly it is necessary to convey benevolence toward them, so that there may be a greater exercise [of benevolence] toward fellow human beings. Indeed with good reason God ordered that we carry hurt animals and take back those that stray, and not to

¹Prov 17:6. ²FC 23:154*. ³PG 64:689-92. ⁴CS 123:258-59*.

bind the mouth of an ox.⁵ He absolutely wants us to preserve the health of animals: in the first place for our sake, second, in order that they may provide us with their menial service. At the same time it is an exercise of benevolence and care. Indeed the one who has pity upon strangers has much more pity upon those who are familiar to him. And the one who has pity upon his servants has much more pity for his brothers. But you may say: an animal provides you with a profitable service, but with what does a brother provide you? He is helpful to you, I say, much more from the viewpoint of God. You can see that when we offer care such as we do for our animals we do not consider this demeaning. For, in doing so we are not only serving them but also ourselves. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 12.10.⁶

12:28 Righteousness Tends Toward Life, but Error Leads to Death

JESUS HAS GIVEN US THE WAY OF RECONCILIATION. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: “The

souls of those that bear a settled hatred are to death,” says Solomon. But our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says in the gospels: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift to God.”⁷ CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.6.53.⁸

STRIVE TO LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: “The paths of those who harbor resentment for an injury lead to death.” Are these my words, dearest brothers? They are taken from the canonical sacred Scriptures. Therefore in order that we may not be murderers or among the living dead, let us strive to love not only our friends but also our enemies. Then we will be able to meet a kind and merciful Lord with a conscience at ease, in accord with the bond of his pledge. SERMON 223.4.⁹

⁵See Deut 22:1-4. ⁶PG 64:692. ⁷Mt 5:23-24. ⁸ANF 7:419*. ⁹FC 66:146-47*.





A WISE SON LISTENS
 PROVERBS 13:1-25

OVERVIEW: Pride is the disease of riches, and Christians should avoid both of them (AUGUSTINE). Do not, for lack of discipline, store your profits in a bag that has holes in it (JOHN CASSIAN). Moderation in either wealth or poverty does not necessarily prevent sin (ORIGEN). Because wealth is the ransom of a person's life, wealth must be shared for the sake of salvation (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA), and it is even proper to despise money for the sake of one's soul (PETER

OF ALEXANDRIA). Wealth is for the sake of redemption, not of destruction (AMBROSE). Poverty is not an evil thing, but neither is honest wealth (CHRYSOSTOM). If the poor feel dejected, they should look around and count their blessings (BASIL). Souls are more valuable to the Lord than riches (JEROME), and wealth that redeems the soul may be either temporal or spiritual (BEDE). The property of the ungodly, however, is not transmitted to their children (CHRYSOSTOM). Par-

ents must give account if they fail to discipline their children (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). There are, after all, good reasons not to spare the rod (THEODOTUS), and correction by the rod is especially useful for teaching obedience to the precepts of salvation (AMBROSE). Temporal scourging is sometimes necessary for eternal life (AUGUSTINE). Nonetheless, the greed of the wicked can never be quenched (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA), although the hunger of the righteous is satisfied by the food of the soul (ORIGEN). Overall, the just are satisfied with the heavenly food of God's Word and Wisdom (ORIGEN, CAESARIUS).

13:7 *The Pretenses of Wealth and of Poverty*

THE DISEASE OF RICHES IS PRIDE. AUGUSTINE: It is simply not to be credited that holy Scripture is concerned to advise us on these riches which the proud get such swollen heads about. I mean these visible, earthly riches, of course, as though we should either think they are very important or fear not to have them. "After all," someone will say, "what good does a man get from pretending to be rich when in fact he has nothing?" Scripture has taken note of such a person and found fault with him. . . .

It is not improper, nor is it unseemly or useless that the holy Scriptures should wish to commend rich people to us for being humble. The thing really to be afraid of with riches, you see, is pride. In fact, the apostle Paul has advice on this point for Timothy: "Command the rich of this world," he says, "not to have proud thoughts."¹ It wasn't riches he went in dread of but the disease of riches. The disease of riches is great pride. A grand spirit it is indeed, that in the midst of riches is not prone to this disease, a spirit greater than its riches, surpassing them not by desiring but by despising them.

Great then indeed is the rich person who doesn't think he is great just because he is rich. But if that is why he does think he is great, then he is proud and destitute. He's a big noise in the

flesh. In his heart of hearts he's a beggar. He has been inflated, not filled. If you see two wineskins, one filled, the other inflated, they each have the same bulk and extent, but they don't each have the same content. Just look at them, and you can't tell the difference; but weigh them, and you will find out. The one that has been filled is hard to move; the one that has been inflated is easily removed. . . .

I am not telling you to do away with your wealth but to transfer it, because there are many people who have refused to do this and have been very sorry indeed that they did not obey, when they not only lost their wealth but on account of it have lost themselves too. So, command the rich of this world not to have proud thoughts, and there will happen in them what we have heard in Solomon's proverb: "There are those who humble themselves though they are rich." It can happen even with these temporal riches. Let him be humble. Let him be more glad that he's a Christian than that he's rich. Don't let him be puffed up or become high and mighty. Let him take notice of the poor man his brother, and not refuse to be called the poor man's brother. After all, however rich he may be, Christ is richer, and he wanted all for whom he shed his blood to be his brethren. SERMON 36.1-2, 5.²

DO NOT PUT YOUR PROFITS IN A BAG WITH HOLES. JOHN CASSIAN: For indeed a person who loses by daily distractions of mind and lack of self control what he appears to gain by the conversion of others puts his profits into a bag with holes. And so it is that while they fancy that they can make larger profits by the instruction of others, they are actually deprived of their own improvement. For "there are who make themselves out as rich though possessing nothing, and there are who humble themselves amid great riches." CONFERENCE 24.13.³

13:8 *Ransom of One's Life Is Wealth*

¹Tim 6:17. ²WSA 3 2:174-75, 177*. ³NPNF 2 11:537*

MODERATION OF WEALTH OR OF POVERTY DOES NOT NECESSARILY PREVENT SIN. ORIGEN: And what use is it to recount how many, because of their failure to manage properly their material riches, have received the same punishment as the rich man in the Gospel?⁴ Or how many, because they bore poverty ignobly with behavior more lowly and base than was proper among saints, have fallen away from their heavenly hope? Even those who are midway between these extremes of riches and poverty are not by their moderate estate able to escape sinning. ON PRAYER 29.6.⁵

WEALTH MUST BE SHARED FOR THE SAKE OF SALVATION. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Just as the foot is the measure of the sandal, so the physical needs of each person are the measure of what he should possess. Whatever is excessive—the things they call adornments, the trappings of the rich—are not adornments but a burden for the body. If one is to use violence to ascend to heaven,⁶ it is necessary to carry the good staff of holy deeds and first to share our goods with the oppressed before laying hold of the true rest. Scripture declares that really “his own wealth is the redemption of the soul of man,” that is, if a person is rich, he will obtain salvation by sharing his wealth. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 3.7.39.⁷

DESPISE MONEY FOR THE SAKE OF ONE’S SOUL. PETER OF ALEXANDRIA: Against those who have given money that they might be entirely undisturbed by evil, an accusation cannot be brought. For they have sustained the loss and sacrifice of their goods that they might not hurt or destroy their soul, which others for the sake of filthy lucre have not done. And yet the Lord says, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”⁸ And again, “You cannot serve God and mammon.”⁹ In these things, then, they have shown themselves the servants of God, inasmuch as they have hated, trodden under foot and despised money, and have

thus fulfilled what is written: “The ransom of a man’s life are his riches.” CANONICAL EPISTLES 12.¹⁰

WEALTH IS FOR THE SAKE OF REDEMPTION. AMBROSE: The riches of a person ought to work to the redemption of his soul, not to its destruction. Wealth is redemption if one uses it well. It is a snare if one does not know how to use it. For what is a person’s money if not provision for the journey? A great amount is a burden; a little is useful. We are wayfarers in this life; many are walking along, but a person needs to make a good passage. The Lord Jesus is with him who makes a good passage. LETTER 15.¹¹

POVERTY IS NOT AN EVIL THING, BUT NEITHER IS HONEST WEALTH. CHRYSOSTOM: “The redemption of the soul of a man is his own wealth.” What are you saying? What do you mean by exalting so much wealth? First of all he [Solomon] did not speak about just any wealth but that which is produced through honest activities. Poverty is not, therefore, an evil thing. Rather, he says that no one who wants to may threaten someone who is poor; indeed how can some one terrify one who possesses nothing? For this reason this kind of life is devoid of afflictions. Or, maybe he [Solomon] calls “his own wealth” “righteousness” which snatches him away from death. So the one who is poor in virtue does not have a mind at peace when he suffers threats or the declaration of a punishment. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 13.8.¹²

THE POOR MUST COUNT THEIR BLESSINGS. BASIL THE GREAT: Suppose you are an ignoble and undistinguished person, poor and of lowly origin, without home or city, sick, in need of daily sustenance, in dread of the powerful, cowering

⁴See Lk 16:22-24. ⁵Curtis 19**. ⁶See Mt 11:12. ⁷FC 23:231-32.*
⁸Mt 16:26. ⁹Mt 6:24. ¹⁰ANF 6:276-77*. ¹¹FC 26:80-81. ¹²PG 64:696.

before everyone because of your abject condition. “But he that is poor,” says the Scripture, “bears not reprehension.” Yet, do not despair or cast aside every good hope because your present state is quite unenviable. Rather, turn your thoughts to the blessings already granted you by God and to those reserved by promise for the future. HOMILY ON THE WORDS “GIVE HEED TO THYSELF.”¹³

SOULS ARE MORE VALUABLE TO THE LORD THAN RICHES. JEROME: The Lord yearns for believers’ souls more than for their riches. We read in the Proverbs, “The ransom of a man’s soul are his own riches.” We may, indeed, take a person’s own riches to be those which do not come from someone else or from plunder; according to the precept, “honor God with your just labors.”¹⁴ But the sense is better if we understand a person’s “own riches” to be those hidden treasures which no thief can steal and no robber wrest from him.¹⁵ LETTER 71.4.¹⁶

WEALTH THAT REDEEMS THE SOUL. BEDE: As Solomon says, “A man’s own wealth is the redemption of his soul.” This might be temporal wealth which one distributes and gives to the poor so that one’s righteousness may endure forever, or it might be spiritual wealth in the form of the righteousness that one has attained by taking pity on the poor or by doing other good things. ON THE TABERNACLE 3.13.¹⁷

13:22 A Good Person Leaves an Inheritance

THE PROPERTY OF THE UNGODLY NOT TRANSMITTED TO THEIR HEIRS. CHRYSOSTOM: “A good man will inherit children’s children.” The verb “he will inherit” does not mean that he will take the inheritance from his sons; in fact, this would be the greatest curse. Rather, it means the opposite, that is, that he will transmit his riches to his posterity and will leave behind descendants. But the property of the ungodly is not transmitted to their sons but to those who

can use them properly. Another interpretation may be: the mind, almost like a parent, generates good thoughts; and these become parents of similar actions. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 13.22.¹⁸

13:24 Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child

PARENTS MUST GIVE ACCOUNT. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: You fathers, educate your children in the Lord, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and teach them such trades as are agreeable and suitable to the Lord, lest they by such opportunity become extravagant and continue without punishment from their parents, and so become slack before their time and go astray from that which is good. Therefore do not be afraid to reprove them and to teach them wisdom with severity. For your corrections will not kill them but rather preserve them. . . . [Thus Solomon says,] “He that spares his rod hates his son,” and afterwards, “Beat his sides while he is an infant, lest he be hardened and disobey you.”¹⁹ He, therefore, who neglects to admonish and instruct his own son, hates his own child. Teach, therefore, your children the word of the Lord. Bring them under with cutting stripes, and make them subject from infancy, teaching them the holy Scriptures, which are Christian and divine, and delivering to them every sacred writing, “not giving them such liberty that they get the mastery”²⁰ and act against your opinion. Do not permit them to club together with peer groups. For so they will be turned to disorderly ways and will fall into fornication. And if this happens by the carelessness of their parents, those who gave them birth will be guilty of their souls. For if the offending children get into the company of debauched persons by the negligence of those who gave them life, they will not be punished alone by themselves, but their parents also will

¹³FC 9:441. ¹⁴Prov 3:9. ¹⁵See Mt 6:20. ¹⁶NPNF 2 6:153. ¹⁷TTH 18:157*. ¹⁸PG 64:697. ¹⁹Sir 30:12. ²⁰Sir 30:11.

be condemned on their account. For this cause, endeavor at the time when they are of an age fit for marriage, to join them in wedlock and settle them together, lest in the heat and fervor of their age their course of life become dissolute and you be required to give an account by the Lord God in the day of judgment. **CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 4.2.II.**²¹

GOOD REASONS NOT TO SPARE THE ROD.

THEODOTUS THE VALENTINIAN: God, out of goodness, has mingled fear with goodness. For what is beneficial for each one, that he also supplies, as a physician to a sick man, as a father to his insubordinate child: “For he that spares his rod hates his son.” And the Lord and his apostles walked in the midst of fear and labors. When, then, the affliction is sent in the person of a right-eous man, it is either from the Lord rebuking him for a sin committed before, or guarding him on account of the future, or not preventing by the exercise of his power an assault from without—for some good end to him and to those near, for the sake of example. **EXCERPTS OF THEODOTUS 9.**²²

CORRECTION USEFUL FOR OBEDIENCE.

AMBROSE: The correction of the father who does not spare the rod is useful, that he may render his son’s soul obedient to the precepts of salvation. He punishes with a rod, as we read, “I shall punish their offenses with a rod.”²³ **LETTER 45.**²⁴

TEMPORAL SCOURGING SOMETIMES NECESSARY. **AUGUSTINE:** “He that spares the rod hates his son.” For, give us a person who with right faith and true understanding can say with all the energy of his heart, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”²⁵ For such a person there is no need of the terror of hell, to say nothing of temporal punishments or imperial laws, seeing that with him it is so indispensable a blessing to cleave to the Lord that he not only dreads being parted from that happiness as a heavy punishment but

can scarcely even bear delay in its attainment. But yet, before the good sons can say they have “a desire to depart, and to be with Christ,”²⁶ many must first be recalled to their Lord by the stripes of temporal scourging, like evil servants, and in some degree like good-for-nothing fugitives. **THE CORRECTION OF THE DONATISTS 6.21.**²⁷

13:25 The Appetite of the Righteous Is Satisfied

THE GREED OF THE WICKED CAN NEVER BE QUENCHED.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: We have been created, not to eat and drink but to come to the knowledge of God. “The just man,” Scripture says, “eats and fills his soul; but the belly of the wicked is ever in want,” ever hungry with a greed that cannot be quenched. **CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.1.14.**²⁸

FOOD OF THE SOUL SATISFIES THE HUNGER OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

ORIGEN: We must consider the food promised in the law as the food of the soul, which is to satisfy not both parts of a person’s nature but the soul only. And the words of the gospel, although probably containing a deeper meaning, may yet be taken in their more simple and obvious sense, as teaching us not to be disturbed with anxieties about our food and clothing, but, while living in plainness, and desiring only what is needful, to put our trust in the providence of God. **AGAINST CELSUS 7.24.**²⁹

THE JUST ARE SATISFIED. **ORIGEN:** If you take [this verse] according to the literal sense that “when the just person eats he will fill his soul but the souls of the impious will be in poverty,” it will appear false. For the souls of the impious take food with eagerness and strive after “satiety,” but the just meanwhile are hungry. Finally, Paul was just, and he said, “Up to this hour we are hungry,

²¹ANF 7:435-36*. ²²ANF 8:44. ²³Ps 89:32 (88:33 LXX). ²⁴FC 26:234. ²⁵Ps 42:2. ²⁶Phil 1:23. ²⁷NPNF 1 4:641*. ²⁸FC 23:106. ²⁹ANF 4:620.

and thirsty, and naked, and we are beaten with fists.”³⁰ And again he says, “In hunger and thirst, in many fastings.”³¹ And how does Solomon say, “when the just eats he will satisfy his soul”? But if you consider how “the just person” always and “without interruption” eats from “the living bread” and fills his soul and satisfies it with heav-

enly food which is the Word of God and his wisdom, you will find how the just person “eats his bread in abundance” from the blessing of God. HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 16.5.4.³²

³⁰1 Cor 4:11. ³¹2 Cor 11:27. ³²FC 83:270-71. Caesarius of Arles in a sermon offers the same comment; see FC 47:120-21.





WISDOM OPPOSED BY FOLLY
 PROVERBS 14:1-35

OVERVIEW: The house of wisdom built by the wise woman can easily be destroyed by words of the foolish (BESA THE COPT). The house built upon doctrine and faith, likewise, can be destroyed by heresy (CHRYSOSTOM). The house built in heaven can be destroyed by the rebellion of the wicked (BEDE). The phenomenon of fear can make people more religious (CHRYSOSTOM). Fools condemn themselves by their foolish talk (AMBROSE), and a foolish preacher knows better how to reprove than how to sympathize (GREGORY THE

GREAT). Martyrs are faithful witnesses worth believing (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). Wisdom indicates three ways of friendship, of which the highest is virtue (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). In the end God's counsel does prevail, even though people may think otherwise (JEROME). Our true fear is not a fear of God but a fear of falling into evil (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Life, however, is transformed by fear of punishment (AUGUSTINE), and strength is shown in adversity (GREGORY THE GREAT). Patience comes from resistance to anger

(JOHN CASSIAN), just as understanding, like strength, comes from patience and exercise (CHRYSTOSTOM). The meek person can heal the heart, just as the tranquil give life to the flesh (AMBROSE). All notwithstanding, the commands of God must not be reduced to the triviality of jokes (CHRYSOSTOM).

14:1 *Wisdom's House Destroyed by Folly*

CONSTRUCTIVE WORK OF THE WISE WOMAN. BESA THE COPT: And it was also said, "A wise woman builds a house, but the foolish will destroy it with her hands." This means that the wise woman encourages her neighbor in the fear of God and the love which is in her heart toward her sister and her sisters. But, on the other hand, the foolish woman will destroy them by her words full of bitterness, hatred, wickedness and scorn, even as it is written, "A rod of scorn is in the mouth of the foolish,"¹ and that means you. FRAGMENT 29, LETTER TO ANTINOE 2.3-4.²

THE HOUSE BUILT ON DOCTRINE AND FAITH. CHRYSOSTOM: "The wise women built up their homes." The church built its house with its patience and hope in Christ, that is, it has roused and restored those entering it with its doctrine and faith. "The foolish destroyed it with her own hand." This is the heresy which becomes the cause for their eternal death. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 14.I.³

THE HOUSE BUILT IN HEAVEN. BEDE: Both each faithful soul and the catholic church throughout the world build a house for itself in the heavenly homeland through good works. The wicked, however, through their evil living and even, at times, through open rebellion, destroy what was well designed by the good. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.14.I.⁴

14:2 *The Upright Fear the Lord*

A FEAR FACTOR THAT FAVORS RELIGION. CHRYSOSTOM: "He who walks straight, fears the

Lord." Not just any fear makes people walk straight, but the fear of God. . . . A life provided with virtue is quite illustrious, but the addition of fear makes persons more religious. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 14.2.⁵

14:3 *The Talk of a Fool*

FOOLS CONDEMN THEMSELVES BY THEIR FOOLISH TALK. AMBROSE: What judgment harder than that of our hearts, whereby each one stands convicted and accuses himself of the injury that he has wrongfully done against his brother? This the Scriptures speak of very plainly, saying, "Out of the mouth of fools there is a rod for wrongdoing." Folly, then, is condemned because it causes wrongdoing. Ought we not rather to avoid this, than death, or loss, or want, or exile or sickness? Who would not think some blemish of body or loss of inheritance far less than some blemish of soul or loss of reputation? DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 3.4.24.⁶

MORE READY TO REPROVE THAN TO ENCOURAGE. GREGORY THE GREAT: It is the way of haughty preachers that they are more desirous of strictly reproving their hearers even when distressed than they are to cherish them in a kindly manner. For they study more to chide and reprove faults than to encourage goodness with praise. They are anxious to appear superior to other people, and they are better pleased when anger raises their feelings than when love makes them equal. They always want to find something to smite sharply with reproof. As it is written, "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride," because really he knows how to smite sharply but not to sympathize with humility. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 5.24.34.40.⁷

14:5 *A Faithful Witness Does Not Lie*

¹Cf. Prov 14:3. ²CSCO 157:96, 158:92-93. ³PG 64:700. ⁴CCL 119B:82. ⁵PG 64:700. ⁶NPNF 2 10:71. ⁷LF 23:81*.

MARTYRS ARE FAITHFUL WITNESSES WORTH BELIEVING. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: These things we have said concerning those that in truth have been martyrs for Christ, but not concerning false martyrs, concerning whom the oracle speaks, “The name of the ungodly is extinguished.”⁸ For “a faithful witness will not lie, but an unjust witness inflames lies.” For he that departs this life in his testimony without lying, for the sake of the truth, is a faithful martyr, worthy to be believed in such things wherein he strove for the word of truth by his own blood. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 5.1.9.⁹

14:8 *The Folly of Fools*

VIRTUE, MUTUALITY AND PLEASURE: THREE WAYS OF FRIENDSHIP. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: “The wisdom of able men will understand the paths of wisdom, but the folly of fools goes in the wrong direction.” Prophecy says, “To whom shall I look if not to the man who is gentle and tranquil and who trembles at my words.”¹⁰ We have been taught that there are three forms of friendship. The first and best of these is based on virtue, since the love which proceeds from reason is firmly based. The second stands between the others and is based on mutuality. It involves mutual sharing and is beneficial to life. Friendship on the basis of free giving is mutual. The third, and last, comes, as we put it, from habit. Some say that it chops and changes, being based on pleasure.¹¹ STROMATEIS 2.101.2-3.¹²

14:12 *A Way That Leads to Death*

IN THE END GOD’S COUNSEL PREVAILS. JEROME: We read in Proverbs, “There is a way that seems just to men, yet the end of it leads to the depths of hades.” You see, ignorance is also clearly condemned in this text, since man thinks otherwise and he falls into hades, seemingly having the truth. “There are many thoughts,” he says, “in the heart of man.”¹³ But still, it is not his will, which is uncertain and doubtful and change-

able, that prevails but the counsel of God. AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 1.39.¹⁴

14:16 *The Wise Are Cautious*

NOT A FEAR OF GOD BUT A FEAR OF FALLING INTO EVIL. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Awe is fear of the divine. But if fear is a passion, as some insist that fear is a passion, not every fear is a passion. Superstition is a passion, being the fear of spiritual powers which are themselves agitated by different passions. On the other side, the fear of the God who is free from passions is itself free from passions. It is really not a fear of God but a fear of losing him. This fear is a fear of falling into evil; it is a fear of evil. Fear of falling is a desire for incorruptibility and for freedom from the passions. STROMATEIS 2.8.40.1-2.¹⁵

14:26 *Strong Confidence Comes from Fear of the Lord*

LEARN HOW TO FEAR. AUGUSTINE: “The fear of the Lord is the hope of courage.” When you fear the punishment that is threatened, you learn to love the reward that is promised; and thus through fear of punishment you keep on leading a good life, and by leading a good life you acquire a good conscience, so that finally through a good conscience you don’t fear any punishment. Therefore, learn how to fear, if you don’t want to be afraid. SERMON 348.1.¹⁶

STRENGTH IS SHOWN IN ADVERSITY. GREGORY THE GREAT: Strength is never shown except in adversity, and so patience is immediately made to succeed to strength. For every person proves himself in a much truer sense to have advanced in strength in proportion as he bears with the bolder heart the wrongs of other persons. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 1.5.33.¹⁷

⁸Cf. Prov 10:7. ⁹ANF 7:442*. ¹⁰Is 66:2. ¹¹Cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3.1156 A 6ff. ¹²FC 85:224. ¹³Prov 19:21. ¹⁴FC 53:292*. ¹⁵FC 85:185-86. ¹⁶WSA 3 10:91. ¹⁷LF 18:266.

14:29 *The Patience of Those Who Are Slow to Anger*

PATIENCE COMES FROM RESISTANCE TO ANGER. JOHN CASSIAN: Everyone knows that patience is derived from passion and endurance and therefore that you cannot call anyone patient unless he endures indignities without annoyance. So Solomon rightly praised the patient person: “Better is the patient man than the strong, and he who restrains his anger more than he that takes a city,”¹⁸ and “A long-suffering man is mighty in prudence, but a fainthearted man is very foolish.” Therefore, if a wronged man flares up in anger, the wrongful abuse should not be thought of as the cause of his sin but the manifestation of a hidden weakness. CONFERENCE 18.13.¹⁹

UNDERSTANDING COMES FROM PATIENCE AND EXERCISE. CHRYSOSTOM: Do you not see the athletes, how they exercise when they have filled the bags with sand? But there is no need for you to practice this. Life is full of things that exercise you and make you strong. . . . For it is said, “One who is long-suffering abounds in wisdom, but he who is small of soul is strongly foolish.” ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 19.5.²⁰

14:30 *A Tranquil Mind Gives Life*

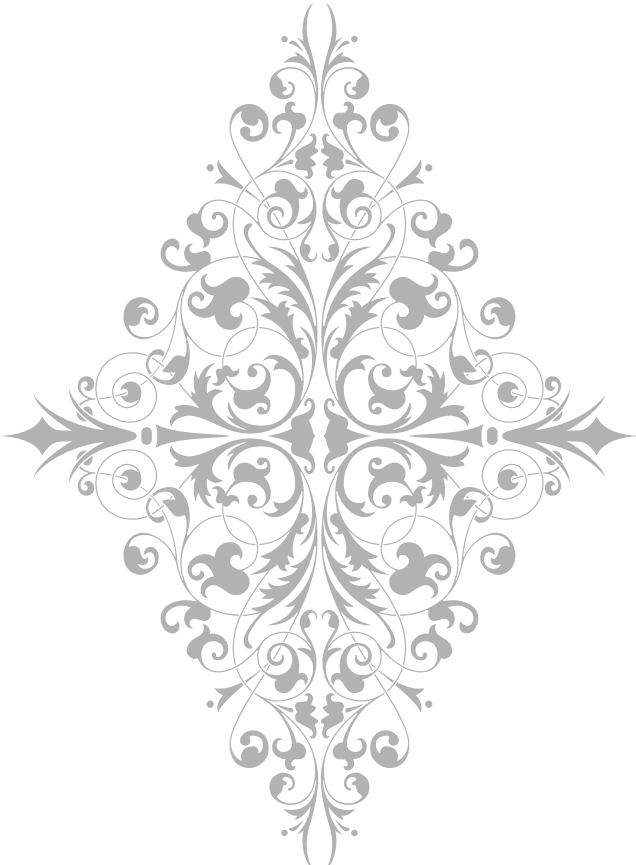
THE HEALER OF THE HEART. AMBROSE: While all our actions should be free from hidden malevolence, this is particularly the case in the selection of a bishop, whose life is the pattern for all

his flock. Calm and pacific judgment is called for if you are to prefer to all his fellows a man who will be elected by all and who will heal all dissension. “The gentle man is the physician of the heart.” In the gospel the Lord declared himself the physician of the heart when he said, “They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.”²¹ LETTER 63.46.²²

14:31 *To Oppress the Poor Is to Insult God*

THE COMMANDS OF GOD. CHRYSOSTOM: “He who slanders the poor irritates his own Maker.” Here there are two sins: slander and opposition to the poor. Why does he irritate his Maker? His Maker certainly made him and made it easy for him to be subjected to a tongue of a slanderer. “He who really honors God has pity upon the needy.” If God made the poor, why must the poor be pitied? Certainly I heard many saying: Is there any need to pity the poor man whom God would have not made poor if he loved him? How long will we play with our salvation? How long will we laugh at things in which the one who is wicked and loaded with countless sins should tremble and fear and be terrified? Tell me then whom God did favor: did he favor either Lazarus or the rich man? This is what ruins us, the fact that we easily slip into [bad] jokes. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 14.31.²³

¹⁸Prov 16:32. ¹⁹LCC 12:272*. ²⁰NPNF 1 14:456*. ²¹See Mt 9:12; Mk 2:17; Lk 5:31. ²²LCC 5:269. ²³PG 64:701.



INSTRUCTIONS IN WISDOM
PROVERBS 15:1-33

OVERVIEW: Jesus' way is persuasion, not admonition (EPHREM). Anger is one's own decision, not the Lord's (CHRYSOSTOM). God's eyes watch us and are present everywhere (BENEDICT). God listens to the heart, not to the voice (CYPRIAN). Often the tongue sins by speaking (CHRYSOSTOM), but the prudent person is always prepared and knows what to do. Indeed, prudence is useful for every beneficial activity (BASIL). The consistency of the wise stands in contrast to the inconsistency of fools (GREGORY THE GREAT). Good works, performed by the upright, constitute a prayer acceptable to God (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Laughter, however, must be held in check (BASIL).

A cheerful countenance is reflected in the church's beauty (CASSIODORUS). Natural desires do have a limit set by self-sufficiency (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). On the whole it is better to prefer a simple and frugal meal offered in love and good conscience rather than a virtual feast that is characterized by hatred (ORIGEN). A livelihood of simplicity is sufficient (AMBROSE), and to the eyes of love even scraps from the table seem generous. Pleasure, however, is not found in abundance but abundance in pleasure (CHRYSOSTOM). The way of the slothful is strewn with thorns that are many and various (GREGORY OF NYSSA), but the royal highway of the upright points to the heavenly Jerusalem (JOHN CASSIAN). Denial of God is the greatest evil (ORIGEN). One who rejects instruction is the foe of his own soul (VALERIAN), for to reject instruction is to hate oneself (ORIGEN).

15:1 Anger

GENTLENESS PENETRATES DEEPER THAN

HARSHNESS. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Our Lord gave most of his assistance with persuasion rather

than with admonition. Gentle showers soften the earth and thoroughly penetrate it, but a beating rain hardens and compresses the surface of the earth so that it will not be absorbed. "A harsh statement evokes anger," and with it comes injury. Whenever a harsh word opens a door, anger enters in, and on the heels of anger, injury. HOMILY ON OUR LORD 22.3.¹

ANGER IS ONE'S OWN DECISION. CHRYSOSTOM: "Anger even ruins the prudent: a soft answer turns away anger, but a painful word arouses rage." All things depend on our decision, certainly also to raise anger or to soothe. It is not the Lord who gets angry, but it is in our power to cause his anger or the opposite. And if anger even ruins the prudent, how much more will it ruin those about whom it was said [that] anger destroys the imprudent? And this certainly happens also to the prudent because of some negligence. But "a soft answer turns away anger," that is, a way of answering in open humility and without any harshness. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 15.I.²

15:3 Eyes in Every Place

GOD IS WATCHING AND PRESENT. BENEDICT: We believe God is everywhere, and his eye beholds the good and wicked wherever they are: so we ought to be particularly assured of his special presence when we assist at the divine office. Therefore we must always remember the advice of the prophet, "To serve God in fear," "to sing wisely" and that "the angels are witnesses of what we sing."³ Let us then reflect what behavior is

¹FC 91:298-99. ²PG 64:704. ³Cf. Ps 2:11; 47:7 (46:8 LXX); 138:1 (137:1 LXX).

proper for appearing in the presence of God and the angels, and so sing our psalms that the mind may echo in harmony with the voice. **RULE OF ST. BENEDICT 19.**⁴

GOD LISTENS TO THE HEART. CYPRIAN: “In every place the eyes of the Lord behold the good and the evil.” And when we are gathered together with the brethren in one place and celebrate divine sacrifices with a priest of God, we ought to be mindful of modesty and discipline and not toss our prayers about at random with uncouth voices and not cast forth with turbulent loquaciousness our petition. Rather, our petition should be commended to God in modesty, because it is our heart, not our voice, that will be heard. God, who sees our thoughts, is not to be admonished by shouts, as the Lord proves when he says, “Why do you think vainly in your hearts?”⁵ And in another place, “And all the churches shall know that I am a searcher of the desires and the heart.”⁶ **THE LORD’S PRAYER 4.**⁷

15:4 *A Gentle Tongue*

THE ILLNESS OF THE TONGUE. CHRYSOSTOM: “Sanity of tongue is the tree of life.” The tongue which does not sin by speaking makes use of sanity: indeed the illness of the tongue is its sin. The one who can check his tongue and does not sin with it is filled with the Holy Spirit. **COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 15.4.**⁸

15:5 *The Fool Lacks Prudence*

THE PRUDENT ARE ALWAYS PREPARED. BASIL THE GREAT: True prudence is the knowledge of what to do and what not to do. One who possesses it never refrains from virtuous works and is never pierced by the deadly arrow of vice. Thus, he who understands words of prudence knows the difference between what is insidious, structured for deception, and what reminds us quietly about the best way to live life. Like the good prac-

tice of a banker, he will retain what is good and abstain from every form of evil.⁹ Grant such prudence to the builder of his house, that he would lay its foundation upon rock, that is, support it on faith in Christ, so that it will remain unmoved when the winds and rains and thunderstorms attack.¹⁰ For the Lord teaches us through this parable to remain immovable in the presence of temptations, both those of human and also of supernatural origin. Beyond this, he teaches us not to neglect the necessary things, but, having been equipped for the journey of life, to anticipate the coming of the bridegroom with eager hearts. **HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 6.**¹¹

PRUDENCE IS USEFUL FOR EVERY BENEFICIAL ACTIVITY. BASIL THE GREAT: Prudence is that quality by which all things are accomplished through skillful industry, in the same way that malice is that quality whereby only evil is perpetrated. Because, therefore, every activity admits prudence and because evils likewise occur in all things, the name of prudence signifies two realities. Whoever uses cleverness and skill for the destruction of others is evil, but one who acts cleverly and shrewdly to avoid the harm that others have in store for him, directly and wisely detecting his own good, possesses a prudence that is worthy of praise. Attend diligently, therefore, to the voice of the prudent soul, and you will know that it contains a center in which the prudence which uses healthy counsel for its own benefit and that of its neighbor is to be praised. But the prudence which applies itself to the neighbor’s detriment, using its faculties for the purpose of destruction, becomes liable to condemnation. **HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS II.**¹²

15:7 *The Lips of the Wise and the Minds of Fools*

⁴LCC 12:309. ⁵See Mt 9:4. ⁶See Rev 2:23. ⁷FC 36:129-30**. ⁸PG 64:704. ⁹See 1 Thess 5:21. ¹⁰See Mt 7:25. ¹¹PG 31:400. ¹²PG 31:409.

CONSISTENCY AND INCONSISTENCY. GREGORY THE GREAT: The heart of the wise is always consistent, because, while it rests in good convictions, it directs itself constantly to good deeds. But the heart of the foolish is inconsistent, because, while it shows itself as variable and changeable, it never remains what it was. PASTORAL RULE 3.18.19.¹³

15:8 The Sacrifice of the Wicked and the Prayer of the Upright

AN ACCEPTABLE PRAYER TO GOD. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: We can discover many counsels about other things, also, as about prayer, for example: “Good works are a prayer acceptable to the Lord,” Scripture says. The way to pray is prescribed: “If you see one naked, cover him, and do not look away from the members of your family. Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your garments shall speedily rise, and your justice shall go before your face, and the glory of God shall encircle you.”¹⁴ CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 3.12.89.¹⁵

15:13 A Glad Heart Is Appropriate

REFLECTED IN THE BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH. CASSIODORUS: The church explains how it can please the Lord in the light of the living,¹⁶ which means in the brightness of the saints, among whom [the church] is made beautiful, spotless and without wrinkle. Whatever befalls them shines from its face. Just as a man’s healthy constitution makes his face more handsome, just as in Solomon’s words, “When the heart rejoices the countenance flourishes,” so the beauty of the features of holy church is diffused abroad when found in the merits of the blessed. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 55.13.¹⁷

A CHEERFUL SMILE DISTINGUISHED FROM RAUCOUS LAUGHTER. BASIL THE GREAT: Those who live under discipline should avoid very carefully even such intemperate action as is com-

monly regarded lightly. Indulging in unrestrained and immoderate laughter is a sign of intemperance, of a want of control over one’s emotions and of failure to repress the soul’s frivolity by a stern use of reason. It is not unbecoming, however, to give evidence of merriment of soul by a cheerful smile, if only to illustrate that which is written, “A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance”; but raucous laughter and uncontrollable shaking of the body are not indicative of a well-regulated soul, or of personal dignity, or self-mastery. THE LONG RULES 17.¹⁸

15:17 A Meager Meal with Love Is Better Than a Feast with Hatred

THE MEAN BETWEEN EXTREMES. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: “Herbs with love are better than a fatted calf with deceit.” This is reminiscent of what we said before, that herbs are not the Agape, but that meals should be taken with charity. A middle course is good in all things, and no less so in serving a banquet. Extremes, in fact, are dangerous, but the mean is good, and all that avoids dire need is a mean. Natural desires have a limit set to them by self-sufficiency. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.1.16.¹⁹

PREFER SIMPLE AND FRUGAL HOSPITALITY. ORIGEN: Better is the hospitality of vegetables served with friendship and grace than a fatted calf served with enmity. Often we accept simpler, more frugal hospitality offered in good conscience—as guests at the table of those who are unable to furnish us with more—in preference to elevated words “lifted up against the knowledge of God”²⁰ and proclaiming with ample plausibility a sentiment alien to the Father of our Lord Jesus who has given the law and the prophets.²¹ ON PRAYER 27.6.²²

¹³NPNF 2 12:42** ¹⁴See Is 58:7-8. ¹⁵FC 23:267*. ¹⁶See Ps 56:13 (55:14 LXX). ¹⁷ACW 52:37*. ¹⁸FC 9:271*. ¹⁹FC 23:108*. ²⁰2 Cor 10:5. ²¹See Mt 5:17*. ²²Curtis 17**.

A LIVELIHOOD OF SIMPLICITY IS SUFFICIENT. AMBROSE: Be content with what is your own and do not let your well-being be based on doing harm to your neighbor. You may find your livelihood in the simplicity of innocence. The person in possession of his own good knows nothing of waylaying others. He is not inflamed by the desires of the avaricious person, whose every gain is at the expense of virtue and a further incentive to cupidity. Therefore, should he come to know his blessings, the poor person is truly happy who lives righteously in a manner which is to be preferred to all the treasures of the world, because “better a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasures without fear.” How much under these circumstances does one need to support life? If you go beyond that little and seek that, also, which others find pleasure in possessing, that, too, has little to commend it: “It is better to be invited to herbs with love than to a fattened calf with hatred.”

Let us use our talents, therefore, for the acquisition of grace and the attainment of salvation, not to circumvent others who do us no harm. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 5.8.23.²³

TO THE EYES OF LOVE EVEN SCRAPS FROM THE TABLE SEEM GENEROUS. CHRYSOSTOM: When one invites to supper guests that are hungry and have an appetite, even if he lays a meager table it seems abundant owing to the anticipation of the guests who fall upon the dishes with great relish. In just the same way we too have confidence in your spiritual appetite and do not hang back, even if we have a poor and meager table, before laying it in customary manner before your good selves. This is what a certain sage also remarked: “Better a meal of vegetables with love than a beast from the manger with enmity,” suggesting that love has a different view of what is set forth, and to its eyes ordinary things appear rich and scraps seem generous. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 45.1.²⁴

PLEASURE IS NOT IN ABUNDANCE. CHRYSOS-

TOM: “It is better the hospitality with vegetables.” I will explain what [Solomon] says. If one fears God and also enjoys the benevolence of people, it is still better for him to have little property than an abundance. Indeed, pleasure is not in abundance, but abundance is in pleasure, as Hesiod says. One who neglects offenses settles the future judgments about them. A stupid person does nothing sensibly, whereas the judicious one directs, that is, displays actions of free opinion. Those who despise consulting other people about what must be done, despise advice. It then happens that those people, who think they are something when they are nothing, wander in error. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 15.17.²⁵

15:19 *Thorns Impede the Sluggard, but the Path of the Upright Is Level*

THE WAY OF THE SLOTHFUL IS STREWN WITH MANY THORNS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: There are those who are called the slothful in the book of Wisdom, who strew their path with thorns, who consider harmful to the soul a zeal for deeds in keeping with the commandments of God, the demurrers against the apostolic injunctions, who do not eat their own bread with dignity, but, fawning on others, make idleness the art of life. Then, there are the dreamers who consider the deceits of dreams more trustworthy than the teachings of the Gospels, calling fantasies revelations. Apart from these, there are those who stay in their own houses, and still others who consider being unsociable and brutish a virtue without recognizing the command to love and without knowing the fruit of long-suffering and humility. ON VIRGINITY 23.²⁶

THE ROYAL HIGHWAY TO THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM. JOHN CASSIAN: “The ways of those who do not work are strewn with thorns, but the ways of the strong are trodden down.” Thus wandering from the king’s highway, they can

²³FC 42:178. * ²⁴FC 82:469. ²⁵PG 64:705. ²⁶FC 58:71.

never arrive at that metropolis to which our course should ever be directed without swerving. Ecclesiastes also significantly expressed this saying: "The labor of fools wears those who do not know how to go to the city;"²⁷ namely, that "heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all."²⁸ CONFERENCE 24.24.²⁹

15:26 Wicked Thoughts Are an Abomination to the Lord

DENIAL OF GOD IS THE GREATEST EVIL. ORIGEN: If every evil word is an abomination to the Lord your God, how great an abomination must be supposed the evil word of denial and the evil word of publicly proclaiming another god and the evil oath by the fortune of people, something that has no existence.³⁰ EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM 7.³¹

15:32 To Ignore Instruction Is to Despise Oneself

ONE WHO REJECTS INSTRUCTION IS THE FOE OF HIS OWN SOUL. VALERIAN: If the prophet deems those guilty whom discipline has never

reached, what should we think of those whom it has abandoned? Discerning between the acts of these two classes of people, the prophet authoritatively regards the fault of never having come to discipline as one less serious than that of having rejected her law. Notice his words: "He that rejects instruction despises his own soul." The case truly is just what he says. For the person who has spurned the warnings of discipline in order to occupy himself with the devil's business is indeed the foe of his own soul. HOMILY 1.4.³²

TO REJECT INSTRUCTION IS TO HATE ONESELF. ORIGEN: We are not harsh toward the impenitent. They are wicked to themselves, for those that spurn instruction hate themselves. Yet even in such cases we should seek in every way that healing come to those who are so completely perverted as not even to be conscious of their own ills and drunk with a drunkenness more fatal than that from wine, the drunkenness that comes from the darkness of evil.³³ ON PRAYER 7.³⁴

²⁷Eccles 10:15 LXX. ²⁸Gal 4:26. ²⁹NPNF 2 11:542*. ³⁰Origen has been discussing idol worship. ³¹OSW 45. ³²FC 17:304*. ³³Cf. Prov 20:1; Is 28:1, 7; Mt 24:49. ³⁴Curtis 18**.





THE LORD WEIGHS THE PLANS
OF THE MIND
PROVERBS 16:1-33

OVERVIEW: We cannot take even the first step toward salvation without God's grace (AUGUSTINE). Everyone's light shines in its particular way, but God does not acknowledge the deeds of the proud (CHRYSOSTOM). Our ways are made straight by God's help and mercy (JEROME). God is not moved either by fear or hope of reward (JOHN CASSIAN). The tyranny of pride estranges us from God's mercy (CHRYSOSTOM). By faith with good works sins are cleansed (CYPRIAN). Wisdom, which is better than gold, is none other than Christ (DIDYMUS). Sloth leads to destruction (JOHN CASSIAN), and pride must be checked rather than given free license (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Let us delight in the honey of wisdom (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA) and shun the hearing of worldly tales (BASIL). In fact, the words of Scripture are sweet like a honeycomb (AMBROSE), and bees in the mouth of Ambrose prefigured the sweetness of his message (PAULINUS). If you must be angry, let your anger be self-critical (AMBROSE). Anger can be contained by the discipline of reason (CASSIODORUS). There is an outstanding example of patience over anger in the story of the woman in 2 Maccabees who chose to give over to the executioner every one of her seven sons rather than to utter a single word of sacrilege (AUGUSTINE). If you seek a great victory, conquer yourself by patience rather than some city by force (GREGORY THE GREAT).

16:1 *The Answer of the Tongue*

HUMANITY'S PART CAN BE DONE ONLY WITH GOD'S GRACE. AUGUSTINE: Assuredly, as to what is written, "The preparation of the heart is man's part, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord," they are misled by an imperfect understanding, so as to think that to prepare the heart—that is, to begin good—pertains to people without the aid of God's grace. Be it far from the children of promise thus to understand it! AGAINST TWO LETTERS OF THE PELAGIANS 2.19.¹

16:2 *Pure Ways*

GOD DOES NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROUD. CHRYSOSTOM: Besides being bright, certainly light (as it is) is conspicuous. As it does its work everyone observes it. In the same way, the humble person shows us in no small way what is right. For a contrite person will nevertheless excel in great things. But God does not desire to acknowledge the deeds of the proud. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 16.2.²

16:3 *Commit Your Work to the Lord*

OUR WAYS ARE MADE STRAIGHT BY GOD'S HELP AND MERCY. JEROME: We are commanded to show him our ways and make our ways to him, which are made straight, not by our own efforts but by his help and mercy. Whence it is written, "Make straight your way in my sight"³ (or as other copies have it, "make straight my way in your sight"), so that what is straight to him may also appear straight to me. Solomon also says, "Lay open your works to the Lord, and your thoughts shall be directed." For our thoughts are directed then, and only then, when we lay open to the Lord, as to a firm and very stable rock, everything that we do and impute everything to him. AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 3.8.⁴

16:4 *Everything Has Its Purpose*

ONLY GOD IS MOVED BY NEITHER FEAR NOR HOPE OF REWARD. JOHN CASSIAN: Only God does what is good, acting from love of goodness for its own sake and not moved by fear or hope of reward. As Solomon says, "The Lord has done all things for his own sake." For the sake of his own goodness he bestows an abundance of goodness upon the worthy and the unworthy, because he can neither be wearied by wrongdoing nor provoked to painful emotion by human wickedness. He always remains what he is, perfect in goodness and unchanging in nature. CONFERENCE 11.6.⁵

¹NPNF 1 5:400. ²PG 64:708. ³Ps 5:8 (5:9 LXX). ⁴FC 53:360-61. ⁵LCC 12:248-49**.

16:5 *Arrogance Is an Abomination*

THE TYRANNY OF PRIDE ESTRANGES US FROM GOD'S MERCY. CHRYSOSTOM: Nothing so estranges from the mercy of God and gives over to the fire of hell as the tyranny of pride. If we possess this within us, all our life becomes impure, even if we practice chastity, virginity, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, or any virtue whatsoever. "Every proud man," Scripture says, "is an abomination to the Lord." Therefore, let us check this puffing up of the soul, and let us cut out this tumor, if we wish to be pure and be rid of the punishment prepared for the devil. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 9.⁶

16:6 *Atonement for Iniquity*

SINS ARE CLEANSED. CYPRIAN: The Holy Spirit speaks in the Scriptures, saying, "By alms and by faith sins are cleansed." Surely not those sins which had been contracted before, for they are purged by the blood and sanctification of Christ. Likewise again he says, "As water quenches fire, so do alms quench sin."⁷ Here also it is shown and proved that just as with laver of the waters of salvation the fire of Gehenna⁸ is extinguished, so by almsgiving and good works the flame of sin is quenched. And because the remission of sins is once granted in baptism, constant and continuous labor acting in the manner of baptism again bestows the mercies of God. This the Lord also teaches in the Gospel. For when it was noted that his disciples were eating without first having washed their hands, he replied and said, "He who made the inside made also the outside. Truly give alms, and behold all things are clean to you."⁹ WORKS AND ALMSGIVING 2.¹⁰

16:16 *Wisdom Is Better Than Gold*

WISDOM IS CHRIST. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: As gold is better than silver, so wisdom is superior to prudence. The former pertains to knowledge, the latter to the interpretation of what is hidden.

Either you can interpret the nests of wisdom as the churches or as the dwelling places of the holy ones in heaven. But wisdom itself is Christ. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 16.16.¹¹

16:18 *Destruction and Fall*

SLOTH LEADS TO DESTRUCTION. JOHN CASSIAN: "Loss goes before destruction, and an evil thought before a fall," just as no house ever falls to the ground by a sudden collapse, but only when there is some long-standing flaw in the foundation or when by long-continued neglect of its inhabitants, what was at first only a little drip breaks through and the protecting walls are gradually ruined. In consequence of long-standing neglect the gap becomes larger and the walls break away, and in time the drenching storm and rain pours in like a river. For "by slothfulness a building is brought low, and through lazy hands the house shall leak."¹² CONFERENCE 6.17.¹³

PRIDE MUST BE CHECKED. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: Do we commend hospitality? Do we admire brotherly love, wifely affection, virginity, feeding the poor, singing psalms, nightlong vigils, penitence? Do we mortify the body¹⁴ with fasting? Do we through prayer take up our abode with God? Do we subordinate the inferior element in us to the better—I mean, the dust¹⁵ to the spirit, as we should if we have returned the right verdict on the alloy of the two which is our nature? Do we make life a meditation of death? Do we establish our mastery over our passions, mindful of the nobility of our second birth? Do we tame our swollen and inflamed tempers? Or our pride, which "comes before a fall," or our unreasonable grief, our crude pleasures, our dirty

⁶FC 33:94. ⁷See Sir 3:33. ⁸Jeremiah warned that this place would be renamed the "Valley of Slaughter" (Jer 7:32, 19:6), because it was looked upon as a divinely appointed place of punishment for apostates and other great sinners. ⁹See Lk 11:40-41 Vg. ¹⁰FC 36:228*. ¹¹PG 39:1637*. ¹²Eccles 10:18. ¹³NPNF 2 11:361*. ¹⁴1 Cor 9:27. ¹⁵Gen 2:7.

laughter, our undisciplined eyes, our greedy ears, our immoderate talk, our wandering thoughts, our anything in ourselves which the evil one can take over from us and use against us, “bringing in death through the windows,”¹⁶ as Scripture has it, meaning through the senses?

No. We do the very opposite: we offer freedom to the passions of others, like kings declaring an amnesty after a victory, on the sole condition that they give their assent to us—and thus rush against God more violently or more “piously” than before; for this discreditable purchase we pay them a dishonorable price, license in exchange for impiety. *AGAINST THE EUNOMIANS, THEOLOGICAL ORATION I* (27).¹⁷

16:24 Good Words Are Like Honeycombs

DELIGHT IN THE HONEY OF WISDOM. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: You who love instruction and are eager to listen, receive once again the sacred words: delight yourselves in the honey of wisdom; for so it is written, “Good words are honeycombs, and their sweetness is the healing of the soul.” For the labor of the bees is very sweet and benefits in many ways the soul of man; but the divine and saving [honey] makes those in whom it dwells skillful in every good work and teaches them the ways of [spiritual] improvement. *COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 120*.¹⁸

SHUN THE HEARING OF WORLDLY TALES.

BASIL THE GREAT: This course . . . will bring you honor and true glory. With your ears opened to give heed and your hands ready to execute the command you have heard, let your tongue be silent and keep your heart under custody. Be slow and dull for idle talk but knowing and wise in hearkening to the saving words of the holy Scriptures. Let the hearing of worldly tales be to you as a bitter taste in your mouth but the discourse of holy men as a honeycomb. *ON RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD*.¹⁹

THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE ARE SWEET LIKE

A HONEYCOMB. AMBROSE: The sea is holy Scripture which has within it profound meanings and the mysterious depths of the prophets. Into this sea many rivers have entered. Delightful and clear are these streams. These fountains are cool, springing up into life everlasting.²⁰ There, too, are “pleasant words, like honeycomb,” and courteous conversations which water souls with the sweetness of moral commands. The streams of holy Scripture are diverse; you know that which you should drink from first, second, and last. *LETTER 15*.²¹

BEES IN THE MOUTH OF AMBROSE PREFIGURED THE SWEETNESS OF HIS MESSAGE.

PAULINUS OF MILAN: It came to pass that our Ambrose was born while his father, Ambrose, was administering the prefectureship of the Gallic provinces. On one occasion, when the child had been placed in a cradle in his father’s courtyard and was asleep with his mouth open, a swarm of bees suddenly approached and covered his face, so that they were continually flying in and out of his mouth. His father, who was strolling nearby with his wife and daughter, watched with fatherly affection to see in what way this miracle would terminate. Meanwhile, he restrained the maid from driving away the bees, for she had accepted the responsibility of feeding the child and was anxious lest they harm him. But, after a while, the bees flew away and rose so high in the air that they could in no way be seen by human eyes. The father, terrified by this event, said, “If this child lives, he will be something great.” For, even then, the Lord was acting during the infancy of his servant in order that what was written might be fulfilled: “Well-ordered words are as a honeycomb.” For that swarm of bees was implanting the honeycombs of his later works, which would proclaim the heavenly gifts and direct the minds of people from earthly to heavenly things. *LIFE OF ST. AMBROSE 2.3*.²²

¹⁶Jer 9:21. ¹⁷FGFR 221. ¹⁸CGSL 480. ¹⁹FC 9:21-22. ²⁰See Jn 4:14. ²¹FC 26:77-78*. ²²FC 15:34-35.

16:32 *Be Slow to Anger*

RESTRAIN YOUR ANGER TOWARD OTHERS.

AMBROSE: If you are angry, be angry with yourselves, because you are roused, and you will not sin. For he who is angry with himself, because he has been so easily roused, ceases to be angry with another. But he who wishes to prove his anger is righteous only gets the more inflamed and quickly falls into sin. "Better is he," as Solomon says, "that restrains his anger than he that takes a city," for anger leads astray even brave men.

DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 1.21.96.²³

ANGER CAN BE CONTAINED BY THE DISCIPLINE OF REASON. CASSIODORUS: The type of anger which does not lead to deeds motivated by anger is easily forgiven, as Scripture says: "He that conquers his anger is better than he who captures a city." For this reason, the command to manage anger is given so that, if we are already angry, we may not sin through an act of indiscreet rashness. Because of our human brokenness we are not able to get complete control of our hot emotions, but with God's help, we contain them by the power of reason that we are taught. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 4.5.²⁴

AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF PATIENCE OVER ANGER. AUGUSTINE: The Scriptures offer the example²⁵ of a woman of astounding fortitude and oblige me now to speak of her. This woman chose to give over to the tyrant and executioner

every one of her seven sons rather than to utter a single word of sacrilege. And after fortifying them with her exhortations, at the same time suffering cruelly in their tortures, she herself had to undergo what she had called upon them to endure. Could any patience be greater than this?

Yet what marvel is it that the love of God pervading her inmost soul should have withstood the tyrant and the executioner, and bodily pain, and the weakness of her sex, and her own human emotions? Had she not heard the words: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"?²⁶ Had she not heard, "The one who is patient is better than the one who is the mightiest"? . . . She most assuredly knew these and many other divine precepts on fortitude written in the books of the Old Testament (which were the only ones then in existence) by the same Holy Spirit who wrote those in the New Testament. THE CATHOLIC AND MANICHAEAN WAYS OF LIFE 1.23.43.²⁷

CONQUER YOURSELF BY PATIENCE. GREGORY THE GREAT. Taking cities is a smaller victory because the places we conquer are outside of ourselves. A greater [victory] is won by patience, because a person overcomes himself and subjects himself to himself, when patience brings him low in bearing with others in humility. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 35.²⁸

²³NPNF 2 10:17. ²⁴Cetedoc 0900, 97.4.111. ²⁵2 Macc 7:1-42. ²⁶Ps 116:15 (115:6 LXX). ²⁷FC 56:36**. ²⁸CS 123:306**.



THE ONE WHO RESTRAINS
WORDS HAS KNOWLEDGE
PROVERBS 17:1-28

OVERVIEW: Be liberal and benevolent but not wasteful or extravagant. The truly wealthy are those who are rich in faith (AMBROSE), but God also is the Creator of the poor (CHRYSOSTOM). Children bring a hundred times more riches than a field or a house (JOHN CASSIAN). Neither God nor the church rejoices in wicked children who reject divine wisdom (ORIGEN). God the Father is our glory, and Christ is the church's crown (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Quarrels easily begin when the tongue is loosened (GREGORY THE GREAT). One who is prudent is sparing in words (HIPPLYTUS). Account must be rendered for everything that comes from the mouth (PACHOMIUS). Opening the mouth may reveal an empty head (GREGORY THE GREAT). Even one who asks questions can also be credited with wisdom (JOHN CASSIAN).

17:1 *Counsel of Moderation*

BE LIBERAL AND BENEVOLENT. AMBROSE: The Scriptures teach us not to be wasteful but liberal. There are two kinds of free giving, one arising from liberality, the other from wasteful extravagance. It is a mark of liberality to receive the stranger, to clothe the naked, to redeem the captives, to help the needy. It is wasteful to spend money on expensive banquets and much wine. Therefore one reads, "Wine is wasteful, drunkenness is abusive."¹ It is wasteful to spend one's own wealth merely for the sake of gaining the favor of the people. This they do who spend their inheritance on the games of the circus, or on theatrical pieces and gladiatorial shows, or even a combat of wild beasts, just to surpass the fame of their forefathers for these things. All this that they do is only foolish, for it is not right to be extravagant in spending money even on good works. DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 2.21.108-9.²

17:5 *To Mock the Poor Insults One's Maker*

THE TRULY WEALTHY. AMBROSE: Let no one think that he is to be paid more deference because

he is rich. In the church a person is rich if he is rich in faith, for the faithful person has a whole world of riches. Is it strange that the faithful person owns the world, since he owns Christ's inheritance, which is more priceless than the world? "You were redeemed with the precious blood,"³ surely was said to all, not only to the rich. LETTER 59.⁴

GOD IS THE CREATOR OF THE POOR. CHRYSOSTOM: "He who laughs at the poor irritates his creator." Why? Because God is the creator of the poor. Who is so cruel, who is so inhuman, that when he should be moved to compassion he laughs instead? Certainly this too will have to be punished. That person will perish because he sins against the high and wise providence of God. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 17.5.⁵

17:6 *Grandchildren Are the Crown of Their Grandparents*

CHILDREN BRING RICHES. JOHN CASSIAN: Instead of the joy that people experience from the possession of a single field or house those who have been adopted as children of God⁶ will enjoy a delight in riches a hundred times greater and possess as their own all things which belong to the eternal Father, and assert in heart and soul like the true Son: "All things that the Father has are mine."⁷ If no longer occupied by criminal anxiety in distractions and cares, but free from care and glad at heart they go everywhere as to their own, they will hear daily the announcement made by the apostle: "For all things are yours, whether the world or things present or things to come;"⁸ and by Solomon: "The faithful has a world of riches." CONFERENCE 24.26.⁹

GOD OUR GLORY AND CHRIST THE CHURCH'S CROWN. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: "The crown

¹Prov 20:1. ²NPNF 2 10:60*. ³1 Pet 1:18-19. ⁴FC 26:353. ⁵PG 64:713. ⁶See Eph 1:5 KJV. ⁷Jn 16:15. ⁸See 1 Cor 3:22 KJV. ⁹NPNF 2 11:543-44.

of old men is their children's children and the glory of children is their father," it is said. Our glory is the Father of all, and the crown of the whole church is Christ. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.8.71.¹⁰

17:14 *Beginning of Strife*

QUARRELS EASILY BEGIN WHEN THE TONGUE IS LOOSENED. GREGORY THE GREAT: The indolent mind for the most part lapses by degrees into downfall. We neglect to guard against idle words, and so we go on to hurtful ones. At first it pleases us to talk of other the affairs of others; afterwards the tongue gnaws with detraction at the lives of those of whom we talk. Then at last we break out into open slanders. Thus are sown pricking thorns, quarrels arise, the torches of enmities are kindled and peace of heart is extinguished. Therefore, it is well said by Solomon, "The beginning of strife is like letting out water." For to let out water is to let loose the tongue to a flurry of speech. PASTORAL RULE 3.14.15.¹¹

17:21 *A Stupid Son Is Grief to a Father*

WICKED CHILDREN WHO REJECT DIVINE WISDOM. ORIGEN: God is called "father" and God's love to humankind "mother," which was the cause of the divine incarnation and his suffering for our sake. Although God is our Father, he does not rejoice in an adopted son who is uneducated in divine wisdom and knowledge and who is committed to wickedness and evil. But a reasonable son gladdens his mother, that is, God's love toward humankind. It is she who presents us to God the Father as undernourished children, longing for solid spiritual food. That is done in order that his son, Jesus Christ, who became like our brother,¹² could make us full citizens [of his kingdom] both in word and in deed. Also, our mother is the church who was betrothed to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Eternally, she begets sons and daughters for him. And those who learned divine wisdom and knowledge glad-

den both God our Father and his church, our mother. But she grieves and laments over those uninstructed who do not want to repent and be saved but prefer to persevere in wickedness. EXPOSITION ON PROVERBS, FRAGMENT 17.21.¹³

17:27 *One Who Restrains Words Has Knowledge*

ONE WHO IS PRUDENT IS SPARING OF WORDS. HIPPOLYTUS: He asks of wisdom who seeks to know what is the will of God. And he will show himself prudent who is sparing of his words on that which he has come to learn. If one inquires about wisdom, desiring to learn something about wisdom, while another asks nothing of wisdom, as not only wishing to learn nothing about wisdom himself but even keeping back his neighbors from so doing, the former certainly is deemed to be more prudent than the latter. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.¹⁴

ACCOUNT MUST BE RENDERED. PACHOMIUS: Let your words be measured and counted by yourself, knowing that you shall render an account to God of what comes out of your mouth, including a pleasantry or even a word that does not edify. . . . And do not become a stranger to such promises. Whatever you think and whatever you love, establish it firmly in the Lord. And keep in mind your departure from the body to go to God "who will reward each one according to his works."¹⁵ FRAGMENT 2.3.¹⁶

17:28 *Even a Fool Who Keeps Silent Is Considered Wise*

OPENING THE MOUTH MAY REVEAL AN EMPTY HEAD. GREGORY THE GREAT: As in a house, when the door is shut, it is not known what members there are hidden within, so, generally

¹⁰FC 23:154. ¹¹NPNF 2 12:38*. ¹²See Heb 2:17. ¹³PG 17:201.

¹⁴ANF 5:173; TLG 2115.053.19.1. ¹⁵Cf. Mt 16:27; Prov 24:12; Rom 2:6. ¹⁶CS 47:86.

speaking, if a fool holds his peace, it is hidden whether he is wise or foolish. This is only so, however, if no other works come to light that may speak the mind even of one who is silent. For this reason, the holy man, seeing that his friends were anxious to appear what they were not, charged them to hold their peace, so they might not appear what they were. And so it is said by Solomon, "Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise." MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 3.II.35.¹⁷

EVEN ONE WHO ASKS QUESTIONS CAN ALSO BE CREDITED WITH WISDOM. JOHN

CASSIAN: Understanding is required to discern the distinctions and the drift of questions; and it is a main part of knowledge to understand how ignorant you are. Hence it is said that "if a fool asks questions, it will be accounted wisdom,"¹⁸ because, although one who asks questions is ignorant of the answer to the question raised, yet as he wisely asks and learns what he does not know, this very. CONFERENCE 4.9.¹⁹

¹⁷LF 21:24*. ¹⁸Prov 17:28 LXX, apparently the opposite of RSV.
¹⁹NPNF 2 11:333*.



FREQUENCY OF WICKEDNESS
BRINGS CONTEMPT
PROVERBS 18:1-16

OVERVIEW: The Arian heretics lend truth to the proverb that frequency of wickedness breeds contempt and a lack of ability to discriminate. The deeper people go into superstition, the more they advance in shamefulfulness (ATHANASIUS), and the deeper one becomes involved in sin, the harder it is to extricate oneself (AUGUSTINE). Those who sink to the depths of sin also infect others (FULGENTIUS). Daily penance is preferable to an accumulation of sins at the end of life. Despair and even crimes arise as sins build up (CAESARIUS), for, once our sins begin, they are difficult to stop (CHRYSOSTOM). An evil mind, once mired in sin, also begins to suspect others, and increasing frequency of sin easily leads to disregard for it (JOHN OF DAMASCUS). The waters of God's word are abundant and life-giving. Shun the wicked, even those in important positions (CHRYSOSTOM). Pride often precedes ruin (ORIGEN), but an upright life makes one worthy of the fullness of God (EVAGRIUS).

18:3 Frequency of Wickedness Breeds Lack of Ability to Discriminate

THE ARIAN HERETICS LEND TRUTH TO THIS PROVERB. ATHANASIUS: As to [the Arians'] blasphemous position that "the Son knows not the Father perfectly," we ought not to wonder at it; for having once set themselves to fight against Christ, they contradict even his express words, since he says, "As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father."¹ Now if the Father knows the Son but in part, then it is evident that the Son does not know the Father perfectly. It is not lawful to say this. The Father does know the Son

perfectly; then it is evident that as the Father knows his own Word, so also the Word knows his own Father whose Word he is.

By these arguments and references to the sacred Scriptures we frequently overthrew them; but they changed like chameleons and again shifted their ground, striving to bring upon themselves that sentence, "When an ungodly man comes into a depth of evils, he despises them." DEPOSITION OF ARIUS 4-5.²

THEY ADVANCE IN SHAMEFULNESS. ATHANASIUS: Just as men who plunge into the deep, the deeper they go down, they descend into darker and deeper places, so it is with humankind. For they did not keep to idolatry in a simple form, nor did they abide in that with which they began. But the longer they went on in their first condition, the more new superstitions they invented, and, not satiated with the first evils, they again filled themselves with others, advancing further in utter shamefulfulness and surpassing themselves in impiety. But to this divine Scripture testifies when it says, "When an ungodly man comes into a depth of evils, he despises them." AGAINST THE HEATHEN 8.4.³

HARD TO EXTRICATE ONESELF. AUGUSTINE: Confession dies with a dead man, but is always possible for one who is alive. There is this saying, "When a sinner shall have come into the depth of evil things, he despises [them]." For it is one thing to long for, another thing to fight against

¹Jn 10:15. ²NPNF 2 4:71**. ³NPNF 2 4:8*.

righteousness. It is one thing to desire to be delivered from evil, another thing to defend one's evil doings rather than to confess. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 68.7.⁴

THOSE WHO SINK TO THE DEPTH OF SIN.

FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: The proud and recalcitrant who despair of the forgiveness of sins repudiate forgiveness. Not only do they with pitiable blindness reject the care for their own salvation, but they also do not rest from upsetting other faithful souls with deadly words, if they are unable to pervert them. Often, either the frightfulness of their sins or the length of a wicked life takes away from them the hope of salvation and drives them to perpetrate even worse things in such a way that in such people that statement of holy Scripture is fulfilled: "When wickedness comes, contempt comes also." LETTER TO VENANTIA 3.⁵

DAILY PENANCE PREFERABLE TO AN ACCUMULATION OF SINS.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Not only slight sins but even greater offenses try to overtake us day and night. So let us not hold back repentance until the end of life, but while we are living let us endeavor to do penance daily. This practice should be observed continuously, not only by the laity and clerics, but even by priests and monks. . . . Since we cannot spend a day without sin, what is the sense of gradually piling up slight offenses and thus making endless streams of tiny drops? Despair arises from a multitude of sins heaped up over time, according to the words: "The wicked man, when he has come into the depth of sins, despises [them]." Of course, you are all well aware that we can more easily uproot them when they are still young than cut them off when they are firm. SERMON 61.1.⁶

DESPAIR AND EVEN CRIMES ARISE AS SINS BUILD UP.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Believe this devoutly and firmly: God never abandons a person unless he himself has already deserted God.

Although a person may have committed serious sins once, twice and a third time, God still looks for him, as he says through the prophet, "that by his conversion he may live."⁷ However, when he begins to continue in his sins, despair arises from the multitude of them, and hardening is caused by the despair. While careless people at first despise their own sins because they are small, if these slight offenses increase, crimes are even added; they heap up to finally overwhelm them, and when this happens there is fulfilled what is written: "With wickedness comes contempt." SERMON 101.2.⁸

SINS ARE DIFFICULT TO STOP.

CHRYSOSTOM: "When the godless fall to the depths of evil, they lose all sense of respect." It is a terrible thing, you see, dearly beloved, a terrible thing to fall into the clutches of the devil. I mean, the soul then, as though caught in a net, and like a boar trapped in the mire, is likewise caught up in pleasure and, swept along by its evil habits, it loses all sense of the foul odor of its sins. Consequently, we must be awake and on our guard so as never to allow the evil demon any entrance at the outset, lest he cloud our reasoning, blind the sharp vision of our mind, and thus as if robbing us of sunlight render us unable to see the rays of the sun of justice and cause us to fall into the abyss. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 22.12.⁹

AN EVIL MIND BEGINS TO SUSPECT OTHERS.

GREGORY THE GREAT: The evil mind is always set in pains and labors, since it is either contriving mischiefs that it may bring down or fearing lest these be brought down upon it by others. While hatching plots against neighbors, one becomes all the more afraid of plots being hatched by neighbors against oneself. . . . Even when there is peace, he suspects plots, in that he, who is always dealing craftily, calculates that there is no one who might deal honestly with himself. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 3.12.44.¹⁰

⁴NPNF 1 8:287*. ⁵FC 95:355. ⁶FC 31:300*. ⁷Ezek 33:11. ⁸FC 47:99*. ⁹FC 82:78. ¹⁰LF 21:72-73*.

INCREASING FREQUENCY OF SIN. JOHN OF DAMASCUS: The more those greater sins grow on them, the more does the soul become accustomed to them and think light of them. For it is said, “When the wicked comes to the depth of evil things, he thinks light of them.” BARLAAM AND JOSEPH 19.172.¹¹

18:4 *The Words of the Mouth Are Deep Waters*

THE WATERS OF GOD’S WORD ARE ABUNDANT AND LIFE-GIVING. CHRYSOSTOM: “The word in the heart of man is a deep water, and a river and fountain of life spring forth.” By “deep water” he [Solomon] means “abundant” water which can often produce many rivers instead of one. Or, he says: it contains it deeply hidden in itself. As water is immeasurable, so the word in the heart of the person who lives according to God is without limit. Therefore, he uses “word” for knowledge. This is the one in whose heart a fountain of water is made when he hears the words of Jesus. He [Solomon] then speaks of it “springing forth,” raining upon or watering the fields which makes them fertile. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 18.4.¹²

18:5 *Do Not Cater to the Wicked*

SHUN THE WICKED. CHRYSOSTOM: “It is not good to admire those who are impious,” even though one of them has an important position or

covers up what is right with persuasive speech. To admire the behavior of the impious is to sanction iniquity inspired by the devil. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 18.5.¹³

18:12 *A Haughty Heart Comes Before Destruction*

PRIDE OFTEN PRECEDES RUIN. ORIGEN: There is nothing to be proud about. For to sink to the state of being proud has its consequences according to the text: “Before ruin the heart of man is exalted and before glory it is humble.” These words [also] concern the text: “Hear and hearken, and do not be proud, because the Lord has spoken.”¹⁴ HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 12.8.3.¹⁵

18:16 *A Gift that Opens Possibilities*

AN UPRIGHT LIFE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: “A man’s gift” is called an upright life. It is that gift that “makes room for him” and makes him worthy of the fullness of God.¹⁶ It is that very thing which is called the “throne” of the holy powers. Indeed, the “throne” of the mind is that excellent state which they maintain who are seated in a position that is fixed or immovable. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 184.18.16.¹⁷

¹¹LCL 34:291*. ¹²PG 64:717. ¹³PG 64:717. ¹⁴Jer 13:15. ¹⁵FC 97:122. ¹⁶See Eph 3:19. ¹⁷SC 340:278.

THE ONE WHO STATES
HIS CASE FIRST
PROVERBS 18:17-24

OVERVIEW: David is a model for confessing his sin (ORIGEN). Indeed, the just person anticipates his accuser in the admission of sin. It is an act of freedom to confess early. Pardon is sure to follow (AMBROSE). It is wise to anticipate the accusation of your adversary (PAULINUS OF MILAN). The true Christians are those who are willing to condemn their own sins (AMBROSE). Always be the first to accuse yourself (BASIL), because to do this allows you to correct any later accusation. Cain, however, delayed his confession until it was too late (CHRYSOSTOM). Paul promptly acknowledged his own sin, and so should we (JEROME). Neither despair of God's forgiveness nor defer your repentance to later (CAESARIUS OF ARLES). Some confess their sins in order to gain credit, however, and not for the sake of being honest (GREGORY THE GREAT). To settle a dispute by lot may reduce contentiousness (AUGUSTINE). The concord of two brothers bound together is unbreakable, for the disciples were united like brothers helping each other in a fortress (CHRYSOSTOM). But brotherhood is also a matter of spiritual affection (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The tongue, surrounded by teeth and lips, stands in the middle of the mouth like a sword (CHRYSOSTOM). But words can still cause deaths (VALERIAN).

18:17 He Who States the Case First

DAVID IS A MAJOR PRECEDENT IN CONFESSING HIS SIN. ORIGEN: David also speaks in the Psalms and says, "I made my iniquity known and did not cover my sin. I said, 'I will proclaim my

injustice against myself,' and you have forgiven the impiety of my heart."¹ You see, therefore, that "to proclaim the sin" is to deserve the forgiveness of sin. For the devil, having been anticipated in the accusation, will not be able to accuse us further. If we are our own accusers, this profits us to salvation. But if we delay so that we are accused by the devil, that accusation delivers us to punishment; for he will have as companions in hell those whom he will have convicted of complicity. HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 3.4.5.²

THE JUST PERSON ANTICIPATES HIS ACCUSER. AMBROSE: The just person takes note of his own weakness The wise person recognizes it; the foolish one does not. Indeed, the wise person is moved to repentance by his own faults, while the foolish one takes pleasure in his. "The just man is the accuser of himself," while the unjust one is his own apologist. The just person wishes to anticipate his accuser in the admission of his sin, while the unjust one desires to conceal his. The one rushes on in the beginning of his speech to reveal his wrongdoing, the other attempts to lay the accusation to rest by the garrulousness of his speech, so as not to reveal his wrongdoing. THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 1.6.20.³

TO CONFESS FIRST TO THE LORD IS FREEDOM. AMBROSE: Let us who are free from sin, purchased, as it were, by the price of Christ's

¹Ps 32:5 (31:5 LXX). ²FC 83:61. ³FC 65:342-43*.

blood, let us not be subject to the slavery of people or of passion. Let us not be ashamed to confess our sin. See how free is the one who could say, "I have not been afraid of a very great multitude, so that I would not confess my sin in the sight of all."⁴ One who confesses to the Lord is freed from his slavery: "The just is the accuser of himself in the beginning of his speech." He is not only free but just, for justice is in liberty, and liberty in confession, and as soon as one has confessed he is pardoned. LETTER 54.⁵

THE TRUE CHRISTIANS. AMBROSE: Are not those who condemn their sin truer Christians than those who think to defend it? "The just accuses himself in the beginning of his words." He who accuses himself when he sins is just, not he who praises himself. LETTER 51.⁶

CONFESSION REQUIRES CORRECTION. PAULINUS OF MILAN: He is his own accuser who, instead of waiting, anticipates his accuser, so as to lighten his own sin by confession, lest he have something which his adversary may accuse. And for this reason, Scripture says, "The just is first accuser of himself." For he snatches away the voice of his adversary and by the confession of his own sins breaks to pieces the teeth prepared for the prey of hostile accusation. In so doing he gives honor to God, to whom all things are exposed, and who wishes the life rather than the death of the sinner.⁷ Indeed, to the penitent himself confession alone does not suffice, unless correction of the deed follows, with the result that the penitent does not continue to do deeds which demand repentance. LIFE OF ST. AMBROSE 9.39.⁸

BE THE FIRST TO ACCUSE YOURSELF. BASIL THE GREAT: Speak not in your own praise, nor contrive that others do so. Do not listen to indecent talk. Conceal insofar as you can your own superior gifts. On the other hand, where sin is concerned, be your own accuser, and do not wait for others to make the accusation. Thus, you will be like a just man who accuses himself in the first

speech made in court, or like Job who was not deterred by the crowd of people in the city from declaring his personal guilt before all.⁹ ON HUMILITY.¹⁰

BE THE FIRST TO CONDEMN YOURSELF. CHRYSOSTOM: When you commit sin, do not wait for another man to accuse you but, before you are accused and indicted, you yourself had best condemn what you have done. Then, if someone accuses you later on, it is no longer a matter of your doing the right thing in confessing but of your correcting the accusation which he makes. And so it is that someone else has said, "The just man begins his speech by accusing himself." So it is not a question of accusing but of being the first to accuse yourself and not waiting for others to accuse you.

Peter certainly sinned gravely in denying Christ. But he was quick to remind himself of his sin and, before anyone accused him, he told of his error and wept bitterly.¹¹ He so effectively washed away his sin of denial that he became the chief of the apostles, and the whole world was entrusted to him. DISCOURSES AGAINST JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS 8.3.3-4.¹²

CAIN DELAYED HIS CONFESSION UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE. CHRYSOSTOM: You see, when Cain was asked by the Lord, "Where is your brother Abel?" that was the time for him to confess his fault, fall on his knees, pray and ask pardon. At that point, however, he rejected the healing, whereas now, after the sentence, after all was over, after the accusation was leveled at him in a loud voice by the blood that had been shed, he made his confession only to gain nothing from it. That is why the inspired author also said, "He who accuses himself at the beginning of the speech is in the right." Accordingly, had Cain anticipated the Lord's accusation, perhaps he would have been

⁴Job 31:34. ⁵FC 26:302-3*. ⁶LCC 5:257. ⁷Cf. Heb 4:13; Ezek 18:32. ⁸FC 15:57*. ⁹Job 31:34. ¹⁰FC 9:485*. ¹¹Cf. Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:54-62; Jn 18:16-18. ¹²FC 68:213-14*.

granted some mercy on account of the Lord's unlimited goodness. I mean, there is no sin, no matter how grave, that can exceed his mercy provided we demonstrate our repentance at the proper time and beg pardon. "Cain said, 'My guilt is too great for me to be forgiven'—an adequate confession, but too late. *HOMILIES ON GENESIS 19.14.*¹³

PAUL PROMPTLY ACKNOWLEDGED HIS SIN.

JEROME: Blessed, therefore, is he who acknowledges that he is a sinner just as the apostle does: "I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."¹⁴ If the apostle makes such a confession, how much more should the sinner? Scripture says, moreover, "If the just man is prompt to accuse himself, how much more should the sinner be?" *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 47 (PSALM 135).*¹⁵

NEITHER DESPAIR OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS NOR DEFER REPENTANCE.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: If you acknowledge your sins, God will forgive you. So, let no one despair, but, likewise, let no one entertain presumptuous hope. The one who believes that even if he does penance for his sins the divine mercy will not forgive him wrongly despairs, while one who defers the remedy of repentance to a much later day is presumptuous. *SERMON 64.4.*¹⁶

SOME CONFESS THEIR SINS TO GAIN CREDIT.

GREGORY THE GREAT: Even those who do not believe that they have sinned, generally confess themselves sinners. For it is frequently the case that people openly confess themselves sinners, but on hearing a true account of their sins when other persons attack them, they boldly defend themselves and endeavor to appear innocent. Everyone of this character, then, if he says that he has sinned, speaks untruly, as he proclaims himself a sinner not from the inmost heart, but only in words. For since it is written, "The just man in the beginning accuses himself," he wished to gain credit, not to be humbled, by confessing his sin. He desired, by accusing himself, to appear humble

without being so. . . . The righteous, then, in passing sentence on his own conduct, knows from the bottom of his heart, by the examples of holier men, that he really is what he professes to be. *MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 5.24.22.*¹⁷

18:18 Disputes Can Be Ended by Lot

TO SETTLE A DISPUTE BY LOT MAY REDUCE CONTENTIOUSNESS. **AUGUSTINE:** "The lot suppresses contentions and determines even between the mighty." For it is better for God to decide in uncertainties of this kind than for people, whether he deigns to call the better ones to a share in his passion and to spare the weak, or to strengthen the former to bear these evils and to withdraw from this life those whose survival cannot be as beneficial to the church as theirs would be. It will be an unusual thing to proceed in this matter by drawing lots, but, if it is done, who will dare to judge it adversely? Surely, everyone but the envious or those ignorant of this appropriate quotation will praise it. *LETTER 228.*¹⁸

18:19 Help for Brothers in a Strong City

THE CONCORD OF TWO BROTHERS. **CHRYSOSTOM:** Do you see the great strength which comes from concord? And do you see the great harm caused by contentiousness? A kingdom in revolt destroys itself. When two brothers are bound together and united into one, they are more unbreakable than any wall. *DISCOURSES AGAINST JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS 3.1.3.*¹⁹

THE DISCIPLES WERE UNITED LIKE BROTHERS. **CHRYSOSTOM:** "A brother helped by his brother is like a fortified and elevated city: and is as strong as a well fortified palace of kings." The disciples of Christ were of the same mind, like brothers, and were fortified like a royal palace

¹³FC 82:29-30. ¹⁴1 Cor 15:9. ¹⁵FC 48:353. ¹⁶FC 31:310-11. ¹⁷LF 23:65-66. ¹⁸FC 32:150. ¹⁹FC 68:48.

surrounded by many walls as they helped each other. They were firm in their unity, and their mutual aid made them stronger and stronger.

COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 18.19.²⁰

THE BONDS OF SPIRITUAL AFFECTION WITHSTAND THE SIEGE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA:

Truly spiritual affection is a strong city not able to be overcome or besieged by the devil either by undermining or by scaling. For it does not give way to the siege machines of Satan because it is guarded by Christ, the Lord, by Christ who conquered the world and has prepared eternal blessings for you, by Christ, who said, “He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”²¹ LETTER 30.2.²²

18:21 *Death and Life in the Power of the Tongue*

THE TONGUE STANDS IN THE MIDDLE LIKE A SWORD. CHRYSOSTOM: Christ makes the same point when he says, “By your own words you will be condemned, and by your words you will be justified.”²³

The tongue stands in the middle ready for either use; you are its master. So also does a sword lie in the middle; if you use it against the enemy, it becomes an instrument for your safety; if you use it to wound yourself, it is not the steel but your own transgression of the law that causes your death. Let us think of the tongue in the same way, as a sword lying in the middle. Sharpen it to accuse yourself of your own sins, but do not use it to wound your brother.

Hence, God has surrounded the tongue with a double wall—with the barrier of the teeth and the fence of the lips—in order that it may not easily and heedlessly utter words it should not speak. BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTIONS 9.33-35.²⁴

WORDS CAUSE DEATHS. VALERIAN: A wound arising from words is unbearable. . . Truly, dearly beloved, if you look deeply, and diligently investigate the swelling tumor of an exasperated heart, you will discover that the wounds produced by words cause deaths. HOMILY 5.4.²⁵

²⁰PG 64:720. ²¹See Mt 10:38. ²²FC 76:120 ²³Mk 12:27. ²⁴ACW 31:142*. ²⁵FC 17:332.





A POOR PERSON WALKS
IN INTEGRITY
PROVERBS 19:1-29

OVERVIEW: Grace is not bestowed upon us according to our human merits (AUGUSTINE). The angels uphold spiritual friendship that comes

from knowledge of God (EVAGRIUS). At the end there will be punishments for the false and crowns for the true (AUGUSTINE). A lack of pa-

tience indicates a lack of wisdom (GREGORY THE GREAT). God is with those who responsibly marry and with those who, living the single life, show self-control (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). God created marriage, indeed, but not every match of every man with a particular woman. At the end, it is better to have God as debtor, to whom alms have been lent, than as judge (CHRYSOSTOM), for money given to the poor is money lent to God (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). So give to the poor now, and great will your reward be later in heaven (CAESARIUS). God's perfect purpose is greater than any human plan (AUGUSTINE). When a pestilent character is punished a simple one is made wiser, because sinners are punished for the education of others (ORIGEN).

19:3 *Raging Against the Lord*

GRACE IS NOT BESTOWED ACCORDING TO OUR DESERVING. AUGUSTINE: Grace is not bestowed according to human merits; otherwise grace would be no longer grace.¹ For grace is so designated because it is given gratuitously. ON GRACE AND FREE WILL 21.43.²

19:4 *The Role of the Angels in Spiritual Friendship*

RELATIONSHIP TO THE ANGELS COMES FROM KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: "Richness" of knowledge and wisdom "brings us many angels,"³ but an impure person is even separated from the angel given to him at birth. Spiritual friendship is virtue and knowledge of God, through which we bind ourselves to friendship with the holy powers. Thus it is said that human beings who repent give cause for joy to the angels.⁴ Thus also the Savior calls his servants "friends,"⁵ since they are ready to receive greater wisdom. So also Abraham, rich in knowledge, offered that mystical table to the friends who appeared to him in the middle of the day.⁶ SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 189.19.4.⁷

19:5 *True and False Witnesses*

PUNISHMENTS FOR THE FALSE AND CROWNS FOR THE TRUE. AUGUSTINE: There are true martyrs and false ones, because there are true and false witnesses. But Scripture says, "The false witness shall not go unpunished." If the false witness will not escape punishment, neither will the true witness be denied a crown. And it was, indeed, easy to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth, because he is God; but to do so to the death, that was a great work. SERMON 286.1.⁸

19:11 *Slow to Anger*

LACK OF PATIENCE INDICATES LACK OF WISDOM. GREGORY THE GREAT: Each person shows himself to be less wise the more he proves to be less patient. He cannot truly impart good by his teaching if he does not know how to bear calmly the evils done him by another. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 35.⁹

19:14 *A Prudent Wife Is from the Lord*

CHOICE BETWEEN SELF-CONTROL OR RESPONSIBLE MARRIAGE WITH CHILDREN.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Who are the two or three who gather in the name of Christ with the Lord in their midst?¹⁰ By three does he not mean husband, wife and child? "A wife is united with her husband by God." But if a man wishes to be unencumbered and prefers to avoid producing children because of the time it takes up, then, says the apostle, "he had better stay unmarried like me."¹¹ . . . God through his Son is with those who responsibly marry and produce children, and it is the same God who in the same way is with the man who shows self-control in the light of the Logos. STROMATEIS 3.10.68.1-4.¹²

¹Rom 11:6. ²NPNF 1 5:463*. ³Evagrius reflects a different textual tradition. ⁴See Lk 15:10. ⁵See Jn 15:15. ⁶See Gen 18:1-8. ⁷SC 340:282. ⁸WSA 3 8:101. ⁹CS 123:305-6*. ¹⁰Mt 18:20. ¹¹1 Cor 7:8. ¹²FC 85:298.

GOD CREATED MARRIAGE. CHRYSOSTOM: When a certain wise man says, “It is by the Lord that a man is matched with a woman,” he means this: God made marriage, and not that it is God that joins together every man that comes to be married with a woman. For we see many that come to be with one another for evil, even by the law of marriage, and this we should not ascribe to God. *HOMILIES ON ROMANS 23.13.1.*¹³

19:17 *Be Kind to the Poor*

IT IS BETTER TO HAVE GOD AS DEBTOR THAN AS JUDGE. CHRYSOSTOM: Let us lend to God almsgiving so we may receive from him clemency in exchange. Oh, how wise is this statement! “Whoever has mercy upon the poor lends to God.” Why did he not say, “Whoever has mercy upon the poor gives to God” instead of “lends”? Scripture recognizes our greediness; it understood that our insatiate desire, which looks longingly toward greediness, asks for an excess. This is why it did not say simply, “Whoever has mercy upon the poor gives to God,” so you may not think that the recompense will be customary; rather, it said, “Whoever has mercy upon the poor lends to God.” Since God borrows from us, then, he is our debtor. How do we want to have him, as judge or debtor? The debtor is ashamed before his lender; the judge does not put to shame the one who borrows. *HOMILIES ON REPENTANCE AND ALMSGIVING 7.6.23.*¹⁴

MONEY GIVEN TO THE POOR IS MONEY LENT TO GOD. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The lesson, therefore, which he teaches us is love for the poor, which is precious in the sight of God. Do you feel pleasure in being praised when you have any friends or relatives feasting with you? I tell you of something far better: angels shall praise your bounty, and the rational powers above, and holy men as well; and he too shall accept it who transcends all, and who loves mercy and is kind. Lend to him fearing nothing, and you will receive with interest whatever you gave, for “he,” it says, “who

has pity on the poor lends unto God.” *COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 103.*¹⁵

GIVE TO THE POOR NOW. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: If a trustworthy man said to you, Give me one gold coin, and I will repay you one hundred solid gold coins, would you not gladly give him the one in order that you might receive the hundred? Now the God of heaven and earth says to you, “He who has compassion on the poor lends to God”; moreover, “As long as you did it for one of the least of these, you did it for me”;¹⁶ and in the Psalms, “Well for the man who is gracious and lends.”¹⁷ How much more, then, should you lend to God on earth, in order that you may receive a manifold return in eternal life? Then you will deserve to come before the tribunal of the eternal judge in the sight of the angels and can say with assurance and a clear conscience, Give, Lord, because I have given; have mercy because I have shown mercy. *SERMON 158.6.*¹⁸

19:21 *The Purpose of God*

GOD’S DESIGNS ARE GREATER THAN HUMAN JUDGMENTS. AUGUSTINE: What lies hidden in the designs of God I confess I do not know—I am only a man—but this I know with full certainty, that, whatever it is, it is more just, more wise, and more solidly based on incomparable perfection than all the judgments of people. *LETTER 104.*¹⁹

19:25 *A Simple One Is Made Wiser*

SINNERS ARE PUNISHED FOR THE EDUCATION OF OTHERS. ORIGEN: If you want to take Scripture as a witness that sinners are punished for the education of others, even if those unabashed may be beyond treatment, hear Solomon in the Proverbs who says, “When a pest is being whipped, the fool will be more astute.” He did not say that he who is being whipped will be more astute and

¹³NPNF 1 11:511*. ¹⁴FC 96:105. ¹⁵CGSL 414*. ¹⁶Mt 25:40. ¹⁷Ps 112:5 (111:5 LXX). ¹⁸FC 47:362-63. ¹⁹FC 18:189.

more sensible through the whips, but he said that the fool will change from foolishness into common sense through whips employed on the pest. For this is signified here by the term *astute*, and the fool changes because he sees others who are whipped. Hence the punishment of others is use-

ful for us if we learn greater readiness for salvation through others who are punished. HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 12.6.¹⁷

²⁰FC 97:118-19





THE RIGHTEOUS AND
THE SINNERS
PROVERBS 20:1-30

OVERVIEW: Wine is a wasteful expenditure, and Scripture repudiates its intemperate use (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Wine is a good thing only in moderation (PACHOMIUS). Wine teaches us, in that it makes him that is familiar with it like itself. Wine hates those who are most fond of it (EPHREM). One who offends God's holiness with sin, sins against his own soul (ORIGEN). There will be nothing in the summer for the sluggard who retreated from the cold in winter (GREGORY THE GREAT). The practice of mercy, so characteristic of our fathers in the faith (APHRAHAT), must characterize also the honorable person in our time (CHRYSOSTOM). No human is without sin (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS), no one's heart is perfectly clean (CHRYSOSTOM), there is no one without stain (GREGORY OF NYSSA), and hence no one can dispense with repentance (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). After all, if even the stars are not pure, as Job says, then how can anyone's heart be entirely clean (JEROME)? Rectitude in judgment is evidence that one's soul is well disposed toward equity and law (BASIL). False weights and measures must be repudiated in every walk of life; indeed, equity must be observed, permitting neither excess nor defect (AMBROSE). And person-

ally, we must not tolerate lighter weights for ourselves than for others (JOHN CASSIAN). An immediate gain of wealth is not worth the loss of eternal blessedness (GREGORY THE GREAT). Ordered by God, our steps are guided toward the attainment of the kingdom of heaven and not merely for earthly gain (AUGUSTINE), for our steps as mortal sinners are nevertheless directed by the Lord (CHRYSOSTOM). Thus, we have free choice but we also have God's help (JEROME). There must be collaboration of the young and strong with the old and wise (BEDE). Through bodily affliction can come great gifts that lead to repentance and that avoid future sins (GREGORY THE GREAT).

20:1 Strong Drink Leads Astray

SCRIPTURE REPUDIATES INTEMPERATE USE.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Scripture always uses wine in a mystical sense, as a symbol of the holy blood, and always repudiates any intemperate use made of it. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.2.29.¹

¹FC 23:119.

WINE IS A GOOD THING ONLY IN MODERATION. PACHOMIUS: As it is said, “The priest and the prophet were deranged by wine.”² “Wine is licentious, drunkenness is bold. The person who indulges in them will not be exempt from sin.” Wine is a good thing if you drink it with moderation. “If you set your eyes on cups and goblets you will walk naked as a pestle.”³ Therefore, all who have prepared to become disciples of Jesus should abstain from wine and drunkenness. INSTRUCTIONS 1.45.⁴

WINE HATES THOSE WHO ARE FOND OF IT. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Those who eat the heavenly bread become heavenly without doubt! Wine teaches us in that it makes those who are familiar with it like itself: for it hates those who are fond of it and is intoxicating and maddening and a mocker of them. HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY 3.⁵

20:2 An Angry King Is Like a Growling Lion

CHRIST IS THE KING WHO SHOULD NOT BE IRRITATED. ORIGEN: In this place it openly speaks of Christ as the king, for the one who irritates Christ with [his] sin, sins against his own soul. EXPOSITION ON PROVERBS, FRAGMENT 20.2.⁶

20:4 The Sluggard Will Have Nothing at Harvest

NOTHING IN THE SUMMER FOR THE SLUGGARD. GREGORY THE GREAT: The slothful, in neglecting to do things that are necessary, imagines certain difficulties and harbors certain unfounded fears. So when they find something they may reasonably fear, they satisfy themselves that they have good reason for remaining indolent. . . . Indeed sluggards do not plow because of the cold, when they find an excuse for not doing the good things which they ought to do. Sluggards do not plow because of the cold, when they

are afraid of small evils that confront them and leave undone things of the greatest importance. It is well said, “They shall beg in summer, and it shall not be given to them.” For those who do not toil now in good works will beg in summer and receive nothing, because, when the burning sun of judgment shall appear, they will then beg in vain for entrance into the kingdom. PASTORAL RULE 3.15.16.⁷

20:6 Loyal for Oneself or Faithful for the Sake of Others?

OUR FATHERS WERE FAITHFUL AS WELL AS MERCIFUL. APHRAHAT: All the righteous, our fathers, in all that they did were victorious through faith, as the blessed apostle also testifies about them all, “They prevailed by faith.”⁸ Solomon also said, “Many men are called merciful, but who can find a faithful man?” DEMONSTRATIONS 1.16.⁹

MERCY SHOULD CHARACTERIZE GOD’S IMAGE. CHRYSOSTOM: A human being is of great value since he is made in the likeness of God. If he adds to this the practice of mercy in practical matters he then becomes an honorable man. He, who does this wisely and faithfully, finds the work [he was created to do]. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 20.6.¹⁰

20:9 Pure from Sin

NO HUMAN IS WITHOUT SIN. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: No human, therefore, is without sin. Labor therefore to the utmost of your power to be unblamable; and be solicitous of all the parts of your flock, lest any one be scandalized on your account and thereby perish. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.3.18.¹¹

²Is 28:7. ³Prov 23:31 LXX. ⁴CS 47:35*. ⁵NPNF 2 13:232*. ⁶PG 17:209. ⁷NPNF 2 12:39**. ⁸Heb 11:33, 39. ⁹NPNF 2 13:351*. ¹⁰PG 64:724. ¹¹ANF 7:403**.

TO FALL IS NOT AS BAD AS TO LIE WHERE FALLEN. CHRYSOSTOM: Let us not therefore give up in despair; for to fall is not so grievous as to lie where we have fallen. It is not so dreadful to be wounded as it is to refuse healing after being wounded. “For who shall boast that he has his heart chaste? or who shall say confidently that he is pure from sin?” These things I say not to make you more negligent but to prevent your despairing. HOMILIES ON I CORINTHIANS 8.8.¹²

IS THERE ANYONE WITHOUT STAIN? GREGORY OF NYSSA: Whose soul, then, is pure from stain? How has anyone not been struck by vanity or been trodden down by the foot of pride? Whose hand has never been touched by sin? Whose feet have never run toward evil? Who has not been polluted by a roving eye or been defiled by an undisciplined ear? Whose taste has never been preoccupied by its enjoyment, whose heart has remained unmoved by vain emotions? ON THE LORD’S PRAYER 5.¹³

NO ONE CAN DISPENSE WITH REPENTANCE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The merciful God has provided for the inhabitants of earth repentance as the medicine of salvation. Some endeavor to dispense with repentance, saying of themselves that they are clean. In their great madness they do not understand that to entertain such an idea of themselves is full of all impurity. For “no man is free from defilement,” as it is written. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 149.¹⁴

HOW CAN ANYONE’S HEART BE ENTIRELY CLEAN? JEROME: “Who can say,” writes the wise man, “I have made my heart clean”? The stars are not pure in the Lord’s sight; how much less people whose whole life is one long temptation.¹⁵ LETTER 125.7.¹⁶

20:10 Inequalities in Weights and Measures

RECTITUDE IN JUDGMENT. BASIL THE GREAT: If there were two persons to be judged, one being

given more consideration and the other less consideration, with a judge standing between both and making them equal by depriving only the one who has more than enough, the judge can be said to have failed to the extent that the adjudged party is injured. He who does not first have true justice instilled in his soul, but is corrupted by money or favors his friends or seeks vengeance against his enemies or reveres power, is unable to effect justice. . . . For rectitude in judgment is evidence that someone’s soul is well disposed toward equity and law. Hence, it prohibits this in what follows, saying, “Large weights and small weights are abominable before God,” with inequality in judgment being indicated in Proverbs under the title of weights. HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 9.¹⁷

FALSE WEIGHTS AND MEASURES MUST BE REPUDIATED. AMBROSE: Every kind of unfair action is shameful. Even in common things, false weights and unjust measures are accursed. And if fraud in the market or in business is punished, can it seem free from reproach if found in the midst of the performance of the duties of virtue? DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 3.9.65.¹⁸

EQUITY MUST ACCEPT NEITHER EXCESS NOR DEFECT. AMBROSE: He who commands must always keep to the exact scope of the commandments, and he who distributes tasks must observe equity in looking into them, for “a false balance is an abomination to the Lord.”¹⁹ There is, then, an excess and a defect in weight, but the church accepts neither, for “excessive and defective weights and diverse measures, both of them are alike abominable in the sight of the Lord.” CONCERNING WIDOWS 13.78.²⁰

WE MUST NOT TOLERATE LIGHTER WEIGHTS FOR OURSELVES THAN FOR OTHERS. JOHN CASSIAN: We must strive not to have unfair

¹²NPNF 1 12:47*. ¹³ACW 18:79*. ¹⁴CGSL 592*. ¹⁵Job 25:5-6.

¹⁶NPNF 2 6:246. ¹⁷PG 31:405. ¹⁸NPNF 2 10:78. ¹⁹Prov 11:1.

²⁰NPNF 2 10:404-5.

weights in our hearts nor double measures in the storehouse of our conscience. We must not overwhelm those to whom we are to preach the word of the Lord with precepts that are too strict and heavier than we ourselves can bear, while we take for granted that for ourselves those things which have strict rules are to be softened and relaxed. For when we do this, what is it but to weigh and measure the goods and fruits of the Lord's commands with a double weight and measure? For if we dispense them in one way to ourselves and in another to our brothers and sisters, we are rightly blamed by the Lord because we have unfair balances and double measures, in accordance with the saying of Solomon which tells us that "a double weight is an abomination to the Lord, and a deceitful balance is not good in his sight." CONFERENCE 21.22.²¹

20:21 *An Inheritance Hastily Gained Will Not Be Blessed*

IMMEDIATE GAIN IS NOT WORTH THE LOSS OF ETERNAL BLESSEDNESS. GREGORY THE GREAT: When people burn to be filled at once with all manner of wealth, let them hear what Scripture says, "He that makes haste to be rich will not be innocent."²² For certainly those who are determined to increase their wealth do not seek to avoid sin; and, being caught like birds, while looking greedily at the bait of earthly things, they are not aware they are being strangled in the noose of sin. When they long for the gains of the present world and are ignorant of the losses they will suffer in the world to come, let them hear what Scripture says, "An inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning will in the end not be blessed." For indeed we derive our beginning from this life, that we may come to the destiny of blessing. They, therefore, that make haste to an inheritance in the beginning cut off from themselves the destiny of blessing in the end. Since, while they crave to be increased in goods here through the iniquity of avarice, they become disinherited there of their eternal patrimony. When

they either solicit very much, or succeed in obtaining all that they have solicited, let them hear what Scripture says: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul?"²³ PASTORAL RULE 3.20.21.²⁴

20:24 *Steps Ordered by God*

GUIDED TOWARD THE ATTAINMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. AUGUSTINE: Do they suppose, accordingly, that God moves the wills of those whom he has wished to the creation of earthly kingdoms but that he does not move them to the attainment of a heavenly kingdom? But I think that it was in reference to the kingdom of heaven, rather than to an earthly kingdom, that it was said . . . "The steps of a man are guided by the Lord, but how does a mortal understand his own ways?" Let them hear, "Every man seems just to himself, but the Lord directs the hearts."²⁵ Let them hear, "As many as were ordained to life everlasting believed."²⁶ Let them hear these words, and whatever others I have not quoted, by which it is shown that God prepares and converts people's wills also for the kingdom of heaven and for eternal life. And think how strange it would be for us to believe that God moves people's wills for the establishment of earthly kingdoms but that for the attainment of the kingdom of heaven people move their own wills. PREDESTINATION OF THE SAINTS 20.42.²⁷

THE STEPS OF MORTALS ARE DIRECTED BY THE LORD. CHRYSOSTOM: "The steps of man are directed by God." A mortal, that is a sinner [as such], cannot [of himself] know the ways of the Lord; in fact, since he is mortal, he has [of yet] neither died nor lived with Christ. Therefore in the journey to the kingdom of heaven the steps of man are directed by the Lord. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 20.24.²⁸

²¹NPNF 2 11:512*. ²²Prov 28:20. ²³Mt 16:26. ²⁴NPNF 2 12:46**.

²⁵Prov 21:2. ²⁶Acts 13:48. ²⁷FC 86:268-69. ²⁸PG 64:724.

FREE CHOICE WITH GOD'S HELP. JEROME: You maintain that "all are governed by their own free choice." What Christian can bear to hear this? For if not one, or a few or many but all of us are governed by our own free choice, what becomes of the help of God? And how do you explain the text, "A man's goings are ordered by the Lord"? AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 1.27.²⁹

20:29 *The Contrast Between Young and Old*

PLEA FOR COLLABORATION. BEDE: It calls gray hair wisdom. For only then will the city be well ordered, only then will the administration of the holy church be conducted properly, when all the strong men pursue the necessary works and when the elders, endowed with greater prudence, meditate advantageously on what must be done. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 2.20.29.³⁰

20:30 *Blows That Cleanse Evil*

BODILY AFFLICTION CLEANSSES SINS. GREGORY THE GREAT: The sick are to be admonished to consider how great a gift bodily affliction is, which washes away sins that we have committed and restrains those which we might commit, and which inflicts on the troubled mind wounds of penitence derived from outward stripes. As Scripture says, "The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil, and stripes cleanse the secret parts of the belly." The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil, that is, the pain of scourges cleanses iniquities, whether meditated or perpetrated. . . .

When we are outwardly smitten, we are recalled, silent and afflicted, to remember our sins and bring back before our eyes all our past evil deeds. Through what we suffer outwardly we grieve more inwardly because of what we have done. PASTORAL RULE 3.12.13.³¹

²⁹NPNF 2 6:462. ³⁰CCL 119B:107. ³¹NPNF 2 12:35**.





THE VICTORY BELONGS TO GOD PROVERBS 21:1 - 31

OVERVIEW: Good kings do reign over sin, but this is not true of despotic rulers and persecutors, whose hearts were not in God's hand. A literal interpretation of this verse is not sufficient. The hearts in the hand of God are those who govern their bodies and keep them in subjection (JEROME). The king yearns for godliness if his

heart is in God's hand (ATHANASIUS). Our souls are in God's hands (AMBROSE). The king, however, will be saved by divine guidance, not by earthly power (BASIL). Even though the king's heart is in God's hand, Christians are bought by blood, not by money; otherwise their martyrdom would not bring glory to God if they had to pay

for their survival by taxes to the rulers of this world. After all, the kingdom for which we pray is God's reign (TERTULLIAN).

Only the merciful can merit God's mercy (CYPRIAN), and ill-gotten gains, even if offered to the poor, are unacceptable to God (BASIL). Those who give alms, however, will receive happiness that does not perish (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). God repudiates offerings that have been stolen from the needy (GREGORY THE GREAT). Those who do evil without cause are perverse (CHRYSOSTOM). Wives should exhibit modesty and meekness to all outside the church (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). It is better to ponder wisdom than to try to swallow it all at once (AUGUSTINE). Wisdom demolishes untruth (ORIGEN). Do not be double-minded or double-tongued (DIDACHE). All day long the wicked covet, which means their entire human life (EVAGRIUS), but the efforts of the righteous are directed to higher things (GREGORY THE GREAT).

21:1 *The King's Heart and God's Hand*

CHRISTIANS PAY BY MARTYRDOM RATHER THAN IN MONEY. TERTULLIAN: This is the will of God: Look at the situation of the kingdoms and empires as arranged by God, in whose hand the heart of the king lies. Every day they plan for future income, from the registration of property, taxes in kind, gifts and taxes payable in money. But never up to this time has there been procured any such income by bringing the Christians under some sales tax for the person and the sect, when that could be a tremendous source of income because of our vast numbers, known to all. We are bought with blood, we are paid for in blood, we owe no money for our head, because Christ is our head.¹ It is not fitting that Christ should cost us money. How could martyrdoms bring glory to God if by tribute we should pay for the liberty of our sect? And so, the one who bargains to have his freedom at a price goes counter to the divine dispensation. ON FLIGHT IN TIME OF PERSECUTION 12.8.²

THE KINGDOM WE PRAY FOR IS GOD'S REIGN. TERTULLIAN: The phrase "Thy kingdom come" also refers to the same end as "Thy will be done," namely, [that God's kingdom may come] in ourselves. For, when does God not reign, "in whose hand is the heart of every king"? But, whatever we wish for ourselves, we direct our hope toward him, and we attribute to him what we expect from him. . . . This is the prayer of Christians; this shall bring shame to the heathens; this shall bring joy to the angels. It is for the coming of this kingdom that we are harassed now, or rather, it is for this coming that we pray. ON PRAYER 5.1-4.³

THE KING YEARNS FOR HEAVENLY THINGS IF HIS HEART IS IN GOD'S HAND. ATHANASIUS: A desire to learn and a yearning for heavenly things is suitable to a religious emperor; for thus you will truly have "your heart" also "in the hand of God." Since then your piety desired to learn from us the faith of the catholic church, giving thanks for these things to the Lord, we counseled above all things to remind your piety of the faith confessed by the fathers at Nicea. LETTER TO JOVIAN 56.1.⁴

THE SOUL IS IN THE HANDS OF GOD. AMBROSE: Entrust your soul to the hands of the Lord. Not only when it departs from the body but also when it is in the body, it is in the hands of the Lord, because you do not see it, its source or its destination. It is both in you and also with God. Therefore "the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord," who guides it and rules it. The heart is also filled with the spirit, because the spirit is the ruling part of the soul and the strength of the soul. I say that strength lies not in the arms but in counsel, temperance, piety and justice. If the heart of a man is in the hand of the Lord, much more is his soul. DEATH AS A GOOD 10.44.⁵

¹See Eph 5:23. ²FC 40:302. ³FC 40:163*. ⁴NPNF 2 4:567*. ⁵FC 65:101*.

THE KING WILL BE SAVED BY DIVINE GUIDANCE. BASIL THE GREAT: If “the heart of the king is in the hand of God,” he will not be saved through power of arms but through the divine guidance. Now, not any random person is in the hand of God but one who is worthy of the name of king. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 15.9 (PSALM 32).*⁶

KINGS OF THE EARTH REIGN OVER SIN.

JEROME: The kings of the earth are those who reign over sin; consequently, they who govern sin shall give thanks. The prophet is certainly not referring to the kings of this world, for it is written, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord.” Do you for one moment suppose that the heart of Julian the Apostate was in the hand of God? God forbid! Or of Nero or of Maximianus and Decius, the persecutors? God forbid! No, he is speaking of those who have control over sin, who, because their heart is in the hand of God, have conquered the vices and passions of their soul and thereby prevail over sin. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 49 (PSALM 137).*⁷

THE HEARTS IN THE HANDS OF GOD. JEROME: The heart of Julian, the persecutor, of Nero, of Decius, are their hearts in the hand of God? No, the hearts in the hand of God are those who govern their body, who bring it into subjection and compel it to servitude, lest preaching to others they themselves should be rejected.⁸ These are the kings of whom Wisdom says in Proverbs, “He gives kingship to kings.”⁹ *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 54 (PSALM 143).*¹⁰

A LITERAL INTERPRETATION IS NOT POSSIBLE. JEROME: Was the heart of Julian, the persecutor, in the hand of God? The heart of Saul, was it in the hand of God? Was the heart of Manasseh in the hand of God? The heart of Ahab? Were the hearts of all the impious kings of Judah in the hand of God? Do you see that this verse does not admit of a literal interpretation? The kings, therefore, are the saints, and their hearts are in the hand of the Lord. . . . The following words of the

apostle are appropriate here: “But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected.”¹¹ May our soul be in command, our body in subjection. Then Christ will come at once to make his abode with us. *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 9 (PSALM 75).*¹²

21:6 A Lying Tongue

DO NOT BE DOUBLE-MINDED OR DOUBLE-TONGUED. DIDACHE: Do not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double tongue is a “deadly snare.” Your words shall not be dishonest or hollow but substantiated by action. Do not be greedy or threatening or hypocritical or malicious or arrogant. Do not plot against your neighbor. Do not hate anybody. Reprove some, pray for others, and still others love more than your own life. *DIDACHE 2.4-7.*¹³

21:8 The Way of the Guilty Is Crooked

HABITUAL EVILDOERS ARE PERVERSE. CHRYSOSTOM: “For God sends crooked ways to the perverse.” . . . Indeed, nothing makes people so stupid as does habitual evil-doing. When a person is deceitful, when he is unjust, when he is churlish (and these, to be sure, are different forms of evil-doing), when, without having been wronged in any way himself, he inflicts pain, when he connives at trickery—how will he not be exhibiting signs of utter stupidity? *HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 41.*¹⁴

21:13 The Cry of the Poor

ONLY THE MERCIFUL CAN MERIT THE MERCY OF GOD. CYPRIAN: He will not be able to merit the mercy of God who himself has not been merciful, nor will [he] gain any request from the divine love by his prayers who has not been hu-

⁶FC 46:243.* ⁷FC 48:362. ⁸See 1 Cor 9:27. ⁹Cf. Prov 8:15. ¹⁰FC 48:385. ¹¹1 Cor 9:27. ¹²FC 48:67*. ¹³LCC 1:172. ¹⁴FC 33:421.

mane toward the prayer of the poor. **WORKS AND ALMSGIVING** 5.¹⁵

ILL-GOTTEN GAINS ARE UNACCEPTABLE TO GOD. **BASIL THE GREAT:** Benefactions to the needy, financed by unjust gains, are not acceptable with God. Even one who refrains from committing injustices, and yet does not share the goods he possesses with anyone, is not deserving of praise. . . . If you will make an offering to God from the fruits of injustice and rapine, it would be better not to possess such wealth and not to make an offering. **ON MERCY AND JUSTICE.**¹⁶

THOSE WHO GIVE ALMS. **CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA:** Do you not agree that poverty, as I said, is more cruel than any beast of prey? Therefore you must aid those who are fallen under it. Incline your ear to the poor and listen to them, as it is written: "For he who stops his ears that he may not hear the feeble shall also cry, and there shall be none to listen." Give so that you may receive; hear so that you may be heard; sow the little you have so that you may reap much. Besides, the pleasure of the body is short and temporary and ends in rottenness. But almsgiving and charity to the poor crown those who practice them with glory from God and lead to that incorruptible happiness which Christ bestows on those who love him. **COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 103.**¹⁷

21:19 Better to Live in a Desert Land

WIVES SEEK MODESTY AND MEEKNESS. **APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS:** "It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and an angry woman." You wives, therefore, demonstrate your piety by your modesty and meekness to all outside the church, whether they are women or men, in order to their conversion and improvement in the faith. And since we have warned you and instructed you briefly, whom we do esteem our sisters, daughters and members, as being wise yourselves, persevere all your lives in a blameless course of life. Seek to know such kinds

of learning whereby you may arrive at the kingdom of our Lord, and please him, and so rest for ever and ever. **CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES** 1.3.10.¹⁸

21:20 The Wise Are Frugal, but Fools Are Wasteful

BETTER TO PONDER WISDOM THAN TO SWALLOW IT ALL AT ONCE. **AUGUSTINE:** Another passage of Scripture speaks of the precious treasure of wisdom and describes ruminating on wisdom as clean and not ruminating as unclean: "A precious treasure rests in the mouth of a wise man; but a foolish man swallows it up." Symbols of this kind, either in words or in things, give useful and pleasant exercise to intelligent minds in the way of inquiry and comparison. But formerly people were required not only to hear [of food laws] but to practice many such things. For at that time it was necessary that, by deeds as well as by words, those things should be foreshadowed which were in after times to be revealed. After the revelation by Christ and in Christ, the community of believers is not burdened with the practice of the observances but is admonished to give heed to the prophecy. This is our reason for accounting no animals unclean, in accordance with the saying of the Lord and of the apostle, while we are not opposed to the Old Testament, where some animals are pronounced unclean. **REPLY TO FAUSTUS THE MANICHAEAN** 6.7.¹⁹

ENJOYING THE FLAVOR OF THE WORD. **AUGUSTINE:** So those who hear and out of carelessness forget, so to say swallow what they have heard, so that they no longer have a taste of it in their mouth but just bury what they hear under forgetfulness. But those who meditate on "the law of the Lord day and night"²⁰ are chewing the cud, as it were, and enjoying the flavor of the word with a kind of palate of the heart. **SERMON** 149.4.²¹

¹⁵FC 36:231. ¹⁶FC 9:507-8. ¹⁷CGSL 415**. ¹⁸ANF 7:395*. ¹⁹NPNF 14:171*. ²⁰Ps 1:2. ²¹WSA 3 5:20.

21:22 *Demolishing the Fortifications*

WISDOM DEMOLISHES FORTRESSES OF LIES.

ORIGEN: “The wise person assaults strong cities and demolishes the fortifications in which the ungodly trusted.” Do you think when Solomon said this he wanted to teach us that the wise person seized cities and demolished fortifications built from stones? Or, rather, is he indicating that the city and the walls are the doctrines of the ungodly and the syllogisms of philosophers, with which they augment every impiety that is contrary to the divine law and that is observed among pagans or barbarians? And those things that the heretics, with attestations from the Scriptures, place as if in high mountains must also be considered to be among these cities that are both fortified and placed in the mountains. Cities such as these, therefore, are demolished by every wise person who proclaims the word of truth. HOMILIES ON JOSHUA 18.3.²²

21:26 *The Wicked Covet All Day*

THE ENTIRE HUMAN LIFE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: It belongs to angels never to have evil desires; it is human sometimes to have evil desires and other times not to have them; it belongs to demons always to have evil desires.

The expression “all the day” signifies the entire life. So also, “continue in the fear of the Lord all the day”²³ applies to the whole life. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 231.21.26.²⁴

THE SOUL’S EFFORT. GREGORY THE GREAT:

When the soul does not direct itself toward higher things, it lets itself run loose uncared for in lower desires. While not directed with the vigor of lofty aims, it suffers the hunger pangs of lust, and, while neglecting to bind itself up with discipline, it scatters itself abroad in its craving after pleasures. Therefore, it is written again by the same Solomon, “The idle man is given wholly to desires.” PASTORAL RULE 3.15.16.²⁵

21:27 *A Sacrifice Offered with Evil Intent*

GOD REPUDIATES OFFERINGS WITHDRAWN

FROM THE NEEDY. GREGORY THE GREAT: “The sacrifices of the ungodly are abominable, because they are offered in wickedness.” Such persons also often take from the indigent what they give to God. But the Lord shows with what strong censure he disowns them. PASTORAL CARE 3.21.22.²⁶

²²FC 105:165*. ²³Prov 23:17. ²⁴SC 340:326. ²⁵NPNF 2 12:39**. ²⁶NPNF 2 12:48**.



A GOOD NAME
IS BETTER THAN RICHES
PROVERBS 22:1-29

OVERVIEW: The wise possess much more than riches, since a good name is better than wealth (AMBROSE). The wealthy are given wealth to help the poor, the poor are made to test the rich. The Lord helps the poor by the rich and tests the rich by the poor. Let the rich lighten their load by giving away some of their possessions to the needy (AUGUSTINE). A holy sharing of material substance and divine lessons between rich and poor can be of mutual benefit on the road of life (CAESARIUS).

The book of Proverbs offers training that children need and from which they are unlikely to waver in their adult years (BASIL); therefore, we should be zealous for virtuous habits in the young (BEDE). Those who persist in disobedience, however, should be dismissed from a monastic community (BASIL). A slanderer can easily fall into a deep pit and never escape (AMBROSE). Solomon advises that his wisdom be read in a threefold manner (ORIGEN), and indeed the wisdom literature has a threefold division of scriptural teaching, moving from Proverbs to Ecclesiastes to Songs, reflecting moral, physical and theological dimensions (EVAGRIUS). The meaning of Scripture also consists of body, soul, and spirit (CHRYSOSTOM), corresponding with three kinds of spiritual knowledge (JOHN CASSIAN).

When confronted by spiritual distraction, it is best to distance yourself from it (BASIL). The ancient landmarks should never be violated (ORIGEN). Indeed, we should beware of changing the apostolic testimony (EVAGRIUS). The Nicene Creed in particular is an everlasting boundary that must not be altered (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). To demand constant change in religion is to transgress the ancient bounds (VINCENT OF LÉRINS), and recent teachings should be rejected (ACACIUS OF BEROEA AND JOHN OF ANTIOCH). Let us, therefore, be satisfied with the ancient boundaries that have been revealed (JOHN OF DAMASCUS).

22:1 A Good Name Is Better Than Silver or Gold

THE WISE POSSESS MUCH MORE THAN

RICHES. AMBROSE: A good name is more excellent than money, and good favor is better than heaps of silver. Faith itself redounds to itself, sufficiently rich and more than rich in its possession. There is nothing which is not the possession of the wise person except what is contrary to virtue, and wherever he goes he finds all things to be his. The whole world is his possession, since he uses it all as his own. LETTER 15.¹

22:2 Rich and Poor

THE LORD HELPS THE POOR BY THE RICH

AND TESTS THE RICH BY THE POOR. AUGUSTINE: "The poor man and the rich have met each other." Where have they met each other? In this life. This one was born, that one was born, their lives were crossed, they have met each other. And who made them? The Lord. The rich man, to help the poor; the poor man, to test the rich. SERMON 39.6.²

AUGUSTINE: The rich and the poor meet together. In what way, except in this present life? The rich and the poor are born alike. You meet one another as you walk along the way together. The poor must not defraud the rich; the rich must not oppress the poor. The one has need, the other has plenty, but "the Lord is the maker of them both." The Lord helps the one in need by the one who has; by the one who has not the Lord tests the one who has. SERMON 35 (85).7.³

TO GIVE AWAY POSSESSIONS IS TO LIGHTEN

THE LOAD OF THE RICH. AUGUSTINE: Both of you are traveling the same road; you are companions on the journey. Lightly laden are the poor man's shoulders, but yours are burdened with heavy luggage. Give away some of the load that is weighing you down; give away some of your luggage to the needy man—and you will thus afford

¹FC 26:81.* ²WSA 3 2:219. ³NPNF 1 6:368**.

relief both to yourself and to your companion. The Scripture says, "The rich and the poor have met one another, but the Lord has made them both." Where have they met, except in this life? The one is now arrayed in costly garments, while the other is clad in rags. When did they meet? Both were born naked, and even the rich man was born poor. Let him disregard what he found when he had come; let him consider what he brought with him. SERMON 11.6.⁴

HOLY SHARING OF POOR AND RICH. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: I beseech you, beloved brethren, be eager to engage in divine reading whatever hours you can. Moreover, since what a person procures in this life by reading or good works will be the food of his soul forever, let no one try to excuse himself by saying he has not learned letters at all. If those who are illiterate love God in truth, they look for learned people who can read the sacred Scriptures to them. This even illiterate merchants have learned to do, for they hire literate mercenaries and through their reading or writing acquire great profits. Now, if people do this for earthly wealth, how much more should we do it for the sake of eternal life? It often happens that a learned person may be poor in food or clothing, while one who does not know letters has more abundant wealth. The illiterate person who abounds in earthly goods summons the poor learned one, and they mutually give each other what they need. The one by reading feeds the other with the sweet word of God, while the other by giving material substance does not allow his neighbor to suffer want. The learned man should satisfy the soul of the rich man, while the latter should warm the body of the poor man with clothing and refresh him with earthly food. If this is done with charity, there will be fulfilled what is written: "The rich and poor have met one another: the Lord is the maker of them both." Being pressed down with a heavy burden by possessing more than was necessary, the rich man was unable to walk, while

the poor man perhaps was learned but was failing because of not having the necessities of life. For this reason, there was holy sharing on the part of both men. While the rich man gave the poor material wealth from his possessions, the poor man imparted the sacred lessons to the rich, and they both happily reach the eternal country on the road of this life. SERMON 8.1.⁵

22:6 *The Child Trained in Youth Will Not Waver as an Adult*

PROVERBS OFFERS TRAINING THAT CHILDREN NEED. BASIL THE GREAT: Thus, here also it calls him a new child who was reborn through the washing of regeneration and educated and made childlike, who is made fit for the kingdom of heaven through this process in the same way. The book of Proverbs, therefore, provides training which imparts perception and understanding to the recently born child who is hungry for rational and genuine milk: a perception of present realities but an understanding of future realities. For the child is educated in human matters and given a perception of reality so that he would neither be enslaved to shameful desires nor long for the empty glory of this world. Beyond this, Proverbs confers an understanding of the coming age and encourages faith in the promises by its words. HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 13.⁶

BE ZEALOUS FOR VIRTUOUS HABITS IN THE YOUNG. BEDE: It is well known that the Lord grants a great many in their old age to be changed and relieved of the vices that they had in their youth. It is also well known, on the other hand, that some abandon in their old age the virtues with which they were seen to be marked in their youth. But because people much more commonly follow the habits with which they were imbued as children for the rest of their lives, it became a proverbial saying that a man will not change in

⁴FC 11:364. ⁵FC 31:49-50. ⁶PG 31:413.

his old age whatever he began to do as a youth, even though it does not always happen that way. The proverb is formulated like this, therefore, to persuade its readers to be zealous for virtue in youth, lest they be unable as adults to learn the practices which they had despised to acquire at a tender age, for “the odor of that with which a new vessel is imbued will endure for a long time.”⁷ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 22.6.⁸

22:10 *No Scoffer, No Strife*

THOSE WHO PERSIST IN DISOBEDIENCE. BASIL THE GREAT: If some persist in their disobedience, finding fault in secret and not openly stating their grievance, thus becoming the cause of quarreling in the community and undermining the authority of the commands given, they should be dismissed from the community as teachers of disobedience and rebellion. For the Scripture says, “Cast out the scoffer from the council, and contention shall go out with him” and also, “Put away the evil one from yourselves, for a little leaven corrupts the whole lump.”⁹ THE LONG RULES 47.¹⁰

22:14 *Take Care Not to Be Entrapped*

A SLANDERER CAN FALL INTO HIS OWN PIT. AMBROSE: The mouth of one speaking ill is a great pit, a steep precipice for the innocent, but steeper for one of ill will. An innocent person, though easily credulous, falls quickly,¹¹ but when he has fallen rises again. The slanderer is thrown headlong by his own acts, from which he will never emerge or escape. LETTER 15.¹²

22:20 *Numerical Divisions for Instructional Purposes*

SOLOMON’S WISDOM IS READ IN A THREE-FOLD MANNER. ORIGEN: Solomon counsels that what we read “be transcribed in the heart in a threefold manner.” I shall make known to your ears that which occurs to my mind, even beyond

the things that we have said, and you yourself [should] do what is written: “Let one speak and the rest judge.”¹³ Therefore, as I speak what I perceive, you consider and judge if it is correct or not correct. HOMILIES ON JOSHUA 21.¹⁴

THE THREEFOLD DIVISION OF WISDOM LITERATURE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: He who has opened his heart through purity, contemplates the words of God in their practical, physical and theological sense. Accordingly, the whole corpus of Scripture may be divided into three parts: ethical, physical and theological. Consequently, Proverbs corresponds to the first part, Ecclesiastes to the second, and Song of Songs to the third.¹⁵ SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 247.22.20.¹⁶

THE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE ALSO CONSISTS OF BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT. CHRYSOSTOM: As human beings consist of body, soul and spirit, so also Scripture consists of the body of letters, by which the ignorant man is benefited; and that is called “manual instruction.” Second, it consists of soul, that is, a higher meaning,¹⁷ which the one who is higher in learning understands. It also consists of spirit, that is, a more sublime and spiritual contemplation which those who are perfect understand and speak. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 22.20.¹⁸

THREE KINDS OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE. JOHN CASSIAN: There are three kinds of spiritual knowledge—tropological, allegorical, anagogical—of which we read as follows in Proverbs: “But you describe these things to yourself in three ways according to the largeness of your heart.” CONFERENCE 14.8.¹⁹

⁷Horace *Epistle* 1.2.69-70. ⁸CCL 119B:112-13. ⁹1 Cor 5:13, 6. ¹⁰FC 9:325*. ¹¹Cf. Prov 14:15. ¹²FC 26:82. ¹³1 Cor 14:29. ¹⁴FC 105:186-87*. ¹⁵This threefold classification for the books of Scripture and its teaching in the wisdom literature, including the stages of spiritual progress, was early established by Origen in the prologue of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (“moral, natural and contemplative”) and followed by other writers. See the present volume at Song 1:1. ¹⁶SC 340:342. ¹⁷Gk *anagōgē*. ¹⁸PG 64:728. ¹⁹NPNF 2 11:437-38.

22:24 *Do Not Befriend an Angry Person*

DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM SPIRITUAL DISTRACTION. BASIL THE GREAT: A secluded and remote habitation also contributes to the removal of distraction from the soul. Living among those who are unscrupulous and disdainful in their attitude toward an exact observance of the commandments is dangerous, as is shown by the following words of Solomon: "Do not be a friend to an angry man, and do not walk with a furious man, lest perhaps you learn his ways and take snares unto your soul." *THE LONG RULES* 5.²⁰

22:28 *Ancient Landmarks Should Not Be Disturbed*

THE APOCRYPHA IS SET OUTSIDE THE ANCIENT BOUNDARIES. ORIGEN: Nonetheless, it is clear that many examples, which we never read in those Scriptures that we deem canonical but nonetheless are found in the apocryphal books and are shown clearly to have been taken from them, have been brought forth and inserted into the New Testament either by the apostles or the Evangelists. But we must not give credence to the apocryphal books even in this way, for the eternal boundaries, which our fathers erected, must not be moved. It could be that the apostles or the Evangelists, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew what had to be taken from those writings and what had to be refuted. But it is not for us to presume some such ability without danger, when we do not have such abundance of the Spirit. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.*²¹

ANCIENT LANDMARKS MUST NOT BE VIOLATED IN TRANSLATING THE SCRIPTURES.

ORIGEN: Consider whether it would not be well to remember the words, "You shall not remove the ancient landmarks which your fathers have set." Nor do I say this because I hesitate to examine the Jewish Scriptures, comparing them with ours and noticing their differences. This, if it is

not arrogant to say it, I have already to a great extent done to the best of my ability, laboring hard to get at the meaning in all the editions and various readings. I paid particular attention to the Septuagint translation, lest I might be found to accredit any forgery to the churches which are under heaven and give an occasion to those who seek such a pretext for gratifying their desire to slander prominent persons and to bring forth some accusation against those who are outstanding in our fellowship. And I make it my endeavor not to be ignorant of their various readings, so that in my controversies with the Jews I may not quote to them what is not found in their copies and that I may make some use of what they accept, even if it is not found in our Scriptures. For if we are so prepared for them in our discussions, they will not, as is their manner, scornfully laugh at Gentile believers on the grounds that we do not know the true readings recorded in their texts. *LETTER TO JULIUS AFRICANUS* 5.²²

BEWARE OF CHANGING THE ANCIENT BOUNDARIES. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The one who moves the boundaries of piety demonstrates either superstition or impiety. And the one who moves the boundaries of courage changes it into either audacity or cowardice. In the same manner, this applies to other virtues as well as to dogmas and other matters of faith. This especially pertains to the doctrine of the holy Trinity. Thus, whoever rejects the divinity of the Holy Spirit rejects baptism; and whoever names some others as gods introduces a whole pantheon of gods. *SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS* 249.22.28.²³

THE NICENE CREED IS AN EVERLASTING BOUNDARY. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: We do not permit the faith or the symbol of the faith defined by our holy fathers assembled in their day in Nicea to be shaken by anyone, and we do not trust ourselves or others to change a word of what was laid down there, or to depart from a

²⁰FC 9:245-46*. ²¹OSW 244. ²²ANF 4:387*. ²³SC 340:344.

single syllable of it. For we remember the one who said, “Do not alter the everlasting boundaries which your fathers set.” *LETTER TO JOHN OF ANTIOCH* 39.7.²⁴

VIOLATING THE ANCIENT BOUNDS. *VINCENT OF LÉRINS:* I cannot help wondering about such madness in certain people, the dreadful impiety of their blinded minds, their insatiable lust for error that they are not content with the traditional rule of faith as once and for all received from antiquity but are driven to seek another novelty daily. They are possessed by a permanent desire to change religion, to add something and to take something away—as though the dogma were not divine so that it has to be revealed only once. But they take it for a merely human institution, which cannot be perfected except by constant emendations, rather, by constant corrections. Yet, the divine prophecies say, “Pass not beyond the ancient bounds which your fathers have set,” and “Judge not against a judge,”²⁵ and “he that breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.”²⁶ *COMMONITORIES* 21.²⁷

RECENT TEACHINGS MUST GENERALLY BE REJECTED. *ACACIUS OF BEROEA AND JOHN OF ANTIOCH:* We reject all the doctrines introduced recently either through letters or through pamphlets as confusing the common people, since we are content with the ancient legislation of the fathers and obey the one who said, “Remove not the ancient landmarks which your fathers set up.” *LETTER TO CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA* 2.²⁸

SATISFIED WITH THE ANCIENT BOUNDARIES. *JOHN OF DAMASCUS:* He has revealed to us what it was expedient for us to know, whereas that which we were unable to bear he has withheld. With these things let us be content, and in them let us abide, and let us not step over the ancient bounds or pass beyond the divine tradition. *ORTHODOX FAITH* I.I.²⁹

²⁴TCC 144. ²⁵Sir 8:14. ²⁶Eccles 10:8. ²⁷FC 7:305-6*. ²⁸FC 77:183. ²⁹FC 37:166.





SURELY THERE IS A FUTURE
FOR THOSE WHO ARE WISE
PROVERBS 23:1-35

OVERVIEW: Scripture must be understood in a spiritual sense (EVAGRIUS). The passage on dining with a ruler, for example, pertains to Christ (CHRYSOSTOM), for it is from this regal table that we spiritually receive the body and blood of Christ. The table is Christ, and he is also the host, the food and drink, of the banquet (AUGUSTINE). Therefore, to understand this table both mental and spiritual perceptions are needed (ORIGEN). This table is also a table of Scripture from which we can pluck many flowers (JEROME). We should not be gluttonous for sweet foods (CLEM-ENT OF ALEXANDRIA).

We can become ensnared in envy if we establish contact with one who is envious (BASIL). Plato advised correction and chastisement for those who are undisciplined and degenerate (CLEM-ENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Indeed, the discipline of children is viewed under the analogy of God's discipline of humanity (BASIL). If evil will is given total freedom, there would be no point in rebuking careless shepherds (AUGUSTINE). After all, sins not corrected now will be punished in the future (CAESARIUS).

The soul is the mother of our mind, leading us to enlightenment by practical virtues (EVAGRIUS). Charity wants you to give her your heart, not just your money (AUGUSTINE). Beware, though, of an affair with a harlot, which can cause endless disaster (CHRYSOSTOM). Just as redness of the eyes can indicate death to God's Word (CLEM-ENT OF ALEXANDRIA), so also woe and sorrow can indicate transgression of one's baptismal covenant (BASIL).

The clergy, indeed, ought always to be sober (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). The soul of a drunkard is like the flesh of a leper, and excuses for drunkenness are displeasing to God (CAE-SARIUS). Since the mind guides the soul in life as the pilot steers a ship at sea, it is a sad state to be asleep to pain but awake to wine (GREGORY THE GREAT).

23:1 When You Dine with a Ruler, Observe Carefully

SCRIPTURE MUST BE UNDERSTOOD IN A SPIRITUAL SENSE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The divine Scripture should be understood in an intellectual¹ and spiritual sense, because the knowledge of sense perception, literally understood,² is not the truth. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 25:1.23.1.³

DEEPER MEANING OF THIS VERSE PERTAINS TO CHRIST. CHRYSOSTOM: "If you sit at the dinner table of a prince, understand with prudence what is set before you." Christ is anticipated here as the prince. His table and food are the words of his doctrine and his eternal goods which he has prepared for those who love him. Each Christian sits at his dinner table. The one who understands with prudence what Jesus has taught with his works and words extends his hand, which means that with his works he begins to show that he is an imitator of Christ, made humble, a peaceful lover of all and patient in tribulations. The one who does not do this but instead gazes with eagerness at the pleasures of the world must give up any desire for eternal goods which at any rate he will never own. The pleasures of the world are characteristic of a false life, and those who love them will never enjoy eternal possessions. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 23.1.⁴

WE RECEIVE THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST. AUGUSTINE: What is "the table of a powerful man" except that one from which is taken the body and blood of him who has laid down his life for us? And what is to sit at it except to approach humbly? And what is to consider and understand the things that are set before you except to reflect worthily upon so great a grace? TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 84.2.⁵

THE TABLE IS CHRIST. AUGUSTINE: You are approaching the table of a potentate. You, the

¹Gk *noētos*. ²Gk *kata tēn historian*. ³SC 340:346. ⁴PG 64:729. ⁵FC 90:133.

faithful, know what table you are approaching. . . . What regal table are you approaching? One who sets himself before you, not a table spread by the skill of cooks. Christ sets his table before you, namely, himself. Approach this table, and take your fill. Be poor, and you will have your fill. SERMON 332.2.⁶

CHRIST IS THE HOST, THE FOOD AND DRINK OF THE BANQUET. AUGUSTINE: It is certainly a great table where the lord of the table is himself the banquet. Nobody feeds his guests on himself, yet that is what the Lord Christ did, being himself the host, himself the food and drink. So the martyrs recognized what they ate and drank, so that they could give back the same kind of thing. SERMON 329.1.⁷

MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION ARE NEEDED. ORIGEN: What therefore is “the table of the powerful one,” except the mind of that one who says, “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me”;⁸ and “when I am weak, then I am strong”;⁹ On this “clean table of the powerful one,” that is, in his heart, in his mind is offered “a loaf” to the Lord. At the table of this powerful apostle, if you sit to eat, “understand intelligently what is set before you,” that is, perceive spiritually what is said by him. HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 13.4.6.¹⁰

THE TABLE OF SCRIPTURE. JEROME: Holy writ warns us to partake of the feast prudently when we have been invited to dine at the table of a rich man. I might say that a rich man’s table of Scripture has been laid before us. We enter a meadow filled with flowers; here the rose blushes; there the lilies glisten white; everywhere flowers abound in all varieties. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS II (PSALM 77).¹¹

23:3 Foods That Deceive

BUT DO NOT TURN INTO A GIANT MOUTH. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: There is no limit to

the gluttony that these people practice. Truly, in ever inventing a multitude of new sweets and ever seeking recipes of every description, they are shipwrecked on pastries and honey cakes and desserts.

To me, a man of this sort seems nothing more than one great mouth. . . . As for us, who seek a heavenly food, we must restrain the belly and keep it under the control of heaven. CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.1.4.¹²

23:6 Do Not Dine with One Who Is Stingy

WE CAN BECOME ENSNARED. BASIL THE GREAT: Wise, therefore, was he who forbids us even to dine in company with an envious man, and in mentioning this companionship at table, he implies a reference to all other social contacts as well. Just as we are careful to keep material which is easily inflammable as far away as possible from fire, so we must refrain insofar as we can from contracting friendships in circles of which envious persons are members. By so doing, we place ourselves beyond the range of their shafts. We can be caught in the toils of envy only by establishing intimacy with it. HOMILY CONCERNING ENVY.¹³

23:13-14 Punish Sinners and Even Children in Order to Save Them

PLATO ADVISED CORRECTION AND CHASTISEMENT. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Correction and chastisement, as their very name implies, are blows inflicted upon the soul, restraining sin, warding off death, leading those enslaved by vice back to self-control. Thus, Plato, recognizing that correction has the greatest influence and is the most effective purification, echoes the Word when he claims that one who is notably lacking in purification becomes undisciplined and degenerate because he was left uncorrected, while one who is to be truly happy

⁶WSA 3 9:194-95*. ⁷WSA 3 9:182*. ⁸Phil 4:13. ⁹2 Cor 12:10. ¹⁰FC 83:241. ¹¹FC 48:79. ¹²FC 23:95-96. ¹³FC 9:468-69.

should be the most purified and virtuous.¹⁴
CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 1.9.82.¹⁵

DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN IS PARALLELED BY GOD'S DISCIPLINE OF US. BASIL THE GREAT: As small children who are negligent in learning become more attentive and obedient after being punished by their teacher or tutor, and as they do not listen before the lash, but, after feeling the pain of a beating, hear and respond as though their ears were just recently opened, improving also in memory, so likewise with those who neglect divine doctrine and spurn the commandments. For, after they experience God's correction and discipline, then the commandments of God which had always been known to them and always neglected are most readily received as though by ears freshly cleansed. HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 5.¹⁶

IF EVIL WILL IS GIVEN TOTAL FREEDOM, THERE IS NO POINT IN REBUKING CARELESS SHEPHERDS. AUGUSTINE: If the evil will is always to be left to its own freedom, why are careless shepherds rebuked, and why is it said to them, "The wandering sheep you have not called back, that which was lost you have not sought"? LETTER 173.¹⁷

SINS NOT CORRECTED NOW WILL BE PUNISHED. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: When someone presumes to commit a sin against God, he ought to suffer a monastic penance. This should be done in a kind and devout spirit, so that through rebuke he may be corrected in this life in such a way that he may not perish in the future. For every sin which is not corrected in this world will be punished in the future life. Sacred Scripture speaks thus about the son and the servant: "Strike him with the rod," it says, "and you will save him from the nether world." SERMONS 235.3.¹⁸

23:22 Mother and Father Should Each Be Heeded

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE.

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: As the ancient saying goes, soul¹⁹ is the mother of the mind,²⁰ because it is the soul which leads the mind to enlightenment by means of practical virtues. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 258.23.22.²¹

23:26 Give Me Your Heart

CHARITY WANTS YOU TO GIVE YOUR HEART.

AUGUSTINE: If you don't give yourself, you will lose yourself. Charity herself speaks through wisdom and tells you something to save you from panicking at being told, "Give yourself." If anyone wanted to sell you a farm he would say to you, "Give me your gold," and if it was something else, "Give me your coppers," "Give me your silver." Now listen to what charity says to you, speaking through the mouth of wisdom: "Give me your heart, son. Give me," she says. Give her what? "Your heart, son." It was ill when it was with you, when you kept it to yourself. You were being pulled this way and that by toys and trifles and wanton, destructive loves. Take your heart away from all that. Where are you to drag it to, where are you to put it? "Give me your heart," she says. "Let it be mine, and it won't be lost to you." SERMON 34.7.²²

23:27 A Harlot Is a Deep Pit

AN AFFAIR CAN CAUSE ENDLESS DISASTER.

CHRYSOSTOM: Solomon compared the love of [such a] woman with the deep pit. She calls a halt only when she sees that her lover has been stripped of all his possessions. Even more so, she does not stop then but decks herself out more elaborately and insults him in his humiliation, and draws ridicule upon him, and causes him so much misfortune that words are inadequate to describe it. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 87.²³

¹⁴Plato *Soph.* 230DE. ¹⁵FC 23:73-74. ¹⁶PG 31:396. ¹⁷FC 30:75.

¹⁸FC 66:206*. ¹⁹Gk *psychē*. ²⁰Gk *nous*. ²¹SC 340:352-54. ²²WSA 3 2:169*. ²³FC 41:469**.

23:29-31 *Those Who Linger over Much Wine*

DEATH TO GOD’S WORD. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: By the mention of redness of eyes—a sign of death—it is made clear that the wine-biber is already dead to the Word and to reason. It declares his death to the Lord. If one forgets the motives that prompt him to seek the true life, he is dragged down to corruption. With good reason, then, the Educator, in his concern for our salvation, sternly forbids us, “Do not drink wine to drunkenness.” CHRIST THE EDUCATOR 2.2.27-28.²⁴

TRANSGRESSION OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT. BASIL THE GREAT: “Who has woe? Who has sorrow?” For whom is there distress and darkness? For whom eternal doom? Is it not for the transgressors? For those who deny the faith? And what is the proof of their denial? Is it not that they have denied their own confession? And when and what did they confess? Belief in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Ghost, when they renounced the devil and his angels and uttered those saving words. What fit title, then, has been discovered for them, for [these former] children of light to use? Are they not addressed as transgressors, as having violated the covenant of their salvation? ON THE SPIRIT 11.27.²⁵

CLERGY OUGHT ALWAYS TO BE SOBER. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: Since you are the presbyters and deacons of Christ, you ought always to be sober, both among yourselves and among others, so that you may be able to warn the unruly. Now the Scripture says, “The men in power are passionate. But let them not drink wine, lest by drinking they forget wisdom and are not able to judge aright.”²⁶ Wherefore, [the bishops]²⁷ and the presbyters and the deacons are those of authority in the church next to God Almighty and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We say this, not that they are not to drink at all, otherwise it would be to the

reproach of what God has made for cheerfulness, but that they not be disordered with wine. For the Scripture does not say, “Do not drink wine”; but what says it? “Drink not wine to drunkenness.” CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 8.4.44.²⁸

DRUNKENNESS LIKE LEPROSY. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Understand this, brethren, that every drunkard who has made drinking a habit will have leprosy within, in his soul, because the soul of the drunkard is known to be such as the flesh of the leper is seen to be. Therefore one who wishes to free himself of the sin of drunkenness, where not only his soul is killed but even his body is weakened, should drink merely as much as suffices. If he is unwilling to observe this rule, he will be hateful to God and an object of reproach to people. SERMON 189.5.²⁹

EXCUSES FOR DRUNKENNESS DISPLEASE GOD. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: People who want to be like this try miserably to excuse themselves. They say, My friend will be unpleasant if I do not give him as much as he wants to drink when I invite him to a banquet. [But I say to you,] Do not have a friend who is willing to make you displeasing to God, for he is both his own enemy and yours. If you make yourself and someone else intoxicated, you will have a man as your friend but God as an enemy. SERMON 46.4.³⁰

23:34 *The Pilot Asleep in the Midst of the Sea*

THE MIND GUIDES THE SOUL IN LIFE. GREGORY THE GREAT: A person sleeps in the midst of the sea who in the temptations of this world neglects to look out for the motions of vices that rush in on him like impending heaps of waves. And the steersman, as it were, lets the rudder go

²⁴FC 23:117-18*. ²⁵NPNF 2 8:17**. ²⁶Prov 31:4-5 LXX. ²⁷According to some manuscripts. Cf. ANF 7:498, n. 12. ²⁸ANF 7:498*. ²⁹FC 66:20. ³⁰FC 31:233*.

when the mind loses earnestness in guiding the ship of the body. For, indeed, to let the rudder go in the sea is to abandon intentness of forethought among the storms of this life. For, if the steersman carefully holds the rudder fast, he now directs the ship against the billows right and cleaves the assaults of the winds. So, when the mind vigilantly guides the soul, it now surmounts some things and treads them down, now warily turns aside from others, so that it may by hard exertion overcome present dangers and by foresight gather strength against future struggle. PASTORAL RULE 3.32.33.³¹

23:35 *Drunk and Beaten but Still Seeking More Wine*

ASLEEP TO PAIN BUT AWAKE TO WINE. GREG-

ORY THE GREAT: The soul that sleeps with no worries is beaten and feels no pain. Since it does not foresee impending evils, so neither is it aware of those which it has perpetrated. It is drawn without feeling because it is led by the allurements of vices, and yet it is not roused to keep guard over itself. But at the same time it wishes to awake in order to again find wine, because, although weighed down by the sleep of its inactivity in keeping guard over itself, it still strives to be awake to the cares of the world, that it may always be drunk with pleasures. And, while it is asleep to that which it ought to have been wisely awake, it desires to be awake to something else, to which it might laudably have been asleep. PASTORAL CARE 3.32.33.³²

³¹NPNF 2 12:64**. ³²NPNF 2 12:64**.





LOOK AND RECEIVE
INSTRUCTION
PROVERBS 24:1-34

OVERVIEW: Christ is Wisdom, and wisdom's house is Christ's church (CHRYSOSTOM). Not every strong person is also wise, but every wise person is strong if he possesses wisdom (BEDE). Caution is advised, however, and many counselors should be consulted to avoid conflicts. Captives should be redeemed, not merely enquired about (CHRYSOSTOM), and those who struggle should be encouraged with compassion (JOHN CASSIAN). The just person will not perish however often he falls, and whereas "falling" indicates tribulations, so "rising" signifies benefit or profit. When falls do occur, the wicked are weakened but the righteous are strengthened (AUGUSTINE). In fact, by little offenses most of us fall many times daily (JOHN CASSIAN). Nevertheless, multitudes of minor sins should be feared because they accumulate (CAESARIUS). "To rise again" has two senses, first by justification and second at the general resurrection (CASSIODORUS). The saints rise from sin with God's assistance, but the righteous do not cease to be righteous (BEDE). Count as your friends only those who fear Christ as true God and king (CHRYSOSTOM). In order first to prepare the work outside and ahead, it is well to remember that in the midst of life we must prepare for death (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA) and that in such preparation we should be sure to preserve the advantage of our good works (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS), for there is always a need to prepare for death (BESA THE COPT).

24:3 *With Wisdom a House Is Built*

CHRIST IS WISDOM, AND THE HOUSE IS THE CHURCH. CHRYSOSTOM: [Solomon] calls Christ wisdom, intelligence and reason. The house is [Christ's] church which he built and whose storerooms he filled with every kind of precious and splendid riches. The storerooms are the hearts of those who believe in Christ and live in imitation of him—those hearts, I mean, which abound in goodness in thoughts, words and deeds. For this reason, they are made worthy of eternal blessedness. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 24.3-4.¹

24:5 *Wisdom Is Mightier Than Strength*

EVEN A WEAK WISE PERSON IS STRONG.

BEDE: It must be said that not every strong person is also wise, but every wise person is strong, because although one may be physically weak, he will still be able to overcome every strength of the enemy, that is, the devil, if he has wisdom. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 24.5.²

24:6 *War Should Be Waged Only with the Guidance of Many Counselors*

CAUTION IS ADVISED BEFORE ENTERING

WAR. CHRYSOSTOM: [Solomon] calls war a matter full of disorder, a matter in need of many hands. Or, he may be warning us not to rush to war inconsiderately. Behold, he says, When a decision must be taken, is it not always beneficial to have wisdom in the middle of things? COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 24.6.³

24:11 *Rescue Those Who Are Stumbling to Death*

REDEEM THE CAPTIVES. CHRYSOSTOM: "Redeem those who are ready to be slain; spare no effort." [Solomon] did not say, "Enquire curiously, and learn who they are," and yet for the most part they who are led away to execution are wicked. This especially is charity. For he that does good to a friend does it not altogether for God's sake; but he that does good to one unknown acts purely for God's sake. Do not spare your money; even if it is necessary to spend all, yet give.

But we, when we see persons in extreme distress, bewailing themselves, suffering things more grievous than ten thousand deaths, and oftentimes unjustly, we [I say] are sparing of our money and unsparing of our brothers. We are careful of lifeless things but neglect the living soul! ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 10.9.⁴

¹PG 64:732**. ²CCL 119B:121. ³PG 64:732. ⁴NPNF 1 14:417**.

ENCOURAGE WITH COMPASSION THOSE WHO STRUGGLE. JOHN CASSIAN: Learn from your own experience to sympathize with those in trouble and never terrify with destructive despair those who are in danger, nor harden them with severe speeches, but rather restore them with gentle and kindly consolations. As the wise Solomon says, “Spare not to deliver those who are led forth to death, and to redeem those who are to be slain.” CONFERENCE 2.13.⁵

24:16 *The Righteous Fall and Rise Again*

THE JUST WILL NOT PERISH. AUGUSTINE: The text, “For a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again,” means that he will not perish, however often he falls. There is here no question of falling into sins but of afflictions leading to a lower life. CITY OF GOD 11.31.⁶

TRIBULATIONS AND BENEFIT OR PROFIT.

AUGUSTINE: The words “falls seven times” are employed to express every kind of tribulation, whereby one is cast down in the sight of people; and the words “rises up again” signify that one profits from all these tribulations. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 119.162.⁷

WHEN FALLS OCCUR. AUGUSTINE: “The just falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked shall be weakened in evils.” When evils befall the wicked, they are weakened by them. When evils befall the righteous, “the Lord strengthens all that are falling” . . . “and lifts up all those that have been cast down”⁸: all, that is, who belong to him, for “God resists the proud.”⁹ EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 145.13.¹⁰

BY LITTLE OFFENSES WE FALL MANY TIMES DAILY.

JOHN CASSIAN: For those small offences by which “the righteous falls seven times and will rise again” penitence will never cease, as it is written. For either through ignorance, or forgetfulness, or thought, or word, or surprise, or necessity, or weakness of the flesh, or defilement

in a dream, we often fall every day either against our will or voluntarily. On account of these offences—for which he also prays to the Lord and asks for purification and pardon—David says: “Who can understand sins? Cleanse me from my secret sins; and spare your servant from those of others.”¹¹ And the apostle says: “For I do not do the good that I desire, but the evil that I do not desire, that I do.”¹² CONFERENCE 20.12.¹³

MULTITUDES OF MINOR SINS SHOULD BE

FEARED. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: With God’s help we both can and should be without serious offenses, but no just person ever was or ever will be able to live without small sins. We are continuously troubled and tormented by these as by flies buzzing around. . . . Very often sins creep up on us through thoughts or desires or speech or action, as the result of necessity, through weakness or out of forgetfulness. If a person thinks only of serious sins and strives to resist only these but has little or no care about small sins, he incurs no less danger than if he committed more serious offenses. Therefore let us not think little of our sins because they are slight, but let us fear them because they are many. Drops of rain are small, but because they are very many, they fill rivers and submerge houses, and sometimes by their force they even carry off mountains. SERMON 234.4.¹⁴

“TO RISE AGAIN” HAS TWO SENSES. CASSIODORUS: A Christian is said to rise again in two different senses: when he perseveres in God’s gifts of justification after he has been set free by grace from the death of the vices in this world, as the most wise Solomon says: “A just man falls seven times and he rises again.” There is also said to be that general resurrection at which the just will obtain their eternal rewards. EXPOSITIONS OF THE PSALMS 19.9.¹⁵

⁵NPWF 2 11:315*. ⁶FC 14:237*. ⁷NPWF 1 8:587*. ⁸Ps 145:14 (144:14 LXX). ⁹Jas 4:6. ¹⁰NPWF 1 8:660*. ¹¹Ps 19:12-13 (18:13-14 LXX). ¹²Rom 7:19. ¹³NPWF 2 11:502. ¹⁴FC 66:203. ¹⁵Cetedoc 0900, 97.19.131.

THE SAINTS RISE FROM SIN WITH GOD'S ASSISTANCE. BEDE: Let no one, therefore, believe, as Pelagius teaches, that he can live without sins and debts, when he sees the apostles praying earnestly for their own transgressions, as the Lord teaches. And there is also written elsewhere, "The righteous falls seven times and rises again." For it is impossible even for the saints to live without occasionally incurring guilt in very small sins which are committed through talk, thought, ignorance, forgetfulness, necessity, will, surprise. But still they do not cease being righteous, because with the Lord's assistance they rise again more quickly from their guilty act. COMMENTARY ON I JOHN 1.10.¹⁶

THE RIGHTEOUS DO NOT CEASE TO BE RIGHTEOUS. BEDE: Although the righteous may offend perhaps through the frailty of the flesh or through ignorance, nevertheless he does not cease to be righteous, because just as there is daily and unavoidable offense of this kind, so also there is the daily remedy of prayers and good works that quickly raises up the righteous offender, so that he may not tumble to the ground and befoul with the dust of vices the marriage dress of charity and faith. COMMENTARY ON JAMES 3.2.¹⁷

24:21 *Fear the Lord and the King*

COUNT AS FRIENDS ONLY THOSE WHO FEAR CHRIST. CHRYSOSTOM: "Fear God, my son, and the king," that is, fear Christ, the true God and king. Or by "king" [Solomon] means the one who, before ruling over others, rules himself. "Do not be disobedient to any of them." Indeed, the one who denies respect to the king elected by God dishonors God. The impious will be immediately punished: certainly nobody knows that hour or day. Often for those still living an unexpected punishment is taken. Therefore only the judge knows the opportunity and reason of the punishment to be inflicted, or somebody who is a very close friend. So never have a friend except

for the Lord and the king; certainly if they are not friends of the Lord and the king, they are their enemies. In truth, do not consider as friends those who are not the friends of the king and the Lord. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 24.21.¹⁸

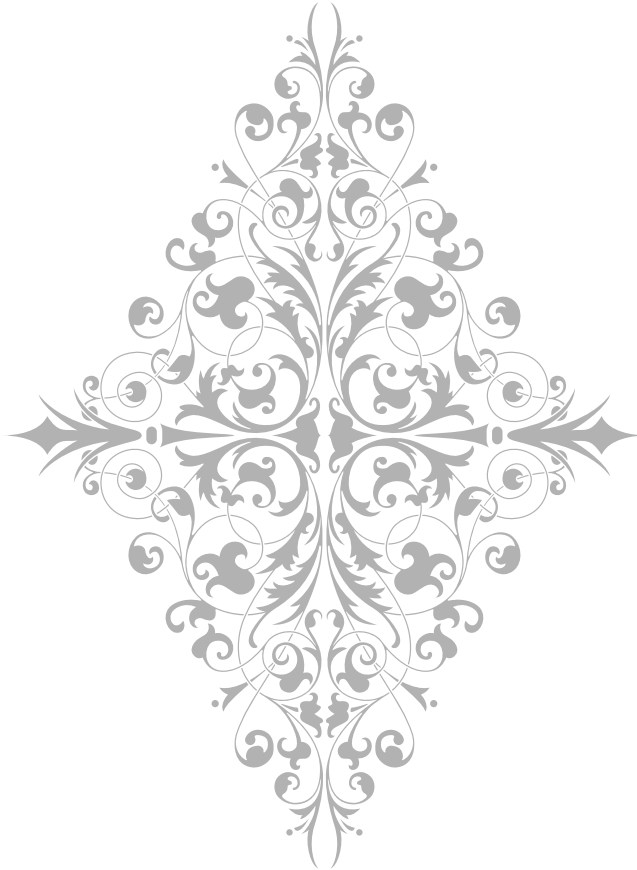
24:27 *First Prepare the Work Outside and Ahead*

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE MUST PREPARE FOR DEATH. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The sacred Scripture has somewhere said, "Prepare your works for your departure, and make yourself ready for the field." Now by our departure I imagine is meant our going from this world and removal from it. And this time must of course overtake every one; for, as the psalmist says, "What man is there that shall live and not see death, and that can save his soul from the hand of hell?"¹⁹ For the nature of man was condemned in Adam and fell away unto corruption, because he foolishly transgressed the commandment given him. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 118.²⁰

PRESERVE THE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR GOOD WORKS. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: Therefore he who values the security of his soul will take care to be out of danger, by keeping free from sin, that so he may preserve the advantage of his former good works to himself. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.3.13.²¹

THE NEED TO PREPARE FOR DEATH. BESA THE COPT: It is a day of shouting and the trumpet.²² It is a day of grief and sighing for those who have not prepared their works well for the way, which means for their departure out of the body, so that they might meet God profitably. SERMON 3, ON THE PUNISHMENT OF SINNERS 10.2.²³

¹⁶CS 82:165-66*. ¹⁷CS 82:36. ¹⁸PG 64:733. ¹⁹Ps 89:48 (88:49 LXX).
²⁰CGSL 470*. ²¹ANF 7:400*. ²²Zeph 1:16. ²³CSCO 158:8-9.



THESE ALSO ARE PROVERBS
OF SOLOMON
PROVERBS 25:1 - 28

OVERVIEW: Many of the Proverbs of Solomon were selected and copied by friends of Hezekiah for the edification of the church (HIPPLYTUS). Those whom Christ has set free are friends to one another (EVAGRIUS). A boastful exorcist should be evaluated by the love he manifests, not by the miracles he performs (JOHN CASSIAN). Bearing false witness, it must be remembered, is like a stroke of calumny (ATHANASIUS). Food and alms are to be given to everyone, even to enemies and sinners. To heap coals of fire upon your enemy, therefore, is a figurative expression that indicates burning lamentations of repentance by which one's pride is healed (AUGUSTINE). In other words, doing good to your enemy causes him or her to grieve and repent (CAESARIUS). The hunger and thirst involved, however, need not be limited to the physical (BEDE).

If a husband and wife quarrel, then it is better for the man to move to the housetop (JEROME). Knowledge of the Savior is like life-giving water (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). It must not be forgotten that the good news is Christ's love and the church's increase in life, work and doctrine (FRUCTUOSUS). Walls are needed for self-control, however, in order to gather spiritual riches (JOHN CASSIAN).

25:1 *The Men of Hezekiah Copied These*

SOME BOOKS SELECTED FOR EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH. HIPPLYTUS: Moreover, in the

days of Hezekiah, there were some of the books selected for use, and others set aside. Whence the Scripture says, "These are the mixed proverbs of Solomon, which the friends of Hezekiah the king copied out." And from where did they take them but out of the books containing the three thousand parables and the five thousand songs? Out of these, then, the wise friends of Hezekiah took those portions which bore upon the edification of the church. FRAGMENTS ON SONG OF SONGS.¹

25:8-10 *The Friendship of a Neighbor*

THOSE WHOM CHRIST HAS SET FREE ARE FRIENDS TO ONE ANOTHER. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: Solomon frequently mentions "friend" and "friendship." Therefore, it is fitting now to look into what he means by friendship. He says [in effect] that grace and friendship liberate. Also, the Savior in the gospels says to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."² Again, Paul writes, "Christ freed us from the curse of the law."³ Hence, if "friendship sets free" and "truth sets free" and the Savior sets free, then Christ is both truth and friendship. Therefore, all who possess the knowledge of Christ are friends to each other. Therefore, the Savior calls his disci-

¹ANF 5:176*; TLG 2115.031.7. ²Jn 8:31-32. ³Gal 3:13. ⁴Jn 15:15. ⁵Jn 3:29. ⁶Ex 33:11.

ples “friends,”⁴ and John the Baptist is a friend of the bridegroom,⁵ and so are Moses⁶ and all the saints. And it is in virtue of that friendship alone, that his friends are also friends to each other. SCHOLIA ON PROVERBS 304.25.10.⁷

25:14 One Who Boasts of a Gift He Does Not Give

BOASTFUL EXORCISTS SHOULD BE EVALUATED BY THEIR LOVE. JOHN CASSIAN: Humility therefore is the teacher of all virtues; it is the surest foundation of the heavenly building; it is the special and splendid gift of the Savior. For anyone who follows the gentle Lord not in the grandeur of his miracles, but in the virtues of patience and humility, can perform all the miracles which Christ worked without danger of pride. But anyone who aims at commanding unclean spirits, or bestowing gifts of healing, or showing some wonderful miracle to the people, even though when showing off invokes the name of Christ, yet that person is far from Christ, because in pride of heart he does not follow his humble teacher. . . Christ did not say: “If you do signs and miracles . . .,” but “if you love one another.” Certainly no one can observe this but the meek and humble.

Therefore our predecessors never considered those monks to be good or free from the fault of pride who professed themselves exorcists or proclaimed boastfully among admiring crowds the grace which they had obtained or which they claimed to be theirs. . . . And so if any one does any of these things in our presence, he ought to be commended by us not out of admiration of his miracles, but for the beauty of his life, and we should not ask whether the devils are subject to him, but whether he possesses those features of love which the apostle describes.⁸ CONFERENCE 15.7.⁹

25:18 One Who Bears False Witness

LIKE A STROKE OF CALUMNY. ATHANASIUS: He that has been struck by a stone goes to a phy-

sician, but sharper than a stone are the strokes of calumny. For, as Solomon has said, “A false witness is a war club, and a sword, and a sharp arrow,” and its wounds truth alone is able to cure. If truth is set at naught, the wounds grow worse and worse. DEFENSE BEFORE CONSTANTIUS 12.¹⁰

25:21-22 Feed Your Enemy and Heap Coals of Fire

FOOD AND ALMS ARE TO BE GIVEN TO EVERYONE. AUGUSTINE: The apostle Paul teaches us in the clearest possible way that alms are to be distributed to everybody, when he says, “Let us be tireless, while we have the time, in doing good to all, though supremely to those at home in the faith.”¹¹ This indeed makes it plain enough that in works of this kind the just are to be given preference. Who else, after all, are we to understand by “those at home in the faith,” since elsewhere it is stated plainly, “The just person lives by faith”?¹² That doesn’t mean, though, that we must close our hearts to other people, even sinners, not even if they adopt a hostile attitude toward us. The Savior himself says, after all, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”¹³ Nor is the point passed over in silence in the books of the Old Testament; one reads there, you see, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink,” a text the apostle also makes use of in the New.¹⁴ SERMON 164A.2.¹⁵

COALS OF FIRE ARE BURNING LAMENTATIONS OF REPENTANCE. AUGUSTINE: This [scriptural passage] seems to prescribe a crime or a vice; therefore, it is a figure of speech directing that we are to participate in the Lord’s passion and treasure up in grateful and salutary remembrance the fact that his flesh was crucified and wounded for us. Scripture says, “If your enemy is hungry, give him food; if he is thirsty, give him drink.” This

⁷SC 340:396. ⁸See 1 Cor 13:4-7. ⁹NPNF 2 11:448**. ¹⁰NPNF 2 4:242**. ¹¹Gal 6:10. ¹²Cf. Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38. ¹³Lk 6:27. ¹⁴Rom 12:20. ¹⁵WSA 3 5:198-99.

undoubtedly prescribes a kindness, but the part that follows—“For by so doing you will heap coals of fire upon his head”—you might suppose was commanding a crime of malevolence. So, do not doubt that it is a figurative expression.

Although it can have a twofold interpretation, by one intending harm, by the other intending a good, charity should call you away from the former to kindness, so that you may understand that the coals of fire are the burning lamentations of repentance by which that person’s pride is healed and he grieves that he has been an enemy of the one who relieves his misery. CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION 3.16.24.¹⁶

DOING GOOD TO YOUR ENEMY. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: The Holy Spirit speaks in the same manner through Solomon: “If your enemy is hungry, give him to eat; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; in doing this you will heap coals of fire upon his head.” At this point we must watch carefully, lest, perchance, we make wounds out of the remedies for us if we do not understand it well. Some people are even inclined to take this precept as if to satisfy their wrath. Indeed, they say within themselves, Behold, I will feed my enemy, so he may burn forever. May God keep an idea of this sort far from our minds! This point ought to be accepted as the saints and ancient fathers have explained it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. . . . When you piously do good to your enemy, however wicked and cruel, savage and unfeeling he may be, he at length sometimes blushes and grieves, beginning to repent of what he has done. Then, when he has begun to do penance, his rational sense, that is, his head, begins to be kindled with the fire of charity. One who before was inclined to harbor wrath against you like a cold maniac now begins to love you with his whole heart through being kindled with spiritual warmth arising from your kindness. SERMON 36.5.¹⁷

THE HUNGER AND THIRST NEED NOT BE LIMITED TO THE PHYSICAL. BEDE: This can be understood both of corporeal food and of spiri-

tual nourishment. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 25.21.¹⁸

25:24 *A Contentious Wife*

IF HUSBAND AND WIFE QUARREL, THEN HE MUST MOVE TO THE HOUSETOP. JEROME: What necessity rests upon me to run the risk of the wife I marry proving good or bad? “It is better,” [Solomon] says, “to dwell in a desert land than with a contentious and passionate woman.”¹⁹ He who is married knows how seldom we find a wife without these faults. Hence that sublime orator, Varius Geminus, says well, “The man who does not quarrel is a bachelor.” [In fact], “it is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop than with a contentious woman in a house in common.” If a house common to husband and wife makes a wife proud and breeds contempt for the husband, how much more if the wife is the richer of the two and the husband but a lodger in her house!

She begins to be not a wife but mistress of the house; and if she offends her husband, they must part. AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.28.²⁰

25:25 *Good News*

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAVIOR IS LIKE LIFE-GIVING WATER. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Just as “waters are pleasant to the thirsty soul,” as Scripture says, so to the mind that loves instruction is the life-giving knowledge of the mysteries of our Savior. Let us, therefore, draw from the sacred springs the living and life-giving waters, even those that are rational and spiritual. Let us take our fill, and weary not in the drinking; for in these things more than enough is still for edification, and greediness is great praise. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 65.²¹

GOOD NEWS IS CHRIST’S LOVE. FRUCTUOSUS

¹⁶FC 2:136*. ¹⁷FC 31:179*. ¹⁸CCL 119B:129. ¹⁹Prov 21:19.

²⁰NPNF 2 6:367*. ²¹CGSL 277*.

OF BRAGA: We have learned from the story in sacred Scripture how pleasing to a man is “good news from a far country.” And what other better news could we expect than the love of Christ, than the spotless profession and propagation of the catholic church, than the pure lives, successful work, and faithful doctrine of the friends of God and the bishops and priests of Christ? These, most blessed father, we confess that we vehemently yearn for and thirstily desire to learn. LETTER 43.²²

25:28 A City Without Walls

WALLS ARE NEEDED FOR SELF-CONTROL.

JOHN CASSIAN: The illustration and image in the passage quoted shows, by comparing it to a city that is destroyed and without walls, how injurious the absence of [self-control] is in a monk. Herein lies wisdom, herein lies intelligence and understanding without which our inward house cannot be built and spiritual riches cannot be gathered together. As it is written, “A house is built with wisdom, and again it is set up with intelligence. With understanding the storehouses are filled with all precious riches and good things.”²³ CONFERENCE 2.4.²⁴

²²FC 63:96*. ²³Prov 24:3-4. ²⁴NPNF 2 11:309**.





HONOR IS NOT FITTING
FOR A FOOL
PROVERBS 26:1-28

OVERVIEW: The fool who does injustice to others for no reason or cause will bring it also upon himself (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). God's Word turns us from idols to the cross, where physical beauty is disfigured but spiritual beauty is resplendent (EPHREM). There is a time for silence and a time to speak (AMBROSE), and fools, in particular, should be ignored in silence (CYPRIAN). Indeed, foolish and irreverent assumptions are unworthy of our response (MACRINA). There are thorns growing deep within all of us that must be burnt out by God's Word (ORIGEN). It was necessary to keep the tabernacle free of thorny barbs, just as thorns grow in the hands of a drunkard and sins in the works of a fool (BEDE). Vacillation will prompt the fool to return to the same sin like a dog to its own

vomit (CHRYSOSTOM), and the same is true of those who vacillate on their vows (FRUCTUOSUS, CAESARIUS OF ARLES). Pagan philosophers are foolish when they consider themselves wise (CHRYSOSTOM), but a person unaware of his own ignorance is even worse (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Silence after an altercation is dangerous without at least some attempt to make up (FRUCTUOSUS). In plotting against others, in fact we sharpen the sword against ourselves (CHRYSOSTOM).

26:2 The "Curse Causeless" Will Do No Harm

THE FOOL BRINGS REPROACH ON HIMSELF.
APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: "As birds and spar-

rows fly away, so the curse causeless shall not come upon any one.”¹ And again [Solomon] says, “Those that bring reproaches are exceedingly foolish.”² But as the bee, a creature as to its strength feeble, if it stings anyone, loses its sting and becomes a drone; in the same manner you also, whatsoever injustice you do to others, will bring it upon yourselves. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 3.1.15.³

26:3 *Whip, Bridle and Rod*

GOD’S WORD TURNS US FROM IDOLS. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: The nations confess you because your word became a mirror before them in which they might see hidden death devouring their lives. Idols are ornamented by those who craft them, but they disfigure their crafters with their ornamentation. [The mirror] brought [the nations] directly to your cross, where physical beauty is disfigured but spiritual beauty is resplendent. The one who was God pursued the nations who were pursuing gods that were not gods at all. And [using] words like bridles, he turned them away from many gods [and brought them] to one.

This is the mighty one whose proclamation [of the gospel] became a bridle in the jaws of the nations,⁴ turning them away from idols to the one who sent him. HOMILY ON OUR LORD 5.1-2.⁵

26:4 *Do Not Imitate the Fool*

A FOOL SHOULD BE IGNORED IN SILENCE.

CYPRIAN: I had treated you with contempt, Demetrian, as you railed with sacrilegious mouth against God, who is one and true, and frequently cried out with impious words, thinking it more fitting and better to ignore with silence the ignorance of a man in error than to provoke with speech the fury of a man in madness. And I did not do this without the authority of the divine teaching, since it is written, “Do not say anything in the ears of the foolish, lest when he hears he may mock your wise words,” and again, “Do not

answer the foolish according to his folly, lest you become like him.” To DEMETRIAN I.⁶

AVOID FOOLS IF YOU WISH A GOOD FLIGHT.

AMBROSE: Your flight is a good one if you do not answer the fool according to his folly. Your flight is good if you direct your footsteps away from the countenance of fools. Indeed, one swiftly goes astray with bad guides; but if you wish your flight to be a good one, remove your ways far from their words. FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD 9.56.⁷

A TIME FOR SILENCE AND A TIME TO SPEAK.

AMBROSE: [David] used not to answer the enemy that provoked him, the sinner that exasperated him. As he says elsewhere, “As though he were deaf he heard not them that speak vanity and imagine deceit, and as though he were dumb he opened not his mouth to them.”⁸ Again, in another place, it is said, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like to him.”

The first duty then is to have due measure in our speech. In this way a sacrifice of praise is offered up to God. Thus a godly fear is shown when sacred Scriptures are read. Thus parents are honored. I know well that many speak because they know not how to keep silence. But it is not often that any one is silent when speaking does not profit him. A wise person, intending to speak, first carefully considers what he is to say and to whom he is to say it; also where and what time. DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 1.10.34-35.⁹

FOOLISH AND IRREVERENT ASSUMPTIONS

ARE UNWORTHY OF RESPONSE. MACRINA:¹⁰ It is more agreeable to remain silent on such questions and to consider their foolish and irreverent assumptions unworthy of a response, since the divine words forbid it, saying, “Answer not a

¹The power of a curse unmerited and pronounced for no good reason or cause is hereby denied. ²Prov 10:18. ³ANF 7:430-31*. ⁴See Is 30:28. ⁵FC 91:280-81. ⁶FC 36:167. ⁷FC 65:322; see also at Prov 5:8 above. ⁸Ps 38:13 (37:14 LXX). ⁹NPNF 2 10:6-7*. ¹⁰As related by her younger brother Gregory of Nyssa.

fool according to his folly.” But the fool, according to the prophet, is “the one who says there is no God.”¹¹ *ON THE SOUL AND THE RESURRECTION*.¹²

26:9 *A Thorn in the Hand of a Drunkard*

THORNS MUST BE BURNED BY GOD’S WORD.

ORIGEN: The sin of all people is not taken away by the Lamb if they neither grieve nor are tormented till it be taken away. For since thorns have not only been sown but have also taken deep root in the hands of everyone who has become drunk because of evil, and has lost sobriety, according to what is said in Proverbs, “Thorns grow in the hand of the drunkard.” So what must we say in addition regarding the extent of distress they produce in him who has received such plants into the body of his own soul? For he who has admitted evil into the depth of his own soul to such an extent that he has become thorn-producing earth has to be cut down by the living and effectual word of God which is more piercing than any two-edged sword and more capable of burning than any fire.¹³

That fire which discovers thorns, and which, because of its own divinity, will stop them and not in addition set the threshing floors or fields of grain on fire, will need to be sent to such a soul. *COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 6.297-98*.¹⁴

THE TABERNACLE MUST BE KEPT FREE OF

THORNY BARBS. **BEDE:** Now the boards [of the tabernacle] were made out of acacia wood, that is, a thorny sort [of wood], and according to the Savior’s pronouncement thorns are the cares of this world, its pleasures, riches and false delights.¹⁵ But the pricks of sins may also not incongruously be compared with thorns, for it is written here that thorns grow in the hands of a drunkard, that is, sins in the works of a fool. Because the holy preachers are eager both to expurgate themselves from the pricks of vices and to strip away all the cares and delights of the

world so that with a free mind they might be able to be expanded in the love of God and neighbor and to run far and wide to preach the word, it is therefore rightly said that the boards of the tabernacle were made out of acacia wood (that is, out of thorny [wood]), for they were indeed made of thorns, but thorns from which all the thorny barbs had been completely stripped away, so that they shone with a pure whiteness. *ON THE TABERNACLE 2.5*.¹⁶

26:11 *A Fool Repeats Folly*

THE FOOL RETURNS TO THE SAME SIN.

CHRYSOSTOM: Don’t you know that people so unconcerned about their own salvation and vacillating between attention to it and headlong course into the devil’s net are compared in sacred Scripture with dogs? It says, remember, “The person who turns away from his sin and then goes back to it is like a dog returning to its vomit.” *HOMILIES ON GENESIS 6.2*.¹⁷

TO WITHDRAW FROM MONASTIC RULE.

FRUCTUOSUS OF BRAGA: We have learned that in some less observant monasteries, men have entered and brought their capital with them and later, losing their religious fervor, have made great trouble in demanding their property. Returning to the world which they had left, as dogs return to their vomit, with the aid of their relatives they have extorted what they had brought with them to the monastery and have sought the support of secular judges. With the help of magistrates they have [thus] destroyed the monasteries, so that we see many innocent men ruined by a single sinner. *GENERAL RULE FOR MONASTERIES 18*.¹⁸

THE RETURN TO SIN.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: These, no doubt, are the things suffered by clerics, monks or virgins who are proud, disobedient

¹¹Ps 53:1 (52:1 LXX). ¹²FC 58:203. ¹³Cf. Heb 4:12; Sir 48:1. ¹⁴FC 80:249. ¹⁵Mt 13:22; Lk 8:14. ¹⁶TTH 18:67. ¹⁷FC 74:78*. ¹⁸FC 63:202*.

and lukewarm. When at the beginning of their life they abandoned the ways of this world and with a fervent spirit fled to the service of holy religion, through the grace of God they were rid of all their sins. But afterwards, when they did not put forth zeal because of carelessness and sloth and were not filled with spiritual graces through the help of God, the vices which had departed found them empty and returned with many more¹⁹ and compelled them to return to their vomit. Then was fulfilled in them what is written, “As the dog that returns to his vomit becomes hateful, so is the sinner that returns to his sin.” SERMON 237.3.²⁰

26:12 One Wise in His Own Eyes Is Dumber Than a Fool

PAGAN PHILOSOPHERS ARE FOOLISH WHEN THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES WISE. CHRYSOSTOM: This is not a small fault either to consider oneself wise and to refer everything back to one’s own judgment. . . . Paul addresses this same reproach to the pagan philosophers: “Professing to be wise, they become fools.”²¹ This is the reason for their folly. The author of the Proverbs said on his part, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Again, it is Paul who gives this advice: “Do not be wise in your own opinion.”²² COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH 5.21.²³

EVEN WORSE IS ONE UNAWARE OF HIS OWN IGNORANCE. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, a person wise in his own conceit; and a still greater evil is to charge with the instruction of others a person who is not even aware of his own ignorance. IN DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT, ORATION 2.50.²⁴

26:24 Deceit Concealed in the Heart

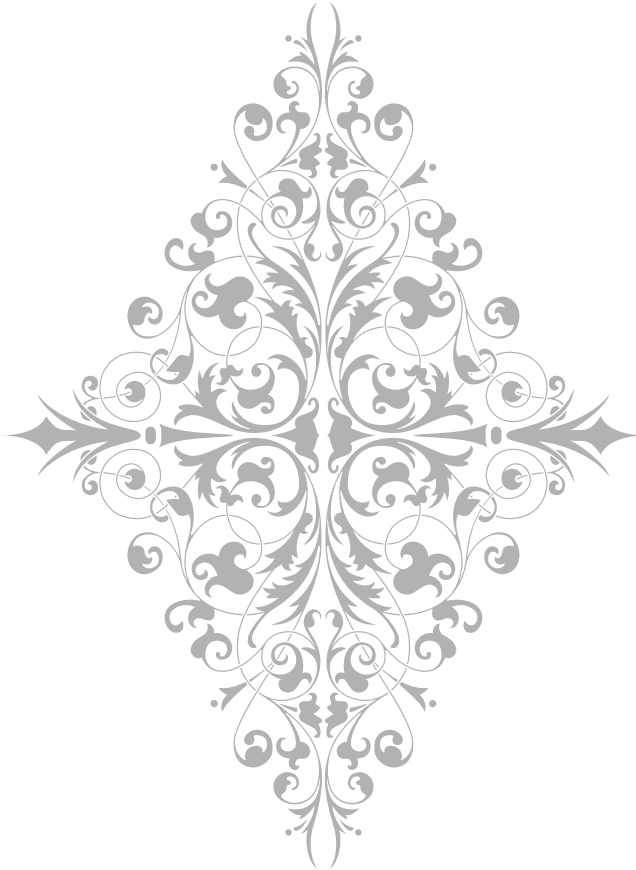
SILENCE AFTER AN ALTERCATION IS DANGEROUS. FRUCTUOSUS OF BRAGA: If one of the brothers who agreed upon a common pact shall suddenly on one occasion only fall into altercation with another, he may, according to the gospel, ask and receive forgiveness.²⁵ But if he refuses to mend his ways, and if the one against whom a wrong has been done has not succeeded in changing the other’s presumption after a first and second admonition, then he shall report it to the abbot, lest both he and his brother be endangered by this silence. As the prophet says, “He who hides his enmity maintains deceit.” MONASTIC AGREEMENT 6.²⁶

26:27 Digging a Pit for Oneself

IN PLOTTING AGAINST OTHERS WE SHARPEN THE SWORD AGAINST OURSELVES. CHRYSOSTOM: “He that digs a pit for his neighbor shall fall into it.” And this happened even then. For they wished to destroy [Jesus] in order to suppress his preaching, but just the opposite took place.²⁷ His preaching flourished by the grace of Christ, whereas all their schemes have been snuffed out and have perished. Further, they have lost their homeland, and freedom, and security and worship, and have been deprived of all honor and glory, and become slaves and captives.

Accordingly, since we know these things, let us never plot against others, because we have learned that by so doing we are sharpening the sword against ourselves and wounding ourselves more deeply than others. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 51.²⁸

¹⁹Conjectural reconstruction of a small lacuna in the text. ²⁰FC 66:217. ²¹Rom 1:22. ²²Rom 12:16. ²³ITA 78; SC 304:244-45. ²⁴NPNF 2 7:215. ²⁵See Mt 18:15-17. ²⁶FC 63:219*. ²⁷Chrysostom is commenting on Jn 7:37-44. ²⁸FC 41:40-41**.



DO NOT BOAST
ABOUT TOMORROW
PROVERBS 27:1-27

OVERVIEW: Baptism should not be delayed to the deathbed (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). The time to act is now (BABAI). To procrastinate is to give advantage to the devil (CHRYSOSTOM). Turn to Christ, therefore, for this very day could be your last. Walk while it is light and do not delay your repentance, for death will come only once and we know not when. Moreover, we can never tell who may be joining us tomorrow in heaven, whether friend or enemy (CAESARIUS). Testimony to oneself is arrogant (AUGUSTINE). A book devoted to self-glorification is contrary to wisdom (GREGORY OF NYSSA), and God is aware of those who steal the honors that properly belong to others (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). Open rebuke is better than hidden love (BASIL); therefore, we should prefer friendly rebukes over silent friendship (AMBROSE). Love mingled with severity is a mark of true friendship, and between friends it is possible to object without eliciting hatred (AUGUSTINE). The wounds of love are sweet (MAXIMUS OF TURIN). The wound of love is seen in Peter, not Judas. In matters of trust, it is better to prefer close friendship over kinship (AMBROSE). Spiritual carelessness can be compared with a neglected roof that leaks (JOHN CASSIAN). Various levels of spiritual maturity need different kinds of instruction (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA).

27:1 You Know Not What Tomorrow May Bring

DO NOT DELAY BAPTISM TO THE DEATHBED. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: He that says, “When I am dying I will be baptized, lest I should sin and defile my baptism,” is ignorant of God and forgetful of his own nature. For “do not delay to turn to the Lord, for you do not know what the

next day will bring forth.” Baptize also your infants, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of God. For he says, “Suffer the little children to come to me, and forbid them not.”¹ CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 6.3.15.²

THE TIME IS NOW. BABAI: Do not rely on tomorrow: your business belongs to today, for our time is not a time for just words or for acquiring property, or indeed to swagger about enjoying ourselves, or to relax in idleness. No, for the discerning it is time for action; it is the time to gather in fruits; it is the time for repentance, it is the time for everyone to supplicate Christ with all his heart. LETTER TO CYRIACUS 4.³

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE OR GIVE ADVANTAGE TO THE DEVIL. CHRYSOSTOM: Let us not then be procrastinating until tomorrow. For we “know not what the next day may bring forth,” nor let us say “we shall conquer this habit “little by little,” since this “little by little” will never come to an end. Therefore, dismissing that excuse, let us say, “If we do not reform the practice of swearing today, we will not delay until later, when ten thousand things press upon us. Though it were necessary to die, or to be punished, or to lose all that we have, we will not give the devil the advantage of slackness nor the pretext of delay.” Thus if God should perceive your soul inflamed and your diligence quickened, then he also himself will lend his assistance to change you. HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES 20.22.⁴

TURN TO CHRIST. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Let us

¹Mt 19:14. ²ANF 7:457*. ³CS 101:140. ⁴NPNF 1 9:480**.

turn to him, dearly beloved, and not wish to defer our amendment until the end of our life. Let us listen to the prophet when he says, "Delay not your conversion to the Lord, put it not off from day to day,"⁵ "for you know not what any day may bring forth." O man, why do you delay from day to day, when perhaps today you are going to have your last day? SERMON 109.2.⁶

DO NOT DELAY YOUR REPENTANCE. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: "You know not what any day may bring forth." "Between morning and evening the weather changes."⁷ Elsewhere we are also advised with a salutary precept: "Let us walk while we still have the light, before darkness comes over us."⁸ Now some careless person may say, When I reach old age, then I shall have recourse to the healing of repentance. The wretched person does not know that if one has been accustomed to commit sins with a promise of repentance, never or only with difficulty will he merit to obtain the fruit of repentance. SERMON 209.1.⁹

DEATH WILL COME, AND ONE KNOWS NOT WHEN. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: With what boldness does he put off his salvation to old age, when he cannot be certain of the space of one day? Therefore, if we do not want to fear death, we should always be ready. Then, when the Lord bids us come from this world, we may come before the sight of the eternal judge with a clear and free conscience; not with despair but with joy. SERMON 22.5.¹⁰

WE CAN NEVER TELL WHO MAY JOIN US TOMORROW IN HEAVEN. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Therefore let us love our enemies. Perhaps the person who is your friend today will commit such sins that he cannot be with you in eternal life, "for you know not what tomorrow may bring." On the contrary, your enemy may be converted to repentance in such a way that he merits to be your fellow citizen in that heavenly Jerusalem; in fact, he might even become greater than you. SERMON 38.3.¹¹

27:2 *Let Your Praise Come from Another*

PRAISEWORTHY TESTIMONY OF ONESELF IS ARROGANT. AUGUSTINE: If I seem arrogant to you, it is for this reason, that I bear testimony to myself. For every person, when he wishes to bear praiseworthy testimony to himself, seems arrogant and proud. So it has been written, "Let not your own mouth praise you, but let the mouth of your neighbor praise you." TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 36.3.2.¹²

SELF-GLORIFICATION IS CONTRARY TO WISDOM. GREGORY OF NYSSA: If we did anything in those struggles for our religion that redounds to our honor in the telling, wisdom commands us to leave it to others to tell. "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth." And it is this very thing that our omniscient friend has not been conscious of in devoting the larger half of his book to self-glorification. AGAINST EUNOMIUS 1.12.¹³

GOD KNOWS THOSE WHO STEAL HONORS THAT BELONG TO OTHERS. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: No one crowns himself, and that person is justly ridiculed who devises praises for himself, for it is written, "Let your neighbor praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips." Though hypocrites may be able possibly to remain undetected and thus to seize the honors that people bestow, yet God knows your hearts. The judge cannot be deceived. . . . He knows who steals by fraud the honor which another truly deserves. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 110.¹⁴

27:5 *Open Rebuke Rather Than Hidden Love*

DO NOT CONCEAL A SIN IN BEHALF OF ANOTHER. BASIL THE GREAT: It is surely clear

⁵Sir 5:7. ⁶FC 47:141. ⁷Sir 18:26. ⁸See Jn 12:35. ⁹FC 66:89-90. ¹⁰FC 31:117-18*. ¹¹FC 31:191*. ¹²FC 88:83*. ¹³NPNF 2 5:48. ¹⁴CGSL 448**.

that concealing sin contributes to the death of the sick person, “for the sting of death is sin,” says the Scripture,¹⁵ and also, “Open rebukes are better than hidden love.” Let no one, therefore, conceal a sin in behalf of another, lest fratricide take the place of fraternal charity. **THE LONG RULES 46.**¹⁶

27:6 *The Wounds of a Friend*

A FRIENDLY REBUKE IS BETTER THAN SILENT FRIENDSHIP. **AMBROSE:** Rebukes are good, and often better than a silent friendship. Even if a friend thinks himself hurt, still rebuke him; and if the bitterness of the correction wounds his mind, still rebuke him and fear not. “The wounds of a friend are better than the kisses of flatterers.” Rebuke, then, your erring friend; forsake not an innocent one. For friendship ought to be steadfast and to rest firm in true affection. **DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 3.22.127.**¹⁷

A MARK OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP. **AUGUSTINE:** Not everyone who spares is a friend, nor is everyone who strikes an enemy. “Better are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy.” Love mingled with severity is better than deceit with indulgence. **LETTER 93.**¹⁸

BETWEEN FRIENDS IT IS POSSIBLE TO OBJECT WITHOUT BEGETTING HATRED. **AUGUSTINE:** “More trustworthy are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy.” Let us, then, with all the insistence we can put into it, impress this upon our dearest friends, those who are most sincerely interested in our work, and let them know that it is possible between dear friends for something to be objected to in the speech of either, without charity being thereby diminished, without truth begetting hatred. This is something which is owed to friendship, even if what is objected to is true, or whatever it is, so long as it is uttered from a truthful heart, without keeping in the mind what is at variance with the words. **LETTER 82.**¹⁹

WOUNDS OF LOVE ARE SWEET. **MAXIMUS OF TURIN:** When one who is loved is chastised, a pious act is exercised in his regard, for love has its wounds as well, which are all the sweeter for the harshness of their infliction. For a religious chastisement is sweeter than easy forgiveness, which is why the prophet says, “Sweeter are the wounds of a friend than the freely offered kisses of an enemy.” **SERMON 80.I.**²⁰

THE WOUND OF LOVE CAME FROM PETER. **AMBROSE:** The wounds of love are good too, better than kisses. For “useful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” Peter wounds, and Judas kisses. But the kiss condemned Judas because it carried a traitorous venom; the wound inflicted by Peter also cured him because he washed away his fault with tears. **ON VIRGINITY 6.33.**²¹

27:10 *Prefer a Nearby Neighbor to a Distant Relative*

PREFER CLOSE FRIENDSHIP OVER KINSHIP. **AMBROSE:** Solomon says, “Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off.” For this reason a person generally trusts himself to the good will of a friend rather than to the ties of relationship to his brother. So far does good will prevail that it often goes beyond the pledges given by nature. **DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 1.34.174.**²²

27:15 *A Continual Dripping on a Rainy Day*

SPIRITUAL CARELESSNESS. **JOHN CASSIAN:** Solomon tells us that the same thing happens spiritually to the soul when he says in other words: “Dripping water drives a man out of the house on a stormy day.” Elegantly then he compares spiritual carelessness to a roof and tiles that have not been looked after, through which in the first instance slight drippings of the passions

¹⁵1 Cor 15:56. ¹⁶FC 9:324. ¹⁷NPNF 2 10:88. ¹⁸FC 18:60. ¹⁹FC 12:416*. ²⁰ACW 50:192*. ²¹AOV 18. ²²NPNF 2 10:29-30.

make their way to the soul. If these are not heeded, being considered but small and trifling, then the beams of virtues will decay and be carried away by a great tempest of sins, through which “on a stormy day,” that is, in the time of temptation, the devil’s attack will assail us, and the soul will be driven forth from the abode of virtue, in which it had remained as in its own house as long as it persevered in watchful diligence. CONFERENCE 6.17.²³

27:23 Know Your Own Flock Well

VARIOUS LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: It is not fitting to address simply to all who have believed in Christ instruc-

tion upon all points, for it is written, “With knowledge learn the souls of your flock.” For the way is very different by which we establish in the paths of truth one who has but just now become a disciple, from one more confirmed in mind and able to understand what is the height and depth, and what the length and breadth. In the former, use simple teaching, in which there is nothing profound or difficult to understand. Counsel him to escape from the error of polytheism and fittingly persuade him to discern by the beauty of things created, the universal creator and artificer, who is one by nature and truly God. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 93.²⁴

²³NPNF 2 11:361**. ²⁴CGSL 374*.





WHEN THE WICKED PERISH,
THE RIGHTEOUS INCREASE
PROVERBS 28:1-28

OVERVIEW: If you ask why do the wicked flee when no one is pursuing them, the answer is that they flee from their own conscience (CHRYSOSTOM). The righteous, by contrast, do not fear but

rather dare all things by faith (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). The Stoic doctrine of nature, however, was wrong, because it mistook “nature” for “God” (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). Read God’s

precepts in Scripture as if you expect God to hear your prayers (CAESARIUS). But do not be surprised that God is slow to hear if we have been slow to pay attention (GREGORY THE GREAT). Strive to be worthy, therefore, of being heard by the Lord (BEDE). God does have mercy on those who confess their sins (APHRAHAT); indeed, God cleanses those who acknowledge and confess their sins (JEROME). Fear God in all things; stand firm in the truth (BASIL). Let your worship be focused and attentive (CHRYSOSTOM). Trembling is a necessary prelude to eternal joy (GREGORY THE GREAT), for the wise and holy are always fearful about their salvation (SALVIAN). If we give to the poor, we may receive the kingdom (AUGUSTINE), and always we must heed the challenge that comes from a hungry throat (VALERIAN). Give of your excess, therefore, and your soul will rejoice (CAESARIUS).

28:1 *The Wicked Flee, but the Righteous Are Bold*

THE WICKED FLEE FROM THEIR OWN CONSCIENCE. CHRYSOSTOM: How do [the wicked] flee when no one pursues? He has that within which drives him on—an accuser in his conscience, and this he carries about everywhere. Just as it would be impossible to flee from himself, so neither can he escape the persecutor within; but wherever he goes, he is scourged and has an incurable wound! But not such is the righteous. HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES 8.3.¹

THE RIGHTEOUS DARE ALL THINGS BY FAITH. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: [The righteous] will fear none of the things here enumerated, as it is written, “The righteous man is bold as a lion,” daring all things through faith, not as one who tempts the Lord but as one who has confidence in Him, and as one who is armed and arrayed in the power of the Holy Spirit. And because God is his constant concern, God will also say concerning him, “I am with him in affliction, and I will rescue him, and glorify him.” ASCETICAL HOMILY 7.²

28:4 *Those Who Keep the Law Strive Against Those Who Forsake It*

STOIC DOCTRINE OF NATURE WAS WRONG.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: The Stoics laid down their doctrine on the basis that the goal is to live according to nature, using the word *nature* improperly rather than “God,” since nature applies to plants, crops, trees and stones. At any rate, there is the clear statement, “Scoundrels think nothing of the law, but those who love the law set it in front of them like a wall.” For “the wisdom of able men will understand the paths of wisdom, but the folly of fools goes in the wrong direction.”³ STROMATEIS 2.19.101.⁴

28:9 *Those Who Turn from Hearing God’s Law*

LISTEN TO GOD IF YOU WANT GOD TO HEAR YOUR PRAYER.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: What is written in the book of Solomon we ought to read with great anxiety and fear, not with indifference: “He that hardens his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination.” A person should first be willing to listen to God, if he wants to be heard by him. Indeed, with what boldness does he want God to hear him when he despises God so much that he refuses to read God’s precepts?

How is it, my brothers, that some Christians and, what is worse, even clergy, at times, when they are about to make a journey, order bread, wine, oil, and different items to be provided for themselves, but, while such great preparations are being made for his earthly journey so that his body may live, a man does not bother to read a single book to refresh his soul both here and forever? SERMON 7.3-4.⁵

IF WE HAVE PAID NO ATTENTION.

GREGORY THE GREAT: Just as Scripture says, “When one

¹NPNF 1 9:396*. ²AHSIS 65. ³Prov 14:8. ⁴FC 85:224**. ⁵FC 31:48*.

turns away his ears from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” Why should we be surprised, then, if God is slow to hear our petitions when we on our part are slow to hear God’s command or pay no attention whatever to it? *DIALOGUE* 3.15.⁶

BE WORTHY OF BEING HEARD BY THE LORD.

BEDE: Let [anyone] beg, however, in faith, in no way hesitating. Let him, by living well, show himself to be worthy of being heard when he begs. For anyone who remembers that he has not obeyed the Lord’s commands rightly loses hope that the Lord pays attention to his prayers. For it has been written, “The prayer of one who closes his ear that he may not hear the law will be detestable.” *COMMENTARY ON JAMES* 1.6⁷

28:13 Confess Your Transgressions Rather Than Conceal Them

GOD HAS MERCY ON THOSE WHO CONFESS THEIR SINS. *APHRAHAT*: I address you too, the penitents. You should not keep back from yourselves this means of healing [confession] that has been given you. For it says in the Scripture, “He who confesses his sins and abandons them, on him God has mercy.” Look at the son who squandered his wealth. And when he returned to his father, he received him in joy and slew the fatted ox for him. And his father rejoiced at his repentance and even invited his friends to rejoice with him. And his father embraced him and kept on kissing him, saying, “This my son was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”⁸ And his father did not reprove him for the wealth he had squandered.⁹ *DEMONSTRATIONS* 7.12.¹⁰

GOD CLEANSSES THOSE WHO CONFESS THEIR SINS. *JEROME*: “As confession and beauty are in the sight of God,”¹¹ so a sinner who confesses his sins and says, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness”¹² loses his foul wounds and is made whole and clean. But “he that covers his sins shall not prosper.” *LETTER* 122.3.¹³

28:14 Blessed Is the One Who Feels God

FEAR GOD IN ALL THINGS. *BASIL THE GREAT*: He who in all things stands in awe out of reverent timidity is called blessed, and he stands firm in the truth who is able to say, “I set the Lord always in my sight; for he is at my right hand that I shall not be moved.”¹⁴ *THE LONG RULES, PREFACE*.¹⁵

BE FOCUSED AND ATTENTIVE IN YOUR PIETY. *CHRYSOSTOM*: Let your requests be spiritual . . . let your mind be alert, let your attention be concentrated on the words. Ask for the kind of things it is usual to ask of God so that you may gain what you ask. To the same end maintain your constant vigil, alert, keeping your attention undimmed, no yawning or switching your mind in one direction and another, but working out your salvation in fear and trembling. “Blessed is the person,” Scripture says, remember, “whose piety puts him in awe of everything.” *HOMILIES ON GENESIS* 30.15.¹⁶

TREMBLING IS A NECESSARY PRELUDE TO ETERNAL JOY. *GREGORY THE GREAT*: You ought not, in this life, to have security, whereby you may be rendered careless. For it is written, “Happy is the one who always fears [the Lord].” And again, it is written, “Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice in him with trembling.”¹⁷ In short, then, it must be that in the time of this life trembling will possess your soul, to the end that it may hereafter rejoice without end through the joy of security. *LETTER* 25.¹⁸

THE WISE AND HOLY ARE FEARFUL ABOUT THEIR SALVATION. *SALVIAN THE PRESBYTER*: Someone asks, “Is there, therefore, no difference between saints and sinners?” Certainly, there is a great and almost immeasurable difference. Scripture says, “Blessed is the man who is always fear-

⁶FC 39:140. ⁷CS 82:10*. ⁸Lk 15:32. ⁹Lk 15:11-32. ¹⁰SC 349:423. ¹¹Ps 96:6 (95:6 Vg). ¹²Ps 38:5 (37:6 Vg). ¹³NPNF 2 6:227*. ¹⁴Ps 16:8 (15:8 LXX). ¹⁵FC 9:227-28*. ¹⁶FC 82:232*. ¹⁷Ps 2:11. ¹⁸NPNF 2 12:219**.

ful." The mind of a wise person is ever uneasy about his own salvation. Although there is a great difference between saints and sinners, still I ask all those who profess a religion, Who, according to his own conscience, is sufficiently holy; who does not tremble about the fearful severity of a future judgment; who is untroubled about his eternal salvation? If this is not the case, just as it should not be, I beg, let any one tell me why he does not strive with all the power of his goods to redeem, by a holy death, whatever sins he may have committed by transgression during his lifetime. *FOUR BOOKS OF TIMOTHY TO THE CHURCH* 2.3.¹⁹

28:27 Those Who Give to the Poor Will Not Want

GIVE TO THE POOR AND RECEIVE THE KINGDOM. AUGUSTINE: Don't forget that rule, where it says, "Whoever gives to the poor will never be in want." Have you already forgotten what the Lord is going to say to those who have given to the poor: "Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom"? *SERMON* 198.3.²⁰

WE MUST HEED THE CHALLENGE. VALERIAN: The cry of the hungry person is a challenge in your ears, and the sound of a failing voice from a hungry throat is striking at your door. Why do you not think of that phrase, "Blessed is he that

understands concerning the needy and the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the evil day."²¹ The businessman who keeps stored away in a sack the money with which he could carry on gainful trading is recognized as being quite a fool. *HOMILY* 9.2.²²

GIVE OF YOUR EXCESS, AND YOUR SOUL WILL REJOICE. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Whenever you gather the harvest or vintage, calculate your expenses and those of all who pertain to you and include what you will put into your purse. Then, of what remains, because it was not really given to you, as was already said, but was transmitted to you for distribution among the poor, set it all aside or as much as God inspires your heart to give. The result thus will be as though you had put it in God's hand. If, as we believe, you are willing to do this devoutly, your soul will not only be exasperated and saddened by the captives and poor who come to you but will even rejoice and be glad. With the greatest willingness you will bestow what you set aside for the necessities of the poor out of love for God, and there will be fulfilled in you the words "God loves a cheerful giver"²³ and "He that gives to the poor shall never want." *SERMON* 30.6.²⁴

¹⁹FC 3:296-97. ²⁰WSA 3 6:74-75. ²¹Ps 41:1 (40:1 LXX). ²²FC 17:359*. ²³2 Cor 9:7. ²⁴FC 31:152.



RIGHTEOUSNESS GIVES
STABILITY TO THE LAND
PROVERBS 29:1-27

OVERVIEW: There are ways for one who loves wisdom to preserve it (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA). The wise person tempers his anger with discretion (JOHN CASSIAN), but the fool has no interior discipline for restraining his anger (GREGORY THE GREAT). The undisciplined are corrected not by words but by stripes that bear fruit (AUGUSTINE). The wisdom you teach should be what you practice (JOHN CASSIAN). Israel, pampered from infancy, grew fat and went into captivity among the Gentiles (EPHREM). History provides many examples of persons who have been humiliated by their pride (APHRAHAT). Even perpetual continence, for example, can generate the pride of self-complacency (AUGUSTINE). Indeed, we should cultivate humility for our own good (BEDE).

29:3 *He Who Loves Wisdom Makes His Father Glad*

THERE ARE WAYS TO PRESERVE WISDOM.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: In my view, the sketch of a soul which yearns to preserve the blessed tradition without losing a single drop runs something like this: "When a man loves wisdom, his father's heart will be warmed." Wells which are constantly baled out provide a clearer water; wells which no one draws from turn to rotteness. Use keeps iron brighter; disuse produces rust in it. In general, exercise produces fitness in souls and bodies. STROMATEIS I.I.I2.¹

29:11 *Give Not Full Vent to Anger*

THE WISE PERSON TEMPERES ANGER WITH DISCRETION.

JOHN CASSIAN: We ought then to restrain every movement of anger and moderate it under the direction of discretion, that we may not by blind rage be hurried into that which is condemned by Solomon: "The wicked man expends all his anger, but the wise man dispenses it bit by bit." That is to say, a fool is inflamed by the passion of his anger to avenge himself; but a wise man, by the maturity of his reflection and moderation, diminishes it little by

little and gets rid of it. CONFERENCE 16.27.²

THE FOOL HAS NO INTERIOR DISCIPLINE.

GREGORY THE GREAT: Let the impatient hear what is said again through Solomon: "A fool utters all his mind, but a wise man puts it off, and reserves it until afterwards." Under the impulse of impatience the whole mind expresses itself and because there is no discipline of wisdom to fence it round it does so quickly. But the wise man puts it off, and reserves it till afterwards. When he is wronged, he desires not to avenge himself at the present time, because in his tolerance he wishes others to be spared. Yet he is not ignorant that all things are punished justly at the last judgment. PASTORAL RULE 3.9.10.³

29:19 *Verbal Discipline Does Not Suffice*

THE UNDISCIPLINED ARE NOT CORRECTED BY WORDS.

AUGUSTINE: In saying that "the servant will not be corrected by words," [Solomon] did not order him to be left to himself but implied an admonition as to the means whereby he ought to be corrected. Otherwise he would not have said, "He will not be corrected by words," but without any qualification, "He will not be corrected." For in another place he says that not only the servant but also the undisciplined son must be corrected with stripes, and that with great fruits as the result. For he says, "You shall beat him with the rod and shall deliver his soul from hell,"⁴ and elsewhere he says, "He that spares the rod hates his own son."⁵ THE CORRECTION OF THE DONATISTS 6.21.⁶

29:20 *The Fool Is Hasty in Words*

PRACTICE THE WISDOM YOU TEACH.

JOHN CASSIAN: In all things be "quick to listen and slow to speak"⁷ lest the remark of Solomon be fulfilled in you: "If you see a man too ready of

¹FC 85:30. ²NPNF 2 11:459*. ³NPNF 2 12:30**. ⁴Prov 23:14.

⁵Prov 13:24. ⁶NPNF 1 4:641**. ⁷Jas 1:19.

speech, know that a fool has more hope than he." And never dare to teach someone what you have not practiced yourself. CONFERENCE 14.9.⁸

29:21 *Pampered from Infancy*

ISRAEL WAS IMPRISONED AMONG THE GENTILES. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Formed, surrounded and coddled by delicacies and pleasures since its infancy, Israel, in spite of the [prefigured] images of the cross, "grew fat, became gross and recalcitrant,"⁹ so that, finally, captivity imprisoned it among the Gentiles. "The one who is pampered in his infancy will be handed over to servitude." COMMENTARY ON TATIAN'S DIATESARON 38.¹⁰

29:23 *The Humble Shall Increase in Honor*

HISTORY PROVIDES EXAMPLES OF PERSONS HUMILIATED BY THEIR PRIDE. APHRAHAT: Pride and arrogance have subverted many. Through pride Adam went forth from paradise, and dust became the serpent's meat. Through pride Cain killed his brother and became a trembler and a straggler on the earth. And Ham, because he was uplifted and mocked his father, became accursed and a servant of servants to his brothers. Because of his pride Esau lost the birthright of his primogeniture; and Pharaoh, because he was hardened and uplifted, was drowned in the Red Sea, he and his host. And the sons of Eli the priest, because they were lifted up against the people, were deposed from the priesthood of the Holy One. Goliath the Philistine, because of his arrogance against David, was humbled and put to shame, and fell by his pride. And upon Abimelech the son of Gideon, who was lifted up against his brothers and slew them, came the curse of Jotham his brother. Absalom, who was uplifted and seized the kingdom, fell and was humbled before the servants of David; and Adonijah the son of Haggith, who stole the kingdom, neither retained it nor prospered by his pride. As for Ahithophel

the counselor of iniquities, his pride was humbled by his own hands; and Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon, who made division among the people, became an evil memory in Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri was overcome by covetousness in the inheritance of Jezreel and received retributions. To the king of Edom, who was lifted up against Ahab, there was not found anyone that should bind or that should loose. And Haman, who was lifted up against Mordecai, received retribution on the gallows, he and his sons. The men of Babylon who accused Daniel had their bones crushed by lions. And Judas, who betrayed our Savior, fell into the sea with a millstone about his neck. These all were humbled by their pride, as it was written, "The pride of a man shall humble him, and to him who is humble in spirit honor shall be increased." DEMONSTRATIONS 14.10.¹¹

PERPETUAL CONTINENCE CAN GENERATE SELF-COMPLACENCE. AUGUSTINE: Give me someone professing perpetual continence, and free from these and all similar vices and blemishes of conduct. For her I fear pride; for her I dread the swelling of self-conceit from so great a blessing. The more there is in her from which she finds self-complacence, the more I fear lest by pleasing herself she will displease him who "resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."¹² HOLY VIRGINITY 34.¹³

WE SHOULD CULTIVATE HUMILITY FOR OUR OWN GOOD. BEDE: That we ourselves may become worthy of following in his footsteps and ascending to heaven, let us in the meantime become humble on earth for our own good, always mindful that, as Solomon says, "Humiliation follows the proud, and honor follows the humble in spirit." HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 2.15.¹⁴

⁸JCC 163. ⁹Deut 32:15. ¹⁰ECTD 314. ¹¹SC 359:617-20. ¹²Jas 4:6. ¹³ECF 27:184-85*. ¹⁴CS 111:147.



PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS
OF AGUR
PROVERBS 30:1-9

OVERVIEW: Train your eyes on heaven, and the Spirit will lead you there (BASIL). The Wisdom spoken by Solomon is from God (GREGORY OF NYSSA). God's Son is Christ, the Wisdom of God (AUGUSTINE). Even the waters are guided by God's will (EPHREM), just as faith also has need of works (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). We must neither add to God's words nor subtract from them (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). Pray for adequate resources, not excess either of poverty or riches (AMBROSE). Sufficiency does vary according to physical condition and present need (BASIL), but in essence it means the ability to live honorably and respectably (AUGUSTINE).

30:3-4 Wisdom Ascending and Descending

TRAIN YOUR EYES ON HEAVEN. BASIL THE

GREAT: Raise your eyes to heaven, therefore, like him who said, "To you who lives in heaven, I lift my eyes."¹ Look upon the sun of righteousness and, as you are directed by the commandments of the Lord, which resemble the most radiant of stars, have vigilant eyes. Do not allow the eyes [of the soul] to slumber or the eyelids to rest,² that the commandments might lead you perpetually. "For, your law is a lamp to my feet," he says, "and a light to my path."³ Indeed, if you never fall asleep at the helm while steering through life, given the obviously unstable state of worldly affairs, you will obtain the cooperation of the Spirit, who will lead you beyond and transport you with gentle breezes and in peaceful security

¹Ps 123:1 (122:1 LXX). ²See Ps 132:4 (131:4 LXX). ³Ps 119:105 (118:105 LXX).

until you arrive unharmed at that tranquil and serene gate by the will of God, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF PROVERBS 17.⁴

THE WISDOM SPOKEN BY SOLOMON IS FROM GOD. GREGORY OF NYSSA: It is not mere human wisdom that is claimed for himself by Solomon, who says, "God has taught me wisdom," and who, where he says, "all my words are spoken from God,"⁸ refers to God all that is spoken by himself. AGAINST EUNOMIUS 3.2.⁹

GOD'S SON IS CHRIST, THE WISDOM OF GOD. AUGUSTINE: "Surely," you say, "you will be kind enough to tell me whether Solomon truly said, 'God has no son.'" This is quickly answered: not only did he not say, "God has no son," but he did say that God has a Son. Wisdom speaking through him says, "Before all the hills, he begot me,"⁵ and what is Christ but the wisdom of God?⁶ Again, in a certain passage in Proverbs, he says, "God has taught me wisdom, and I have known the science of the saints. Who has ascended up into heaven and descends? Who has held the wind in his bosom? Who has changed the water as a garment? Who has held all the borders of the earth? What is his name? and what is the name of his son?" LETTER 102.5.⁷

EVEN THE WATERS ARE GUIDED BY GOD'S WILL. EPHREM THE SYRIAN:
Indeed, that Will

for whom everything is easy
constrains these abundant
fountains of paradise,
confining them with land,
like water channels;
he summoned them to issue forth
in our direction,
just as he bound up the waters
in the bosom of his clouds,
ready to be sent forth into the atmosphere
at the bidding of his Will.

HYMNS ON PARADISE 9.¹⁰

FAITH ALSO HAS NEED OF WORKS. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: Do you believe that God provides for His creatures, and is able to do all things? Let suitable labor, therefore, follow on your faith, and then He will hear you. Think not to grasp the winds in your fist, that is, faith without works. ASCETICAL HOMILIES 7.¹¹

30:6 Do Not Add to God's Words

NEITHER ADD TO GOD'S WORDS NOR SUBTRACT FROM THEM. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: You shall hate all hypocrisy; and whatever is pleasing to the Lord, that shall you do. By no means forsake the commands of the Lord. But you shall observe what things you have received from him, neither adding to them nor taking away from them. "For you shall not add unto his words, lest he convict you and you become a liar." You shall confess your sins unto the Lord your God; and you shall not add unto them, that it may be well with you from the Lord your God, who wills not the death of a sinner but his repentance. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 7.1.14.¹²

30:8-9 Sufficiency Entails Neither Poverty Nor Riches

PRAY FOR ADEQUATE RESOURCES, NOT EXCESS. AMBROSE: The poor man and the rich man should therefore take heed, because there are temptations for the man of poverty as well as for the man of wealth. And so the wise man says, "Give me neither beggary nor riches." He tells you how this can be obtained. Man has enough when he has a sufficiency, because a wealthy man tends to distend his mind with cares and anxieties, just as he gorges his stomach with rich food. For that

⁴PG 31:421-24*. ⁵Cf. Prov 8:25. ⁶1 Cor 1:24. ⁷FC 18:168-69*. ⁸Cf. Prov 24:31. ⁹NPNF 2 5:140*. ¹⁰HOP 88. ¹¹AHSIS 65. ¹²ANF 7:468.

reason the wise man prays that he may have what is necessary and adequate. . . .

Shun and avoid, therefore, the temptations of the world, so that the poor may not despair and the rich may not grow proud. *SIX DAYS OF CREATION* 6.53.¹³

SUFFICIENCY VARIES. BASIL THE GREAT:

Solomon says, "Give me neither beggary nor riches; give me only what is necessary and sufficient," lest being filled I should deny and say, Who sees me? Or being poor, I should steal and forswear the name of my God; thus representing riches as satiety, poverty as a complete lack of the necessities of life, and sufficiency as a state both free from want and without superfluity. Suffi-

ciency varies, however, according to physical condition and present need. . . . In every case, care must be taken for a good table, yet without overstepping the limits of the actual need. *THE LONG RULES* 20.¹⁴

SUFFICIENCY MEANS THE ABILITY TO LIVE

HONORABLY AND RESPECTABLY. AUGUSTINE:

Surely you see that this sufficiency is not to be coveted for its own sake but to provide for health of body and for clothing which accords with one's personal dignity and which makes it possible for him to live with others honorably and respectably. *LETTER* 130.¹⁵

¹³FC 42:267*. ¹⁴FC 9:280. ¹⁵FC 18:385-86.





PROVERBS OF NUMERICAL
CONSTRUCTION
PROVERBS 30:10-33

OVERVIEW: The proverbial expressions about the grave, woman's love, dry earth and eternal fire are enigmatic, but they have a deeper meaning: inordinate love is insatiable (JEROME). Sin grows continually and never gets enough of what it desires. The proverb about the eye mocking and scorning the parent can be understood in the deeper sense that blasphemy may be directed against God (HIPPOLYTUS).

Still another enigmatic proverb is about the way of an eagle, a serpent, a ship and a man; its meaning, also, must be discovered at a level deeper than the historical (BEDE). Just as a serpent leaves no mark of its track on a rock, so the church leaves no trace of sin in its course (HIPPOLYTUS), and the gates of hell will not prevail against the church just as the way of the serpent upon a rock cannot be found (ORIGEN). Doctrinally,

as against the Arians, this means that there is but one Godhead and not two (AMBROSE).

In fact, the church was once an adulteress (HIPPOLYTUS), and thus the sinner who repents of fornication has more hope than one who does not (ORIGEN), just as the prostitute who renounces sin becomes a virgin by her faith in Christ (MAXIMUS OF TURIN). The three things by which the earth is moved are Father, Son and Holy Spirit (HIPPOLYTUS).

Regarding the four things on earth that are small but wise, the ants, badgers, lizards and locusts are all wiser than the wise especially because they store up for times of need (HIPPOLYTUS). Likewise humans, even those whose faith is as little as the weakness of such creatures, may nonetheless store up treasures for eternal life by their good works (DIDYMUS). To be prudent

therefore we should copy the ants (AUGUSTINE), for their real meaning is hidden and not literal. As for the locusts, human beings are less orderly than they (ORIGEN) and know less about self-government than they (CAESARIUS). Four stately things that all go well are angels, saints, souls and God the Word incarnate (HIPPOLYTUS). Squeeze out the commandments of the two testaments, and they will become like butter for your bread (CHRYSOSTOM).

30:15-16 *Four Things Never Satisfied*

INORDINATE LOVE IS INSATIABLE. JEROME: Who can hide from himself what is thus enigmatically expressed? “The horseleech had three daughters, dearly loved, but they satisfied her not, and a fourth is not satisfied when you say Enough: the grave, and woman’s love, and the earth that is not satisfied with water, and the fire that does not say Enough.” The horseleech is the devil, the daughters of the devil are dearly loved, and they cannot be satisfied with the blood of the slain: “the grave, and woman’s love, and the earth dry and scorched with heat.” It is not the harlot or the adulteress who is spoken of, but woman’s love in general is accused of ever being insatiable. Put it out, it bursts into flame; give it plenty, it is again in need. It enervates a man’s mind and engrosses all thought except for the passion which it feeds. *AGAINST JOVINIANUS* I.28.¹

SIN NEVER ACQUIRES ENOUGH. HIPPOLYTUS: “The horseleech had three dearly loved daughters.” Its daughters lead to sin: the daughters of fornication, murder and idolatry. These three did not satisfy her, for she is not to be satisfied. In destroying man by these actions, sin never varies but only grows continually. For the fourth, [Solomon] continues, is never content to say “enough,” meaning that it is universal lust. . . . For as the body is one and yet has many members, so also sin, being one, contains within it many various lusts by which it lays its snares for men. *FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.*²

30:17 *Mocking and Scorning*

BLASPHEMY AGAINST GOD AND WISDOM.

HIPPOLYTUS: “The eye that mocks at his father, and dishonors the old age of his mother.” That is to say, one who blasphemes God . . . ravens from the caves may pluck from him the eye of gladness. *FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.*³

30:18-19 *The Ways of an Eagle, Serpent, Ship and Man*

THE CHURCH LEAVES NO TRACE OF SIN IN ITS COURSE. HIPPOLYTUS: As a serpent cannot mark its track upon a rock, so the devil could not find sin in the body of Christ. For the Lord says, “Behold, the prince of the world comes and will find nothing in me.”⁴ For as a ship, sailing in the sea, leaves no traces of its way behind it, so neither does the church, which is situated in the world as in a sea, leave her hope upon the earth, because she has her life reserved in heaven; and as it holds her way here only for a short time, it is not possible to trace out her course. . . . “There are three things which I cannot understand, and the fourth I know not: the tracks of an eagle flying,” that is, Christ’s ascension; “and the ways of a serpent upon a rock,” that is, that the devil did not find a trace of sin in the body of Christ; “and the ways of a ship crossing the sea,” that is, the ways of the church, which is in this life as in a sea and which is directed by its hope in Christ through the cross; “and the ways of a man in youth”—the ways of him, namely, who is born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. *FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.*⁵

THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT PREVAIL.

ORIGEN: Neither against the rock on which Christ builds the church nor against the church will the gates of hades prevail; just as the way of a serpent upon a rock, according to what is written

¹NPWF 2 6:367*. ²ANF 5:173-74*; TLG 2115.044.46. ³ANF 5:174**; TLG 2115.045.49. ⁴Jn 14:30. ⁵ANF 5:174*; TLG 2115.013.22, 54.

in the Proverbs, cannot be found. Now, if the gates of hades prevail against any one, such cannot be a rock upon which Christ builds the church. COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 12.11.⁶

NOT TWO GODS BUT ONE GOD. AMBROSE: An eagle and a ship and a serpent are not of one family and nature but of a distinguishable and different substance, and yet they are three. On the testimony of Scripture, therefore, [the Arians] learn that their arguments are against themselves.

Therefore, in saying that the substance of the Father and of the Son is diverse and their Godhead distinguishable, [the Arians] themselves assert there are two gods. But we, when we confess the Father and the Son, in declaring them still to be of one Godhead, say that there are not two gods but one God. And this we establish by the Word of the Lord. ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH 5.3.40-41.⁷

EXPLANATION OF SUCH PARABLES IS DISCOVERED ONLY AT A DEEPER LEVEL. BEDE: With regard to history, it is as written thus. But because this speaks in parables, “the way of the eagle in the heavens” is discovered only with difficulty, referring as it does to the subtlety of the enemy whereby great effort is required to detect his flight around the hearts of heavenly people. The same is true for “the way of the serpent upon the earth,” that is, the cunning of the venomous enemy with which he does not cease to plot against those whom he perceives to be founded upon the rock of faith. Likewise for “the way of the ship in the middle of the sea,” that is, the way of iniquity whereby he moves with such subtlety through the bitter waves of this world, agitated by the winds of unclean spirits, that his journey can be hardly detected or not at all. For the prophet testifies that the eagle signifies this malignant adversary, saying, “Our persecutors were faster than the eagles of heaven,”⁸ that is, the people who pursued us were so fierce that they appeared to be even more vicious than demons themselves. That a serpent often represents the devil was proven both in the sin of the first man

and when a wise man said, “Flee from sin as though from the face of a serpent.”⁹ And the prophet showed that a ship designates the inconsistency of those who are blown about by every wind of doctrine¹⁰ when he referred to “the Chaldeans glorying in their ships,”¹¹ that is, the unclean of spirit exalting in the fragility and instability of the human mind and in their own destruction, as though they were rejoicing victors. Just as they are too clever to be found, therefore, so does the young person who has abandoned the way of truth have such difficulty in thinking that he continually every hour descends further into aimless, senseless considerations. COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 30.18-19.¹²

30:20 *The Way of an Adulteress*

THE CHURCH WAS ONCE AN ADULTERESS.

HIPPOLYTUS: “Such is the way of an adulterous woman, who, when she has done the deed of sin, wipes herself and will say that no wickedness has been done.” Such is the conduct of the church that believes on Christ, when, after committing fornication with idols, she renounces these and the devil and is cleansed of her sins, and receives forgiveness, and then asserts that she has done no wickedness. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.¹³

THE SINNER WHO REPENTS OF FORNICATION HAS MORE HOPE THAN ONE WHO DOES NOT.

ORIGEN: I will describe two persons who have sinned the same abominable sin of fornication, yet between these two who have fornicated, the one is not aggrieved nor feels pain nor is vexed but experiences what was said in Proverbs concerning the adulterous woman “who having washed herself, if she does something, says she has done nothing wrong.” See with me the other who after the mistake is unable to contain himself but punishes the conscience, tortures the heart, is

⁶ANF 9:456*. ⁷NPNF 2 10:289-90. ⁸Lam 4:19. ⁹Sir 21:2. ¹⁰See Eph 4:14. ¹¹Is 43:14. ¹²CCL 119B:144-45. ¹³ANF 5:174*; TLG 2115.044.56.1.

unable to eat and drink, who fasts not because of a judgment but because of grief of repentance. I will describe him as the kind of person who “appears sad all day long”¹⁴ and who wears himself down with suffering and who goes “wailing from the groaning of his heart,”¹⁵ who sees his sin reprov'd before himself on account of all which happened before. And see that this sort of person punishes himself not only for one day nor one night but for a long time. Who do you say has hope before God? Is it that first person who has fornicated and does not care but is callous and also has hardened himself just as one who has “given himself up to licentiousness”?¹⁶ Or is it this latter person who after one sin goes into mourning, lamenting it?

This latter [has some grounds for hope]. The more such a one is burnt by the fire of grief, the more he is shown mercy, and there is for him such sufficient time for punishment, as there is a time of punishment given to that person who fornicated and was grieved.¹⁷ HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 20.9.1-2.¹⁸

THE PROSTITUTE WHO RENOUNCES SIN BECOMES A VIRGIN BY FAITH IN CHRIST.

MAXIMUS OF TURIN: “Such is the way of a prostitute: when she has washed herself she says that she has done something wrong.” Clearly this is said of her who, after having washed herself at the source, does not remember the vices of her sins, assumes the virtue of preaching, and, wiping away her stains with living water, has no more awareness of her sin but is urged on by the ardor of faith. For in a certain way she says that she has done nothing wicked now that she has become a messenger of the truth, and by forgetfulness she renounces her impurity now that she preaches chastity in her devotion. For this is the power of Christ the Lord, that even a sinner who washes himself in his water returns afresh to virginity and forgets what he had done before. And in his new birth he manifests the innocence of infancy, he does not know the sins of youth, and although he had been an adulterer because of the corrup-

tion of sin, he becomes a virgin because of faith in Christ. SERMON 22.3.¹⁹

30:21-23 *The Earth Trembles and Moves*

BY FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT THE WHOLE EARTH IS MOVED.

HIPPOLYTUS: “By three things the earth is moved,” namely, by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. “And the fourth it cannot bear,” namely, the last appearing of the Savior. . . .

The shaking [of the earth] signifies the change of things upon earth. Sin, then, which in its own nature is a slave, has reigned in the mortal body of people. Once, indeed, at the time of the flood; and again in the time of the Sodomites, who, not satisfied with what the land yielded, offered violence to strangers; and a third time in the case of hateful Egypt, which, though it obtained in Joseph a man who distributed food to all, that they might not perish of famine, yet did not take well with his prosperity but persecuted the children of Israel. “The handmaid casting out her mistress,” that is, the church of the Gentiles, which, though itself a slave and a stranger to the promises, cast out the freeborn and lordly synagogue and became the wife and bride of Christ. By Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the whole earth is moved. The “fourth it cannot bear”: for he came first by lawgivers, and second by prophets, and third by the gospel, manifesting himself openly; and in the fourth instance he shall come as the judge of the living and the dead, whose glory the whole creation will not be able to endure. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.²⁰

30:24-28 *Four Things That Are Small but Wise*

ANTS, BADGERS, LIZARDS AND LOCUSTS ARE ALL WISER THAN THE WISE. HIPPOLYTUS:

¹⁴Ps 38:6 (37:7 LXX). ¹⁵Ps 38:8 (37:9 LXX). ¹⁶See Eph 4:19. ¹⁷See 2 Cor 2:5-11. ¹⁸FC 97:240-41*. ¹⁹ACW 50:55. ²⁰ANF 5:174-75*; TLG 2115.013.54.25, 26.1.

“There are four things which are least upon the earth, and these are wiser than the wise: The ants have no strength, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.” And in like manner, the Gentiles by faith in Christ prepare for themselves eternal life through good works. “And the conies [badgers], a feeble folk, have made their houses in the rocks.” The Gentiles, that is to say, are built upon Christ, the spiritual rock, who is become the head of the corner. “The spider [lizard], that supports itself upon its hands, and is easily caught, dwells in the strongholds of kings.” That is, the thief with his hands extended [on the cross], rests on the cross of Christ and dwells in paradise, the stronghold of the three kings—Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

“The locust has no king and yet marches out in array as by one command.” The Gentiles had no king, for they were ruled by sin; but now, believing God, they engage in the heavenly warfare. *FRAGMENT ON PROVERBS.*²¹

STORE UP TREASURES FOR ETERNAL LIFE.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: [Solomon] indicates here those people who have no strength but nonetheless store up treasures for eternal life on account of their good works. . . . The rock, in fact, is the refuge of badgers in which they live. You too, he says, even though you are weak, run to the rock of true faith, and with it restore life. The one who is supported by deeds enters the kingdom. Therefore, he says, do not despair of the kingdom of heaven because of the weakness of your faith; but believing in the promises, hasten to those works which are commanded. Christ is the lion: indeed all rational things are cattle in comparison with him. Moses, in fact, said, “I am a child.” Because of its natural alacrity, the lion is said to walk unhindered. *COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 30.25.*²²

THE REAL MEANING OF THE ANTS. *ORIGEN:*

I do not quote these words, however, as taking them in their literal signification, but, agreeably to the title of the book (for it is entitled “Proverbs”), I investigate them as containing a secret

meaning. For it is the custom of these writers [of Scripture] to distribute into many classes those writings which express one sense when taken literally but which convey a different signification as their hidden meaning; and one of these kinds of writing is “Proverbs.” . . . It is not, then, the visible ants which are “wiser even than the wise,” but they who are indicated as such under the “proverbial” style of expression. And such must be our conclusion regarding the rest of the animal creation. *AGAINST CELSUS 4.87.*²³

BE PRUDENT AND COPY THE ANT! *AUGUSTINE:*

Be prudent, and provide for yourself against the future in heaven. Be therefore prudent, copy the ant, as Scripture says, “Store in summer, lest you be hungry in winter.” The winter is the last day, the day of tribulation; the winter is the day of offenses and bitterness. Gather what may be there for you in the future. If you do not, you will perish, being both imprudent and unwise. *EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 49.12.*²⁴

HUMAN BEINGS UNDER GOD ARE LESS ORDERLY THAN THE LOCUSTS. *ORIGEN:*

Although the locusts do not have a king, as Scripture says, “He marches the well-ordered army in one line,” but people, although they have been made rational by God, have been able neither to rule themselves orderly nor to endure patiently the control of God as king. *HOMILIES ON EXODUS 4.7.*²⁵

HUMANS KNOW LESS ABOUT SELF-GOVERNMENT THAN DO THE LOCUSTS. *CAESARIUS OF ARLES:*

“Although the locust has no king,” as Scripture says, “he leads his army all in array”; but people who have been created rational neither know how to govern themselves nor how to endure with patience the guidance of their king and God. *SERMON 99.2.*²⁶

²¹ANF 5:174-75*; TLG 2115.013.54.33. ²²PG 39:1641-44. ²³ANF 4:536*. ²⁴NPNF 1 8:173**. ²⁵FC 71:270. ²⁶FC 47:83.

30:29 Four Stately Things

ANGELS, SAINTS, SOULS AND GOD THE WORD INCARNATE: ALL GO WELL. HIPPOLYTUS: “There are three things that go well, and the fourth which is comely in going”; that is, the angels in heaven, the saints upon earth, and the souls of the righteous under the earth. And the fourth, that is, God, the Word incarnate, passed in honor through the Virgin’s womb; and creating our Adam anew, he passed through the gates of heaven and became the firstfruits of the resurrection and of the ascension for all. FRAGMENTS ON PROVERBS.²⁷

30:33 Pressing Milk Produces Curds

LIKE BUTTER PRESSED FROM THE MILK OF SCRIPTURE. CHRYSOSTOM: “Squeeze out the milk, and it will be butter.” Squeeze out faithfully the two Testaments of Christ, and you will find the commandments to be as milk. Once you have been nourished with them, you may be transformed into perfect and faithful bread. COMMENTARY ON THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, FRAGMENT 30.33.²⁸

²⁷ANF 5:175^s; TLG 2115.013.59.47. ²⁸PG 64:737.





THE WORDS OF LEMUEL PROVERBS 31:1-31

OVERVIEW: The wine of the flesh produces madness, whereas there is also a spiritual wine that gladdens the human heart (JEROME). Wine is a remedy for depression, unless intemperance results, but drunkenness comes from intemperance and not from wine itself (CHRYSOSTOM). Wine can turn grief or sorrow into joy (GREGORY OF NYSSA). To those who are regretful over their earlier lives, wine is the joy of spiritual knowledge that gladdens the heart (JOHN CASSIAN).

A prudent and loving wife is commendable in the sight of God (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS), and an ideal marriage is more a union of virtue than of bodies. Gregory eulogized his sister as just such a woman, whom to praise would be like praising a statue for its shadow (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). The church from the beginning is the bride of Christ, the good wife and valiant woman of whom

Solomon speaks in Proverbs (CAESARIUS). Jesus treats the church with confidence as his loving bride. A good housewife is concerned with planning for the future (AUGUSTINE). The church possesses the trees of knowledge and of life (ORIGEN).

This housewife is also a valiant woman, the good work she has done is already on the spindle (AUGUSTINE), and just as she puts her hands to the distaff and spindle so we too should not be ashamed to practice “holy works of wool” (CAESARIUS). As she makes herself clothing, there are two garments made of action and spirit, faith and works (AMBROSE). When wool and flax are compared, the wool implies fleshly and outward whereas the linen means spiritual and inward (AUGUSTINE). In fact, the priests of the Old Testament used linen to indicate chastity (CAESARIUS). Mercy, however, is always to be preferred

over the law (AUGUSTINE).

This good woman praises God and all creation in their proper order (AUGUSTINE), and she does not eat the bread of idleness, which breeds evil (BASIL). This one woman who surpasses all others in excellence has many bad daughters, however, and these are heresies bearing a certain family likeness (AUGUSTINE). Thus, heresies are generated from Christian seed but nourished outside the church (LEANDER OF SEVILLE). At the end, all her works will praise her in the gates, and she as the church will dwell in God's house forever, praising her husband, seeing and praising God (AUGUSTINE).

31:4 *Wine and Strong Drink*

THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WINE.

JEROME: The wine of the flesh does not cheer the heart of man but overpowers it and produces madness; it is written, in fact, that it is not for kings to drink wine. The apostle, too, writes that it is good not to eat meat and not to drink wine;¹ yet we are told that wine gladdens the heart of man.² This means, however, spiritual wine, by which, if one drinks, he immediately becomes inebriated. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 42 (PSALM 127).³

31:6 *Only to Those Perishing or in Bitter Distress*

WINE IS A REMEDY FOR DEPRESSION. CHRYSOSTOM: "Let people in distress have wine and those in pain strong drink," which shows that nothing can prove such a good remedy for depression as recourse to this, aside from the fact that in some cases intemperance undermines the benefit coming from it. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 29.6.⁴

DRUNKENNESS COMES FROM INTEMPERANCE.

CHRYSOSTOM: "Give strong drink unto him who is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul." Justly so, because it can mitigate asperity and gloominess and drive away clouds from the brow. "Wine makes glad the heart of man,"⁵ says

the psalmist. How then does wine produce drunkenness? For it cannot be that one and the same thing should work opposite effects. Drunkenness then surely does not arise from wine but from intemperance. Wine is bestowed upon us for no other purpose than for bodily health; but this purpose also is thwarted by immoderate use. HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS 19.5.17.⁶

A MEDICINE FOR SORROW. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Console each other with the following words. It is a good medicine that [Solomon] has for sorrow; for he bids wine be given to the sorrowful. He says this to us, the laborers in the vineyard, "Give," therefore, "your wine to those that are in sorrow," not that wine which produces drunkenness, plots against the senses and destroys the body, but such as gladdens the heart, the wine which the prophet recommends when he says, "Wine makes glad the heart of man."⁷ Pledge each other in that liquor undiluted and with the unstinted goblets of the word, that thus our grief may be turned to joy and gladness, by the grace of the only-begotten Son of God, through whom be glory to God, even the Father, for ever and ever. Amen. FUNERAL ORATION ON MELETIUS.⁸

THE JOY OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE. JOHN CASSIAN: "Give strong drink to those who are in gloom and wine to those who are sad so that they may forget their poverty and be reminded no more of their grief." What [Solomon] means is this. To those filled with bitter regret and sadness over their earlier lives give abundantly the joy of spiritual knowledge like "a wine which gladdens the heart of a man."⁹ Warm them with the headiness of saving words lest they sink into gloom and deadly despair. CONFERENCE 14.17.¹⁰

31:10 *A Good Wife*

¹See Rom 14:21. ²Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX). ³FC 48:322. ⁴FC 82:203. ⁵Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX). ⁶NPNF 1 13:138*. ⁷Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX). ⁸NPNF 2 5:517*. ⁹Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX). ¹⁰JCC 172.

GOD COMMENDS A PRUDENT AND LOVING WIFE. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: A religious wife is blessed. Let her praise the fear of the Lord: give her of the fruits of her lips, and let her husband be praised in the gates. And again, “A virtuous wife is a crown to her husband.”¹¹ And again, “Many wives have built a house.”¹² You have learned what great commendations a prudent and loving wife receives from the Lord God. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 1.3.8.¹³

A TRIBUTE TO A UNION OF VIRTUE. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: I have heard sacred Scripture saying, “Who shall find a valiant woman?” and also that she is a gift of God, and that a good marriage is arranged by the Lord. Those outside, too, have the same thought—if indeed the saying is theirs: “There is no greater boon for a man than a good wife, no worse, than the opposite.”¹⁴ It is impossible to mention anyone who was more fortunate than my father in this respect. For I believe that, if anyone, from the ends of the earth and from all human stocks, had endeavored to arrange the best possible marriage, a better or more harmonious union than this could not be found. For the best in men and women was so united that their marriage was more a union of virtue than of bodies. Although they surpassed all others, they themselves were so evenly matched in virtue that they could not surpass each other. ON THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER, ORATION 18.7.¹⁵

AN IDEAL SISTER. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: The divinely inspired Solomon in his instructive wisdom, I mean in his Proverbs, praises the woman who keeps her house and loves her husband. And in contrast to the woman who wanders abroad, who is uncontrolled and dishonorable, who hunts precious souls with wanton ways and words, he praises her who is engaged honorably at home, who performs her womanly duties with fearless courage, her hands constantly holding the spindle as she prepares double cloaks for her husband, who buys a field in season, and carefully provides food for her ser-

vants, and receives her friends at a bountiful table, and who exhibits all other qualities for which he extols in song the modest and industrious woman. If I were to praise my sister on such counts, it would be like praising a statue for its shadow. ON HIS SISTER ST. GORGONIA, ORATION 8.9.¹⁶

THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST, THE GOOD WIFE AND VALIANT WOMAN. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: The catholic church was not only preached after the coming of our Lord and Savior, beloved brethren, but from the beginning of the world, it was designated by many figures and rather hidden mysteries. Indeed, in holy Abel the catholic church existed, in Noah, in Abraham, in Isaac, in Jacob, and in the other saintly people before the advent of our Lord and Savior. Truly, Solomon says of her, “Who shall find a worthy wife?” What does he mean: “Who shall find”? Here, we should understand the difficulty, not impossibility, of finding her. That valiant woman is the church. SERMON 139.1.¹⁷

31:11-12 *A Trusting Husband, for Whom She Does Good*

CHRIST IS CONFIDENT IN HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: “The heart of her husband is confident about her.” He certainly is confident, and he has taught us to be confident too. He commissioned the church, you see, to the ends of the earth, among all nations, from sea to sea. If she was not going to persevere to the end, her husband’s heart would not be confident about her. . . . So she despoils the world, spread throughout it everywhere; on all sides she plunders trophies from the devil. . . .

“For she works for her husband’s good and not his harm, all the time.” That is why this lady despoils the nations, working for her husband’s good and not his harm. All the time she does

¹¹Prov 12:4. ¹²Prov 14:1. ¹³ANF 7:394-95. ¹⁴Cf. Hesiod *Works and Days* 1.700. ¹⁵FC 22:124. ¹⁶FC 22:106*. ¹⁷FC 47:276.

good and not harm: not for herself either, but for her husband, “that whoever lives may live no longer for himself, but for the one who died and rose again for all.”¹⁸ SERMON 37.4-5.¹⁹

31:13 *Wool and Flax*

WOOL MEANS FLESH OR OUTWARD, LINEN MEANS SPIRIT OR INWARD. AUGUSTINE: The sacred text describes this housewife as a weaver of woolens and linen. But what we want to find out is what wool represents and what linen does. I think wool means something of the flesh, linen something of the spirit. I hazard this conjecture from the order we wear our clothes in; our underclothes or inner garments are linen, our outer garments woolen. Now everything we do in flesh is public, whatever we do in the spirit is private. Now to act in the flesh and not to act in spirit may seem good but is in fact worthless, whereas to act in spirit and not act in the flesh is downright laziness. SERMON 37.6.²⁰

LINEN INDICATED CHASTITY. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: The sacred word describes that woman as working in wool and linen. Perhaps you will ask us what the wool and linen are. The wool signifies something carnal; the linen, what is spiritual. This interpretation is given because in the order of clothing inner garments are of linen, outer ones are of wool. Therefore, the wool signifies something carnal, because it is produced from a mingling or union, while the linen is brought forth from the earth without any carnal pleasure and for this reason seems to be an image of chastity. So true is this that by command of the law, priests of the Old Testament used linen bands as an indication of chastity. SERMON 139.2.²¹

31:16 *To Buy a Field and Plant It*

THE GOOD HOUSEWIFE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. AUGUSTINE: After saying, “Being far-sighted she has bought a field,” as though you were to say, “What did she buy it with?” it adds,

“With the fruit of her hands she has planted a property.” . . . The property it means, you see, lies in the future; that was suggested by the word *far-sighted*. SERMON 37.9.²²

THE WOMAN, AS THE CHURCH, POSSESSES THE TREES OF KNOWLEDGE AND LIFE. ORIGEN: [The text] speaks of the church as a virtuous soul possessing the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. [The church possesses] knowledge as the law, and life as the Word. For she herself [is the church] who came out of the rib of Christ and was found by her bridegroom to be a woman of sound mind and strength, guarding the faith of her bridegroom as she awaits his [return] again from heaven. EXPOSITION ON PROVERBS, FRAGMENT 31.16.²³

31:17 *Loins Girded with Strength*

THE HOUSEWIFE IS A VALIANT WOMAN. AUGUSTINE: “Valiantly girding her loins, she has braced her arms.” Valiant she is indeed. Now we see if she is not also a maidservant. With what devotion she serves, and how readily! To prevent the flapping folds of carnal desires from getting in the way of her work she girds her loins, and so avoids treading on overlong skirts as she hurries about her work. There lies the chastity of this lady, tightly bound by the girdle of the commandment and always ready for good work. SERMON 37.10.²⁴

31:19 *The Distaff and the Spindle*

THE GOOD WORK SHE HAS DONE. AUGUSTINE: “She has also braced her arms on the spindle.” About this spindle let me say what the Lord permits me to. After all, this business of spinning wool is not completely foreign to men. Listen to what it means to say, “She has braced her arms on the spindle.” It could have said “on the distaff.” It said spindle, not without reason, perhaps.

¹⁸2 Cor 5:15. ¹⁹WSA 3 2:187*. ²⁰WSA 3 2:188. ²¹FC 47:277. ²²WSA 3 2:190. ²³PG 17:252. ²⁴WSA 3 2:190.

Though you could, of course, take it, and it wouldn't be at all absurd, that the spindle seems to signify spinning, and spinning signifies the good works of a chaste woman and a busy and careful housewife. All the same I, dearly beloved, will not keep from you what I understand by this spindle. . . .

Look at these two instruments for spinning wool, the distaff and the spindle. The wool is wrapped round the distaff and has to be drawn and spun in a thread and so pass onto the spindle. What's wrapped on the distaff is the future; what's collected by the spindle is already past. So your good work is on the spindle, not on the distaff. On the distaff is what you are going to do; on the spindle is what you have done. So see if you have anything on the spindle, that's where your arms should be braced. *SERMON 37.13.*²⁵

31:20 *The Poor and Needy*

BY CARING FOR THE POOR, YOU PRACTICE HOLY WORKS. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Brethren, let us not be ashamed to practice holy works of wool. If anyone has a full storeroom or granary, all those things are on the distaff; let them pass over to the spindle. They are on the left side as long as you do not give to the poor, but as soon as you begin to practice almsgiving, they are transferred to the right side and become a work from which a garment may result. *SERMON 139.4.*²⁶

31:22 *Making Herself Clothing*

TWO GARMENTS ARE MADE OF ACTION AND SPIRIT, FAITH AND WORKS. AMBROSE: The beauty of a good thing pleases the more, if it be shown under various aspects. For those are good things, whereof the texture of the priestly robe was the token, that is to say, either the Law or the church, which latter has made two garments for her spouse, as it is written²⁷—the one of action, the other of spirit, weaving together the threads of faith and works. *ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH 2, INTRODUCTION II.*²⁸

31:26 *The Teaching of Kindness*

MERCY IS ALWAYS TO BE PREFERRED OVER THE LAW. AUGUSTINE: There is mercy on [Jesus'] tongue, and so he teaches the Law mercifully, as was said about wisdom: "But she carries on her tongue the Law and mercy." Do not fear that you cannot fulfill the Law; flee to mercy. *TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 7.10.2.*²⁹

THIS GOOD WOMAN PRAISES GOD AND ALL CREATION IN PROPER ORDER. AUGUSTINE: "She has opened her mouth with care, and imposed order on her tongue," praising creatures as creatures, the creator as creator, angels as angels, heavenly things as heavenly, earthly things as earthly, men as men, animals as animals. Nothing mixed up, nothing out of order. Not taking the name of the Lord her God in vain, not attributing the nature of a creature to the creator, speaking about everything so methodically that she doesn't put lesser things above the more important or subordinate the more important to the lesser. *SERMON 37.23.*³⁰

31:27 *She Does Not Eat the Bread of Idleness*

IDLENESS BEGETS EVIL. BASIL THE GREAT: Why should we dwell upon the amount of evil there is in idleness, when the apostle clearly prescribes that he who does not work should not eat?³¹ As daily sustenance is necessary for everyone, so labor in proportion to one's strength is also essential. Not vainly has Solomon written in praise: "and she has not eaten her bread idle." *THE LONG RULES 37.*³²

31:29 *One Woman Surpassing All Others in Excellence*

HERESIES ARE BAD DAUGHTERS BEARING A

²⁵WSA 3 2:191. Similar comments are found in Caesarius of Arles; see FC 47:278. ²⁶FC 47:279. ²⁷Cf. Prov 31:22 LXX. ²⁸NPNF 2 10:225. ²⁹FC 78:163. ³⁰WSA 3 2:197. ³¹2 Thess 3:10. ³²FC 9:307.

CERTAIN FAMILY LIKENESS. AUGUSTINE: “Many daughters have done mightily, but you have surpassed and outdone them all.” You, he says, have surpassed them all, you have outdone them all. So who are these other daughters who have done mightily, whom this one has surpassed, and whom this one has outdone? And again, how have they done mightily, and in what way has this one surpassed them? There are, you see, bad daughters, namely, heresies. Why are they daughters? Because they too were born of this woman. But bad daughters, daughters not in the family likeness of their behavior but in the likeness of their sacraments. They too have our sacraments, they have our Scriptures, they have our Amen and Alleluia, most of them have our creed, many of them have our baptism. That’s why they are daughters.

But would you like to know what is said to this lady somewhere else, in the Song of Songs? “Like a lily in the midst of thorns, so is my darling in the midst of the daughters.”³³ SERMON 37:27.³⁴

HERESIES ARE GENERATED FROM CHRISTIAN SEED BUT NOURISHED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. LEANDER OF SEVILLE: “Many women have gathered together riches; you have excelled them all.” . . .

Heresies are generated from Christian seed; they are thorns because they have been nourished outside of God’s paradise, that is, outside of the catholic church. This is proved not by any conjecture of my own making but by the authority of divine Scripture, when Solomon said, “As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women.”³⁵ HOMILY ON THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.³⁶

31:31 Let Her Works Give Praise in the Gates

SHE WILL DWELL IN GOD’S HOUSE FOREVER, SEEING AND PRAISING GOD. AUGUSTINE: And what occupation will she have from then on, her labors being ended? “And her husband will be praised in the gates.” That will be the haven of our labors, to see God and praise God. There they will not say, “Get up, work, clothe the servants, clothe yourself too, put on your best purple, give food to the maids, see that the lamp does not go out, be thorough, get up at night, open your hand to the poor, draw the thread from the distaff to the spindle.” There will not be any works of necessity, because there will not be any necessity. There will not be any works of mercy, because there will not be any misery. You will not break your bread to the poor, because no one will be begging. You will not take in the stranger, because everyone will be living in their own home country. You will not visit the sick, because everyone will be in good health for all eternity. You will not clothe the naked, because everyone will be clothed in eternal light. You will not bury the dead, because everyone will be living life without end.

You will not, however, be doing nothing, just because you are not doing any of this. For you will see the One you have desired, and you will praise him without weariness or fatigue. That is the fruit you will receive. Then will come to pass that one thing you have asked for: “One thing I have asked from the Lord, this will I seek: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” And what will you do there? “To contemplate the delight of the Lord.”³⁷ And her husband will be praised in the gates. “Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they will praise you forever and ever.”³⁸ SERMON 37:30.³⁹

³³Song 2:2. ³⁴WSA 3 2:198-99. ³⁵Song 2:2. ³⁶FC 62:230**. ³⁷Cf. Ps 27:4 (26:4 LXX). ³⁸Ps 84:4 (83:5 LXX). ³⁹WSA 3 2:200-201*.

ECCLESIASTES



THE VANITY OF HUMAN LIFE ECCLESIASTES 1:1-12

OVERVIEW: Ecclesiastes, “the Preacher,” also understood as being Solomon, is also a type of Christ (DIDYMUS, ORIGEN, GREGORY OF NYSSA). In one sense, though, the Spirit is the real author of this book (DIDYMUS). In addition, the name Ecclesiastes indicates the church and the one who leads it (JEROME, GREGORY OF NYSSA). The church is true knowledge, and Christ is the author of

that knowledge (EVAGRIUS). The book of Ecclesiastes must be understood spiritually and in light of other passages of sacred Scripture (GREGORY OF NYSSA), for this present world is not the ultimate end (EVAGRIUS). All things are vanity, and we must turn away from them toward God (AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE). All things are vanity even though God made them good (JEROME). But there

are different kinds of vanities (DIDYMUS). Vanity is pointlessness or futility (GREGORY OF NYSSA), the possession of material bodies (ORIGEN), the pursuit of worldly pleasures (VALERIAN) and being busied with vain things (CHRYSOSTOM). Even the sun in the sky, compared with the true Sun, is vanity (OLYMPIODORUS). Prosperity does not profit our life, and we should not work for things that perish (AUGUSTINE), but those who toil for the eternal gain much. The earth remains, but generations go and come by death and birth (DIDYMUS). The stability of the earth depends on God (AMBROSE), and God's power is evident in the existence and movement of the sea (EPHREM, GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS), although a second enlightenment comes when sunrise follows sunset (DIDYMUS). That we are caught in an endless repetition of cycles, however, is an error of pagan belief (AUGUSTINE). The pattern of the sea indicates the pattern of our journey through life, and, just as it never exceeds its capacity, so never should we (GREGORY OF NYSSA).

1:1 *The Name Ecclesiastes*

ON THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NAME ECCLESIASTES (PREACHER). ORIGEN: But we can also investigate these things before we even come to the very body of the book, such as why Solomon, who seems to have served the will of the Holy Spirit in those three books is called in Proverbs "Solomon, the Son of David, who ruled in Israel,"¹ but in the second book "Solomon" is not written, but it reads, "the words of Ecclesiastes, the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem." To be sure he writes that he is "Son of David" just as in the first book and also "king of Israel." But there he wrote "Proverbs" but here "words" and called himself "Ecclesiastes," when he had called himself "Solomon" there. And although there he mentioned only the country over which he reigned, here he both mentioned the nation and designated the place of his kingdom as Jerusalem.

...

I do not think that anyone can doubt that

Solomon in rather many respects bears the type of Christ, either because he is named "Man of Peace" or because "the Queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon."² This is also the case because he is called "the son of David" and reigns in Israel and because he rules over those kings, on whose behalf he himself is called "king of kings." And again the true "Ecclesiastes" is that very one "who although he was in the form of God, humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant"³ in order to gather an ecclesial body, for Ecclesiastes is called from his gathering a congregation. . . .

Therefore in the first book of Proverbs, when he sets us in moral disciplines, he is said to be "king in Israel" but not yet in Jerusalem because, although we are said to be Israel because of our faith, we nonetheless have not yet arrived to this point so that we seem to have come to the heavenly Jerusalem. But when we will have made progress and will have arrived there so that we will share in the church of the firstborn, which is in heaven, and we know from the ancient and natural reasons we have discussed that the heavenly Jerusalem is our heavenly mother, then already Christ himself will be made our "Ecclesiastes" and will be said to reign not only "in Israel" but also "in Jerusalem. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.⁴

ECCLESIASTES IS SOLOMON, SON OF DAVID.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Solomon, who here appears as Ecclesiastes, that is, who preaches what is appropriate for the church,⁵ is the son of David. He came after Saul, whose rule was destroyed and terminated. Solomon is son of this king David in two ways. . . . The first is according to nature and lineage; the second is according to his teaching. One has to understand Paul in this [second] way when he says, "For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus

¹Prov 1:1. ²Mt 12:42. ³Phil 2:6-7. ⁴Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.83.20.

⁵Gk *ekklesia*.

I became your father through the gospel.”⁶ David thus was Solomon’s father in both respects: according to nature—Solomon was his heir and “David begot Solomon”—but he was also his father in terms of instruction. David was wise as only few are—especially wise regarding God. . . .

But Solomon also became wise in a way that few achieve: he became wise through the wisdom [he received] and through his human lineage. According to both ways Solomon thus was the son of David.

But especially in terms of his words as Ecclesiastes is he the son of David, not so much according to nature as according to instruction. For the sons of the wise beget wise people, since they are wise themselves. But someone who is father of a son according to nature does not necessarily become a father again. Many were sons and did not become fathers. The sons according to the Spirit, however, become fathers themselves. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 5.2.⁷

THE NAME ECCLESIASTES ALSO INDICATES THE CHURCH. JEROME: Solomon is here given the Greek name Ecclesiastes [Heb *Qōhelet*], for he gathers the assembly [*qāhāl*], that is, the church. But we can call him the Preacher because he speaks to the people and his word is directed not only to one person but to everyone. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 1.1.⁸

VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES AS TO THE REAL AUTHOR. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: *Question:* [Are the] words of Ecclesiastes said by the author personally?

Answer: Actually the Spirit is the author of the divinely inspired Scriptures. The Spirit inspires so that words are expressed, but the wise man is also involved. For the Spirit has not himself invisibly written the letter and put down the text, but he breathes it into the soul. Either the real author is Solomon, or some [other] wise men have written it. Maybe we should opt for the latter so that nobody may say that the speaker talks about himself. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 7.9.⁹

SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION IS NECESSARY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: [The book of] Ecclesiastes is offered for our examination because it is especially useful and valuable for contemplation. When [the book of] Proverbs has exercised our minds by its obscure words, wise sayings, riddles and various twists of words as contained in the introduction, we find an ascent for those persons who have advanced to more perfect lessons with regard to this lofty, divinely inspired book. If a toilsome, arduous meditation on Proverbs prepares us for these lessons, how much more laborious and difficult must it be to now examine such sublime matters proposed for our contemplation! . . . Since one of the divine precepts bids us to search the Scriptures¹⁰, it is indeed necessary that once our minds have pursued the truth even though we failed to attain the nobility of its thoughts, we are not perceived as despising the Lord’s command in our effort to discharge our duty worthily. Therefore let us examine the Scripture before us as best we can, for he [God] who has bidden us to search will bestow the power [to preach]. As it is written, “The Lord will give a word to those who preach it with much power.”¹¹ HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.¹²

ECCLESIASTES IS ABOUT THE CHURCH AND THE ONE WHO LEADS IT. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The teaching of Ecclesiastes pertains only to suitable behavior in the church, that is, how to direct a person in virtue. This book aims to elevate our minds above the senses, to abandon great, brilliant and noble appearances, to transcend the senses and to attain what transcends them. Perhaps this inscription refers to the leader of the church [*ekklēsia*]. The true Ecclesiastes [*ekklēsiastes*, Christ] gathers into one assembly those persons who often have been scattered and frequently deceived.¹³ Who could he be except the true king of Israel to whom

⁶1 Cor 4:15. ⁷PTA 25:3-7. ⁸CCL 72:250. ⁹PTA 25:17-19. ¹⁰Jn 5:39. ¹¹Ps 67:12 LXX. ¹²McCambly. ¹³Jn 11:52.

Nathaniel said, "You are the son of God and the king of Israel"?¹⁴ If these words pertain to the king of Israel, the Son of God, as the Gospel says, then he is called Ecclesiastes. We will not deviate from the inscription's meaning provided that we learn about him who firmly establishes the church through the Gospel and to whom these words apply. "The words of Ecclesiastes, son of David":¹⁵ thus Matthew begins his gospel with the name David and calls him Lord. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.¹⁶

CHRIST THE AUTHOR OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE.

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The church is [the assembly] of pure souls. It is the true knowledge of the ages and worlds and about their judgment and provision. Ecclesiastes is Christ, the author of that knowledge. Or, Ecclesiastes is one who, having purified the soul by moral contemplation, leads his or her soul to the contemplation of the physical [world]. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES I.I.I.¹⁷

1:2 Vanity of Life

VANITY MEANS FUTILITY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Vanity may be described as something which lacks existence but exists only in the utterance of this word. The reality behind the word is nonexistent; only the letters transmit a useless, empty sound. These meaningless sounds randomly strike the ear as in a game when we create names which lack meaning. This is one form of vanity. Another refers to persons who zealously accumulate objects with no goal in mind. For example, children's sand buildings, the shooting at stars with arrows, trapping the wind and racing with one's shadow while trying to reach its head. If we take another example, we see that they all fall under the term "vanity." Often human custom calls vanity the looking towards a goal and the pursuit of something profitable; should a person do something contrary or foolish, he invests his energy to no avail. This is too is called vanity. . . . [And] so "vanity of vanities" demonstrates the

incomparable excess of vanity. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.¹⁸

THIS PRESENT WORLD IS NOT THE ULTIMATE END.

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: To those who have entered into the church of the mind and marvel in contemplation of what has come into being, the text says, Do not think that this is the ultimate end or that these are the promises that have been stored up for you. For all these things are [only] vanity of vanities before the knowledge of one's God. For, just as it is futile for medicine [to seek] a final cure, so is it useless [to seek] after knowledge of the Holy Trinity in the ideas of the [present] ages and worlds. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 2.I.2.¹⁹

DIFFERENT KINDS OF VANITIES.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: There is a difference between vanities; there are those that are especially so, and others that are not. . . .

Question: [Does Ecclesiastes speak] about one and the same [kind of vanity]?

Answer: About both, about the things that are just vanity as well as about those that are a vanity of vanities. Both the things that most clearly belong to the sphere of vanity and the less obvious vanities are altogether vain in comparison with actual truth. The newborn, the little child and the boy are imperfect. Of course, they are imperfect in comparison with an adolescent, and they are all imperfect in comparison with a man. . . .

Question: Does he not mean by "vanity of vanities" the visible and the perceivable?

Answer: Yes, but the layperson and the astronomer do not perceive the sun in the same way. The perception of the sun by an astronomer and by a scientist is far inferior to the seeing of the invisible God and it is inferior to the knowledge that comes from God. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 10.13.²⁰

¹⁴Jn 1:49. ¹⁵Mt 1:1. ¹⁶GNHE 34. ¹⁷SC 397:58. ¹⁸McCambly. ¹⁹SC 397:58-60. ²⁰PTA 25:37-41.

WHY VANITY OF VANITIES? JEROME: If everything that God made is very good, then how can everything be vanity—and not only vanity, but even vanity of vanities? As one song in the Song of Songs is shown to excel above all songs, so also is the magnitude of vanity demonstrated by the expression “vanity of vanities.” COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 1.2.²¹

IMPORTANCE OF RISING ABOVE THIS WORLD.

AMBROSE: David, who had experienced those very glances which are dangerous for a man, aptly says that the person is blessed whose every hope is in the name of God.²² For such a one does not have regard to vanities and follies who always strives toward Christ and always looks upon Christ with his inner eyes. For this reason David turned to God again and said, “Turn away my eyes, that they may not see vanity.”²³ The circus is vanity, because it is totally without profit; horse racing is vanity, because it is counterfeit as regards salvation;²⁴ the theater is vanity, every game is vanity. “All things are vanity!” as Ecclesiastes said, all things that are in this world. Accordingly, let the person who wishes to be saved ascend above the world, let him seek the Word who is with God, let him flee from this world and depart from the earth. For a man cannot comprehend that which exists and exists always, unless he has first fled from here. FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD 1.4.²⁵

VANITY BECAUSE OF THE FALL OF HUMANITY.

AUGUSTINE: By this perversity of the soul, due to sin and punishment, the whole corporeal creation becomes, as Solomon says: “Vanity of them that are vain, all is vanity. What advantage has man in all his labor which he does under the sun?” Not for nothing does he say, “of them that are vain,” for if you take away vain persons who pursue that which is last as if it were first, matter will not be vanity but will show its own beauty in its own way, a low type of beauty, of course, but not deceptive. When man fell away from the unity of God the multitude of temporal

forms was distributed among his carnal senses, and his sensibilities were multiplied by the changeful variety. So abundance became laborious, and his needs, if one may say so, became abundant, for he pursues one thing after another, and nothing remains permanently with him. So what with his corn and wine and oil, his needs are so multiplied that he cannot find the one thing needful, a single and unchangeable nature, seeking which he would not err and attaining which he would cease from grief and pain. For then he would have as a consequence the redemption of his body, which no longer would be corrupted. As it is, the corruption of the body burdens the soul, and its earthly habitation forces it to think of many things; for the humble beauty of material objects is hurried along in the order in which one thing succeeds another. The reason why corporeal beauty is the lowest beauty is that its parts cannot all exist simultaneously. Some things give place and others succeed them, and all together complete the number of temporal forms and make of them a single beauty. OF TRUE RELIGION 21.41.²⁶

VANITY IS THE POSSESSION OF MATERIAL BODIES.

ORIGEN: Let us see what is the “vanity” to which the creation was subjected. My own opinion is, that this is nothing else than the possession of bodies, for even though the stars are composed of ether they are nevertheless material. This, it seems to me, is the reason why Solomon arraigns the whole bodily universe as being in a way burdensome and as impeding the activity of spirits, thus: “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, said the Preacher; all is vanity.” For, he adds, “I looked and I saw all things that are under the sun, and behold, all is vanity.” ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.7.5.²⁷

VANITY IS THE PURSUIT OF WORLDLY PLEA-

²¹CCL 72:252. ²²Cf. Ps 40:4 (39:5 LXX). ²³Ps 119:37 (118:37 LXX).

²⁴Cf. Ps 33:17 (32:17 LXX). ²⁵FC 65:282-83*. ²⁶LCC 6:244-45.

²⁷OPF 63-64. ²

SURES. VALERIAN: What is that vanity, if not devotion to riches and the pursuit of worldly pleasures? This is confirmed through Solomon, who says, “Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity.” Therefore, dearly beloved, let no one put his confidence in the vanity of this world. That vanity, as you see, is something standing with insecure footing. Devotion to it is short-lived and empty, and its beauty is like smoke in a wind. The comeliness of its countenance is like that which you see when you look on the beauty of that vine which had its early summer blossoms in well-constituted abundance yet cannot bring forth the actual fruit of the promised grape harvest. While it brings forth too much, it incurs the reproach of perpetual sterility. **HOMILY 6.7.**²⁸

VANITY IS BEING BUSIED ABOUT VAIN

THINGS. CHRYSOSTOM: What is vanity of mind? It is the being busied about vain things. And what are those vain things, but all things in the present life? Of them the Preacher says, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” But a person will say, If they be vain and vanity, for what purpose were they made? If they are God’s works, how are they vain? And great is the dispute concerning these things. But listen, beloved: it is not the works of God that he calls vain; God forbid! The heaven is not vain, the earth is not vain—God forbid!—nor the sun, nor the moon and stars, nor our own body. No, all these are “very good.”²⁹ But what is vain? Let us hear the Preacher himself, what he says: “I planted vineyards, I got men singers and women singers, I made pools of water, I had great possessions of herds and flocks, I gathered me also silver and gold, and I saw that these are vanity.”³⁰ **HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS 12.**³¹

1:3 Vanity of Human Labor

PROSPERITY DOES NOT PROFIT OUR LIFE.

AUGUSTINE: So this is what the rich should do: not be haughty in their ideas, nor set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living

God, who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment; that is what they must do. But what are they to do with what they have? Let me tell you what: “Let them be rich in good works, let them be easy givers.”³² After all, they have the wherewithal. Poverty is difficult and grim. “Let them be easy givers”; they have the wherewithal. Let them share, that is, take some notice of their fellow mortals. “Let them share, let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future.” “You see,” he says, “just because I say ‘Let them be easy givers, let them share,’ it doesn’t mean I want them looted, want them stripped naked, want them left empty. I am teaching them how to make a profit, when I point out, ‘Let them store up for themselves.’ I’m not telling them to do this so that they can lose it; I’m showing them where to transfer the account. ‘Let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they lay hold of true life.’”³³ So this one is a false life; let them lay hold of true life. After all, “Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity. What is this great abundance for man in all his toil, at which he toils under the sun?” So true life is to be laid hold of, our investments are to be transferred to the place of true life, so that we may find there what we give here. The one who transforms us also transforms those investments. **SERMON 61.II.**³⁴

WE SHOULD NOT WORK FOR PERISHABLE

THINGS. AUGUSTINE: If it is a vain thing to do good works for the sake of human praise, how much more vain for the sake of getting money, or increasing it, or retaining it, and any other temporal advantage, which comes unto us from without? Since “all things are vanity: what is man’s abundance, with all his toil, wherein he labors under the sun?” For our temporal welfare itself finally we ought not to do our good works but rather for the sake of that everlasting welfare which we hope for, where we may enjoy an

²⁸FC 17:341-42. ²⁹Gen 1:31. ³⁰Cf. Eccles 2:4-8. ³¹NPNF 1 13:109*. ³²1 Tim 6:18. ³³1 Tim 6:18-19. ³⁴WSA 3 3:147.

unchangeable good, which we shall have from God, nay, what God himself is unto us. For if God's saints were to do good works for the sake of this temporal welfare, never would the martyrs of Christ achieve a good work. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 119.38.³⁵

THOSE WHO TOIL FOR THE ETERNAL GAIN MUCH. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Those who are rich in things that are valued in the realm of the natural do not gain anything. They do not gain longevity. Rich and poor are in the same situation: they go through life quickly and do not stay for a long time. Thus "from all the toil at which they toil under the sun" one does not gain anything, no increase in natural qualities. But the one who toils and strives for things that lead to the eternal and to the invisible gains something: A human being becomes a god, an uncertain human being becomes a strong one, a coward becomes courageous. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 11.18.³⁶

1:4 Stability of the Earth and Instability of Human Life

STABILITY OF THE EARTH DEPENDS ON THE WILL OF GOD. AMBROSE: By the will of God, therefore, the earth remains immovable. "The earth stands forever," according to Ecclesiastes, yet it is moved and nods according to the will of God. It does not therefore continue to exist because based on its own foundations. It does not stay stable because of its own props. The Lord established it by the support of his will, because "in his hand are all the ends of the earth."³⁷ The simplicity of this faith is worth all the proffered proofs. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 1.6.22.³⁸

ERROR OF THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN POSSESS THE EARTH. GREGORY OF NYSSA: What good does the possessor of many acres gain in the end, except that the foolish person thinks his own that which never belongs to him?

Seemingly, in his greed he is ignorant that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof,"³⁹ and that "God is king of all the earth."⁴⁰ It is the passion of having which gives people a false title of lordship over that which can never belong to them. "The earth," says the wise Preacher, "abides for ever," ministering to every generation, first one, then another, that is born upon it. People, though they are so little even their own masters, because they are brought into life without knowing it by their Maker's will and before they wish are withdrawn from it, nevertheless in their excessive vanity think that they are life's lords and think that they, now born, now dying, rule that which remains continually. ON VIRGINITY 4.⁴¹

GENERATIONS GO AND COME. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The sun has existed since it was created and will exist and be one and the same as long as God wants it. But if I say . . . that humankind remains forever, I do not mean one and the same human being but the whole succession of generations. The same is true for other mortal beings and plants. . . . One generation goes and one generation comes. The generation that goes is destroyed by death; the one that comes is the one that is born. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES.⁴²

1:5 Sunrise and Sunset

A SECOND ENLIGHTENMENT AT SUNRISE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The sun of righteousness rises in the soul. The beginning of its rise is preparatory. It is a preparatory enlightenment. But when it circles around the whole soul and enlightens it altogether so that nothing is outside the light any more, then the soul is in perfect enlightenment. For often it sets in order to rise again. Sunset and sunrise are in accordance with its progress. And sunset and sunrise are united with respect to its

³⁵NPNF 1 8:566. ³⁶PTA 25:45-47. ³⁷Ps 95:4 (94:4 LXX). ³⁸FC 42:22. ³⁹Ps 24:1 (23:1 LXX). ⁴⁰Ps 47:7 (46:8 LXX). ⁴¹NPNF 2 5:349**. ⁴²PTA 25:49-53.

location. The second enlightenment means sunset with respect to the previous enlightenment, but it means sunrise with respect to the enlightenment now beginning. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 13.12.⁴³

EVEN THE SUN IS VANITY. OLYMPIODORUS: The great sun, when compared with the Sun of righteousness, is vanity. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 1.5.⁴⁴

1:6 *The Wind Blows*

WIND AND SUN. OLYMPIODORUS: According to the narrative he calls the sun wind, due to the speed of its movement. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 1.6.⁴⁵

1:7 *The Rivers and the Sea*

PATTERN OF THE SEA INDICATES OUR JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The sea is a receptacle for water which tends to flow everywhere; water never ceases to flow while the sea never grows larger. What is the goal of the water's course which always fills the unquenchable sea? What is this influx of water which never fills the ever-constant sea? Ecclesiastes speaks like this that he may explain the insubstantiality of our frenzied pursuits which result from elements constituting man's existence. If the sun's course consists in this, it too has no limit; neither is there any succession between day and night, and the earth is condemned to remain ever unmoved. The rivers also labor in vain, for they are consumed by the insatiable sea which receives this constant inflow to no avail. If this is true, what about man who is subject to such elements? Why are we astonished at the rise and fall of a generation which follows a natural course because a generation of men always succeeds the one before it and so forth? What does Ecclesiastes cry out to the church? That you, oh man, who contemplate the universe, should understand your own nature. The wonders you behold in heaven or on earth,

the sun or sea, should help explain your human nature. Sunrise and sunset resemble our human nature because they both have in common the one course [circle] of life. When we come into existence, we later return to our natural place. Once our life sets, our light passes under the earth which then lays hold of it. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 1.⁴⁶

THE SALTINESS OF THE SEA. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: The waters that the earth drank on the first day were not salty. Even if these waters were like the deep on the surface of the earth, they were not yet seas. For it was in the seas that these waters, which were not salty before being gathered together, became salty. When they were sent throughout the entire earth for the earth to drink they were sweet, but when they were gathered into seas on the third day, they became salty, lest they become stagnant due to their being gathered together, and so that they might receive the rivers that enter into them without increasing. For the quantity that a sea requires for nourishment is the measure of the rivers that flow down into it. Rivers flow down into seas lest the heat of the sun dry them up. The saltiness [of the seas] then swallows up [the rivers] lest they increase, rise up and cover the earth. Thus the rivers turn into nothing, as it were, because the saltiness of the sea swallows them up. COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 1.10.2.⁴⁷

THE AWESOME POWER OF GOD MANIFESTED. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: As for the sea, if I had felt no wonder at its size, I should have felt it for its stillness, at the way it stands free within its proper limits. If its stillness had not moved my admiration, its size must have done. Since both aspects move me, I shall praise the power involved in both. What binding force brought the sea together? What causes it to swell yet stay in position, as if in awe of the land its neighbor?

⁴³PTA 25:57. ⁴⁴PG 93:481. ⁴⁵PG 93:484. ⁴⁶McCambly. ⁴⁷FC 91:82-83.

How can it take in all rivers and stay the same through sheer excess of quantity?—I know no other explanation. Why does so great an element have sand as its frontier?⁴⁸ Can natural philosophers, with their futile cleverness, give any account of it, when they actually take the sea's vast measurements with pint size pots of their own ideas? Or shall I give you the short answer from Scripture, the one more credible, more real, than their long arguments? "He made his command a boundary for the face of the waters."⁴⁹ This command is what binds the elemental water. What makes it carry the sailor in his little boat with a little wind—do you not find it a marvelous sight, does not your mind stand amazed at it?—to bind land and sea with business and commerce and unify for humanity such very different things? What springs do the first springs have? Look for them and see if you, a man, can discover or track one down. Who parted plains and hills with rivers and gave them free course? How do we get a miracle from opposites—from a sea that does not get out and rivers that do not stand still? What feeds the waters, what different kinds of food do they get? Some are nourished with rain, others drink with their roots—if I may use a rich metaphor to describe the richness of God. ON THEOLOGY, THEOLOGICAL ORATION 2(28).27.⁵⁰

THE SEA NEVER EXCEEDS ITS CAPACITY.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: You, The time of your struggle is short. Do not be more inanimate than the earth nor more foolish than [beasts] which lack feeling, for you are endowed with reason and the capacity to administer. Rather, as the Apostle says, "Continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of"⁵¹ in steadfastness and constant stability. Since these words refer to the divine commands, "be steadfast and unmovable,"⁵² allow temperance to abide in your life along with firm faith, constant love and stability in every kind of beauty, that you may resemble the earth's eternal stability. If anyone is greedy like the ocean with its expansive, boundedness desire which the inflow of waters cannot satisfy,

let one be cured of his illness by looking upon the ocean. In this way he will not transgress his own bounds in the multitude of waters but will retain the same fullness without the addition of more water. In similar fashion pleasures arising from human nature with its present limit cannot expand its gluttonous appetite to keep pace with their great number; rather, the influx [of pleasures] does not cease even though our capacity for enjoyment is limited. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.⁵³

1:8 *Insatiability of Human Nature*

SINFUL HUMAN NATURE CANNOT BE SATISFIED.

AMBROSE: Therefore incline to him of whom the psalmist says, "He has not taken his soul in vain."⁵⁴ To speak now of the troubles of this life, the person has taken his soul in vain who is constructing the things of the world and building the things of the body. We arise each day to eat and drink; yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing." He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance. We desire each day to know what is new, and what is knowledge itself but our daily sorrow and abasement? DEATH AS A GOOD 7.28.⁵⁵

THE WRITTEN WORD. OLYMPIODORUS: All writings, both of secular and of divine wisdom, yield instruction when effort is applied. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES I.8.⁵⁶

1:9 *Nothing Is New Under the Sun*

REPETITION OF CYCLES IS AN ERROR OF

⁴⁸Jer 5:22. ⁴⁹Job 26:10 LXX. ⁵⁰FGFR 240-41*. ⁵¹2 Tim 3:14. ⁵²1 Cor 15:58. ⁵³GNHE 40-41*. ⁵⁴Ps 24:4 (23:4 LXX). ⁵⁵FC 65:91. ⁵⁶PG 93:485.

PAGAN BELIEF. AUGUSTINE: There are some people who want to twist even a famous passage in the book of Solomon, called Ecclesiastes, into a defense of these recurring cycles of universal dissolution and re-evocation of the past: "What is it that has been? The same thing that shall be. What is it that has been done? The same that shall be done. Nothing under the sun is new, neither is anyone able to say, 'Behold, this is new,' for it has already gone before in the ages that were before us." But here Solomon was speaking either of things he had just been discussing—the succession of generations, the revolution of the sun, the course of rivers—or, at any rate, of those creatures in general that come to life and die. For example, there were people before us, they are with us now, and they shall come after us. And the same is true of animals and plants. Even monstrosities that are abnormal at birth, different as they are among themselves and, in certain cases, unique, nevertheless, inasmuch as they come under the heading of prodigies and monsters, have existed before and will exist again. Consequently, it is nothing new or even of recent date that a monster should be born under the sun. However, there are some who interpret the words to mean that what Solomon had in mind was that, in the predestination of God, everything is already a fact and, in that sense, there is nothing new under the sun.

Far be it from us Christians, however, to believe that these words of Solomon refer to those cycles by which, as these philosophers suppose, the same periods of time and sequence of events will be repeated. For example, the philosopher Plato having taught in a certain age at the school of Athens called the Academy, even so, through innumerable ages of the past at long but definite intervals, this same Plato and the same city, the same school and the same disciples all existed and will all exist again and again through innumerable ages of the future. Far be it from us, I say, to believe this.

For Christ died once for our sins; and "hav-

ing risen from the dead, dies now no more, death shall no longer have dominion over him."⁵⁷ And we after the resurrection "shall ever be with the Lord,"⁵⁸ to whom we say, as the holy psalmist reminds us, "You, Oh Lord, will preserve us: and keep us from this generation forever."⁵⁹ And the verse that follows, I think, may be suitably applied to these philosophers: "The wicked walk round about." These words do not mean that their life will repeatedly recur in cycle after cycle as they think but that here and now the way of their errors, that is, their false doctrine, goes around in circles. CITY OF GOD 12.14.⁶⁰

GOD EXERCISED HIS CREATIVE POWER. ORIGEN: It is probably in this way that, so far as our weakness allows, we shall maintain a reverent belief about God, neither asserting that his creatures were unbegotten and coeternal with him nor that he turned to the work of creation to do good when he had done nothing good before. For the saying that is written, "In wisdom you have made all things,"⁶¹ is a true one. And certainly if "all things have been made in wisdom," then since wisdom has always existed, there have always existed in wisdom, by a prefiguration and preformation, those things which afterwards have received substantial existence. This is, I believe, the thought and meaning of Solomon when he says in Ecclesiastes, "What is it that has been made? The same that is to be. And what is it that has been created? The same that is destined to be created. And there is nothing fresh under the sun. If one should speak of anything and say, Behold, this is new: it already has been, in the ages that were before us." If then particular things which are "under the sun" have already existed in the ages which were before us—since "there is nothing fresh under the sun"—then all universal categories⁶² have forever existed, and some would say even individ-

⁵⁷Rom 6:9. ⁵⁸1 Thess 4:17. ⁵⁹Ps 12:7 (11:8 LXX). ⁶⁰FC 14:268-69*.

⁶¹Ps 104:24 (103:24 LXX). ⁶²Presumably, genera and species.

ual things; but either way, it is clear that God did not begin to create after spending a period in idleness. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.4.5.⁶³

ON THE AGES BEYOND THIS AGE. ORIGEN:

We say that not then for the first time did God begin to work when he made this visible world; but as, after its destruction, there will be another world, so also we believe that others existed before the present came into being. And both of these positions will be confirmed by the authority of Holy Scripture. For that there will be another world after this is taught by Isaiah, who says, "There will be new heavens, and a new earth, which I shall make to abide in my sight, says the Lord."⁶⁴ And that before this world others also existed⁶⁵ is shown by Ecclesiastes, in the words "What is that which has been? Even that which shall be. And what is that which has been created? Even this which is to be created: and there is nothing altogether new under the sun. Who shall speak and declare, Lo, this is new? It has already been in the ages which have been before us." By these testimonies it is established both that there were ages before our own and that there will be others after it. It is not, however, to be supposed that several worlds existed at once but that, after the end of this present world, others will take their beginning. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 3.5.3.⁶⁶

DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT IS MADE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Let no one listening to these words think that much talk and the repetition of words is vanity by the distinction between what is and what had been, for they demonstrate the difference between body and soul. Although the meaning of terms does not differ that much, the text does make a distinction to clearly manifest the difference for you. The soul existed right from the beginning; it had been purified in the past and will appear in the future. God fashioned the human body and will show the resurrection at the proper time, for that which comes after the resurrection was indeed

fashioned first. The resurrection is nothing other than the restoration [*apokatastasis*] of all things to their original state. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.⁶⁷

1:11 No Remembrance of Things Past

AT THE FINAL RESTORATION ALL MEMORY OF EVIL WILL UTTERLY VANISH. GREGORY OF NYSSA: If they are swallowed up in oblivion, do not wonder because the present will suffer the same fate. Because nature tends towards evil, we are forgetful of the good; but when enjoyment of the good returns, oblivion envelopes evil. We have no remembrance of the first and last things which is as though he said that the events which introduced evil after man's original blessed state will erase the memory the last things. No such memory will exist in the future; the last state [*hē eschatē katastasis*] will utterly destroy the memory of evil deeds in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES I.⁶⁸

1:12 King Over Israel in Jerusalem

A KINGLY BIRTH TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL. GREGORY OF NYSSA: We now learn the identity of Ecclesiastes who gathers into one what is scattered and dispersed. He makes one flock and church in order that everyone may hear the Shepherd's lovely voice who bestows life to all. "The words that I speak are spirit and life."⁶⁹ [Christ] calls himself Ecclesiastes that he might be doctor, life, resurrection, light, way, gate, truth and any other benevolent name for humankind.⁷⁰ What does he say? "I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem." At what time? Was it not when God set up a king in holy Mount Zion to proclaim his precepts?⁷¹ Of him the Lord says "You are my son; today I have begotten you."⁷²

⁶³OFP 42-43*. ⁶⁴Is 65:17. ⁶⁵See the previous passage. ⁶⁶OFP 238-39**. ⁶⁷McCambly. ⁶⁸McCambly. ⁶⁹Jn 6:63. ⁷⁰Mt 9:12; Jn 14:6; 11:25; 12:46; 10:7. ⁷¹Ps 2:6-7 LXX. ⁷²Ps 2:7.

The Maker of all things, the eternal Father, said that he begot him today. Thus this temporal name does not refer to [Christ's] eternal essence but to a birth through the flesh in time for man's

salvation. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.⁷³

⁷³McCambly.



AN INVESTIGATION
OF WISDOM
ECCLESIASTES 1:13-18

OVERVIEW: Useless human toil is not necessarily God's fault (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). To assist human beings in their search for wisdom was the purpose of the incarnation (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Poverty of spirit is the opposite of vanity, whereas

wisdom begins in the fear of the Lord (AUGUSTINE, GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Wisdom is true knowledge (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA), which is manifested in a love for eternity (AUGUSTINE). Vanity, by contrast, is the result of materiality (ORIGEN), it

is caused by abuse of God's gift of freedom (GREGORY OF NYSSA), and its charm is short-lived (JOHN OF DAMASCUS). The better way is to direct one's endeavors positively, toward the middle way of virtue, between excess and deficiency (BASIL). After all, God's way of numbering is not our own (EVAGRIUS). Wisdom shows us the way back to the good, as Solomon found (GREGORY OF NYSSA).

1:13 *The Search for Wisdom*

USELESS HUMAN TOIL. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: I thoughtfully examined and wisely learned the nature of everything on earth. I discovered that it was all very complex, because human beings are allowed to toil away on earth, wallowing about uselessly in various kinds of pretentious effort at various times. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 1.13.¹

THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION IS TO ASSIST HUMANS IN THEIR SEARCH FOR WISDOM. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The I think that the true Ecclesiastes next teaches about the great mystery of salvation when God manifested himself in the flesh. "I applied my heart to seek out and examine by wisdom all things done under heaven." The reason for our Lord's dwelling with men is to give his heart over in wisdom to consider his actions done under the sun. For man is not allowed to consider what lies above heaven just as healthy persons do not require doctors.² Evil belongs to the earth. A snake is a reptile which crawls on its belly, eats earth instead of food from heaven, crawls on anything trampled down and is always on the prowl. It watches for man's heel³ and injects poison in those who have lost the power to tread on serpents.⁴ For this reason Ecclesiastes gives his heart over to careful consideration of every activity done under heaven. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.⁵

1:14 *All Human Works Are Vanity*

VANITY IS CONTRADICTED BY POVERTY OF

SPIRIT. AUGUSTINE: We read in Scripture concerning the striving after temporal things, "All is vanity and presumption of spirit," but presumption of spirit means audacity and pride. Usually also the proud are said to have great spirits, and rightly, inasmuch as the wind also is called spirit. And hence it is written, "Fire, hail, snow, ice, spirit of tempest."⁶ But, indeed, who does not know that the proud are spoken of as puffed up, as if swelled out with wind? And hence also that expression of the apostle, "Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies."⁷ And "the poor in spirit" are rightly understood here, as meaning the humble and God-fearing, that is, those who have not the spirit which puffs up. Nor ought blessedness to begin at any other point whatever, if indeed it is to attain unto the highest wisdom. "But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom";⁸ for, on the other hand also, "pride" is entitled "the beginning of all sin."⁹ Let the proud, therefore, seek after and love the kingdoms of the earth, but "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."¹⁰ SERMON ON THE MOUNT 1.1.3.¹¹

VANITY IS THE RESULT OF THE MATERIALITY OF THIS WORLD. ORIGEN: This then is the "vanity" to which the creation was subjected, and above all that creation which is certainly the greatest thing in this world and which holds a distinguished preeminence by reason of its function. That is, the sun, moon and stars are said to have been subjected to vanity, because they were clothed with bodies and set to perform the task of giving light to the human race. And this creation, Scripture says, was subjected to vanity "not of its own will."¹² For it did not undertake a service to vanity by the exercise of free will but in obedience to the wish of him who was subjecting it, because he who

¹GTPE 19. ²Lk 5:31. ³Gen 3:14-15. ⁴Lk 10:19. ⁵McCambly. ⁶Ps 148:8. ⁷1 Cor 8:1. ⁸Ps 111:10 (110:10 LXX). ⁹Sir 10:13. ¹⁰Mt 5:3. ¹¹NPNF 1 6:4*. ¹²Rom 8:20.

subjected it promised those who were being given over unwillingly to vanity that on the fulfillment of their splendid work of service they should be delivered from this bondage of corruption and vanity, when the time of redemption “of the glory of the sons of God”¹³ should have come. Having received this hope, and looking for the fulfillment of this promise, the entire creation now in the meantime “groans together” with us (for it even has sympathy with those whom it serves) and “is in pain together,”¹⁴ while in patience it hopes for what has been promised. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 1.7.5.¹⁵

VANITY IS CAUSED BY ABUSE OF GOD’S GIFT OF FREEDOM. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Ecclesiastes has come to search through his own wisdom those actions done under the sun, their confusion, why things are subject to nonexistence and how that which is insubstantial prevails against being. He knew that “God has given to the sons of men an evil trouble to be vexed with.” This is not a pious deed we can readily understand because God has given an evil to the sons of men in order to trouble them; and so one may attribute the cause of evil to God. . . . A more pious understanding suggests that God bestows upon man the gift of free will which he abused and then became an instrument for sin. This free will is good and subject to no one, while anything subject to necessity should not be counted as good. But any impulse coming from the mind is free; it distracts the soul to choose evil and pulls it down to passion from the lofty honors it had received. . . . An accurate understanding of these verses does not mean that human nature lacks anything unbecoming from God; rather, they censure our power of free choice which in itself is good and a gift bestowed by God to human nature. But as a result of indiscretion, free will inclines towards the opposite way. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.¹⁶

REJECTION OF VANITY. JOHN OF DAMASCUS: So, following the teachings of these blessed

saints, we utterly renounce these corruptible and perishable things of life, wherein may be found nothing stable or constant, or that continues in one stay. But all things are vanity and vexation of spirit, and many are the changes that they bring in a moment, for they are slighter than dreams and a shadow, or the breeze that blows the air. Small and short-lived is their charm, that is after all no charm, but illusion and deception of the wickedness of the world; which world we have been taught to love not at all but rather to hate with all our heart. Yes, and truly it is worthy of hatred and abhorrence; for whatsoever gifts it gives to its friends, these in turn in passion it takes away and shall hand over its victims, stripped of all good things, clad in the garment of shame, and bound under heavy burdens, to eternal tribulation. And those again whom it exalts, it quickly abases to the utmost wretchedness, making them a footstool and a laughing stock for their enemies. Such are its charms, such its bounties. BARLAAM AND JOSEPH 12.109-10.¹⁷

WE HAVE TO ASCEND TO THINGS THAT ARE FIRM AND IMMOVABLE. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: “I have seen everything,” says Ecclesiastes. I have reviewed in my mind all human things, wealth, luxury, power, glory that is not stable, wisdom that eludes us more often than it is mastered; again pleasure, again wisdom, often returning full circle to the same things, delights of the belly, orchards, numbers of slaves, a multitude of possessions, male and female table servants, singing men and singing women, arms, henchmen, nations at one’s feet, revenues flowing in, the pride of royalty, all life’s superfluities and necessities, in which I surpassed all the kings who were before me. And after all this what is his judgment? “All is vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit,” that is, a kind of irrational impulse of soul and distraction of man who has been condemned to this perhaps because of the original fall. But “hear all the conclusion of my

¹³Rom 8:21. ¹⁴Rom 8:22. ¹⁵OFP 64. ¹⁶McCambly. ¹⁷LCL 34:185.

discourse," he says; "fear God."¹⁸ Through this he ceases from perplexity. And this alone is your gain from life here, to be brought through the confusion of things that are seen and unstable to things which are firm and immovable. ON HIS BROTHER ST. CAESARIUS, ORATION 7.19.¹⁹

1:15 *Avoiding Excess and Deficiency*

THE NATURE OF EXCESS AND DEFICIENCY. BASIL THE GREAT: He is upright in heart who does not have his mind inclined to excess or to deficiency but directs his endeavors toward the mean of virtue. He who has turned aside from valor to something less becomes crooked through cowardice, but he who has strained on to greater things inclines toward temerity. Therefore the Scripture calls those "crooked" who go astray from the middle way by excess or by deficiency. For, as a line becomes crooked when its straight-forward direction is deflected, now convexly, now concavely, so also a heart becomes crooked when it is at one time exalted through boastfulness, at another dejected through afflictions and humiliations. Wherefore Ecclesiastes says, "The crooked will not be kept straight." HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS II.7 (PSALM 7).²⁰

GOD'S WAY OF NUMBERING. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The number by which God numbers the saints displays a certain and determined spiritual order, as it is said, "He numbers the multitudes of stars; and calls them all by name."²¹ . . . Now, if David says, the understanding of God is without number,²² it is not as though it were unworthy of God's essence that it cannot be numbered, or because the nature of such a number cannot be comprehended. For, just as the word *invisible* has two meanings: first, when applied to something that by its very nature is invisible (e.g., God), and second, when applied to something that may be visible yet is not normally seen, like the ocean floor because it is hidden under waters; similarly, "innumerable" has two meanings: what cannot be numbered by nature and what cannot be

numbered for some other reason. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 6.I.15.²³

1:16 *Wisdom of Solomon*

WISDOM AS TRUE KNOWLEDGE. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Therefore it is written in Ecclesiastes, "And I added wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem; and my heart saw many things; and besides, I knew wisdom and knowledge, parables and understanding. And this also is the choice of the spirit, because in abundance of wisdom is abundance of knowledge." He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom will be pre-eminently reliant upon knowledge. Now it is written, "Abundance of the knowledge of wisdom will give life to him who is of it."²⁴ And again, what is said is confirmed more clearly by this saying, "All things are in the sight of those who understand"—all things, both hellenic and barbarian; but the one or the other is not all. "They are right to those who wish to receive understanding. Choose instruction, and not silver, and knowledge above tested gold," and prefer also sense to pure gold; "for wisdom is better than precious stones, and no precious thing is worth it."²⁵ STROMATEIS I.13.²⁶

THE WAY BACK TOWARD THE GOOD. GREGORY OF NYSSA: We next learn about the return of a person who has erred and the change from evil to enjoyment of the good. He [Christ] who has been tempted in all things and is without sin²⁷ holds converse with us in our human nature. He who assumed our weakness²⁸ showed us a way out of evil through the infirmities of his human nature. "Instruct me in the Wisdom [Christ] according to the Solomon who was in the flesh which held converse with us." Once familiar with it, we are able to pass judgment on what men pursue. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.²⁹

¹⁸Eccles 12:13. ¹⁹FC 22:19-20. ²⁰FC 46:176-77*. ²¹Ps 147:4 LXX. ²²Cf. Ps 146:5 LXX. ²³SC 397:66-68. ²⁴Eccles 7:12 LXX. ²⁵Prov 8:9-11. ²⁶ANF 2:313*. ²⁷Heb 4:15. ²⁸Mt 8:17. ²⁹McCambly.

1:17 *The Experience of Solomon*

SOLOMON'S LIFE CORRESPONDED TO HIS EXPERIENCE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: It is Solomon is the one speaking here, the third king of Israel whom the Lord had chosen after Saul and David. He received the kingship from his father and extended his rule which brought him renown among the Israelites. Solomon no longer subjected peoples through battle; by conducting himself peacefully and with full authority, he did not devote his energy towards anything not belonging to him. . . . He claimed to know the efforts needed to attain pleasure and accomplished everything which he had enumerated, an experience which taught him that vanity is the common end of men's pursuits. Ecclesiastes sets forth the order in his narrative when during his youth he first had leisure for personal training, for attention to such labors does not indicate laxity. But the Spirit uses free will, a movement proper to our nature, to increase knowledge if a person is to succeed in his endeavors. Thus wisdom grows not by considering reason which closely regards passion and unreason when it comes to that deception arising from corporeal enjoyment; rather it is knowledge about vanity through experience of these endeavors. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.³⁰

1:18 *Relationship of Wisdom to Sorrow*

THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE SPIRIT HAVE WISDOM THAT DOES NOT BRING SORROW. AUGUSTINE: People are accustomed to set a high value on the knowledge of earthly and celestial things. But they are certainly better who prefer the knowledge of themselves to this knowledge. And a mind to which even its own weakness is known is more deserving of praise than one that . . . is ignorant of the course by which it must proceed to reach its own true health and strength. But one who has been aroused by the warmth of the Holy Spirit . . . has already awakened to God.

In his love for [God, such a person] has already felt his own unworthiness and is willing but is not yet strong enough to come to him. And through the light received from [God, this person] takes heed to himself and finds that his own defilement cannot mingle with his purity. [This person] feels it sweet to weep and to beseech God that he may again and again have pity until he has cast off all his misery. [This person also prays] with confidence as having already received the free gift of salvation through his only Savior and enlightener of humankind. For one who so acts and laments, knowledge does not puff up because charity edifies. He has preferred the one knowledge to the other knowledge; he has preferred to know his own weakness more than to know the walls of the world, the foundations of the earth, and the heights of the heavens. And by acquiring this knowledge he has acquired sorrow, the sorrow arising from his wandering away from the desire of his own true country, and from its founder, his own blessed God. ON THE TRINITY 4, PREFACE.³¹

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW MAKES US GUILTY OF SIN. AUGUSTINE: It is evident, then, that the oldness of the letter, in the absence of the newness of the spirit, instead of freeing us from sin, rather makes us guilty by the knowledge of sin. [Thus] it is written in another part of Scripture, "He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow." [It is] not that the law is itself evil, but because the commandment has its good in the demonstration of the letter, not in the assistance of the spirit. And if this commandment is kept from the fear of punishment and not from the love of righteousness, it is kept in a servile manner, not freely, and therefore it is not kept at all. For no fruit is good which does not grow from the root of love. ON THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 26.³²

³⁰McCambly. ³¹FC 45:129-30*. ³²NPNF 1 5:94*.



THE VANITY OF PLEASURE
AND WEALTH
ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

OVERVIEW: Excessive laughter is not appropriate to a life of wisdom and is contrasted with real joy in the Lord (BASIL, LEANDER). Works that have no useful end do not benefit God's kingdom (CHRYSOSTOM), whereas a house built upon good deeds is really built upon Christ as the rock (DIDYMUS), and a person who has transcended this world, especially in concern for the poor, is freed of all care and anxieties (AMBROSE, BEDE). It is not the acuity of the mind but rather the disposition of the soul that is to be praised or condemned (OLYMPIODORUS). Wine leads to drunkenness, slavery is wrong, gold is useless, and usury is pointless. Even activity that is enjoyable disappears when it is accomplished (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Nonetheless, every actualization of potential is a move toward perfection, although the desire for visible things should be appropriate but not consuming. Toil in pursuit of virtue does

have its reward, but toil is useful if only to know what one is rejecting (DIDYMUS).

2:1 *Pleasure Is Tested but Found Wanting*

THE TEST. GREGORY OF NYSSA: When a person has attained this knowledge, he condemns pleasure as vanity. Ecclesiastes next states "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will prove you with mirth, and behold, you have good things, and behold, this also is vanity.'" He does not immediately submit himself to such an experience nor has he tasted a more severe, solemn life to obliterate pleasure; rather, Ecclesiastes experienced such things and pursued a sober, constant course of action which yields wisdom for those who pursue it. Ecclesiastes shrinks away from sense delights because passion does not attract him to these vanities; he believes that knowledge of the true

good confers perception to anyone faithful to it. From the beginning the enemy indulges in laughter and mirth and calls passion anything mad or deranged. Anything else is rightly called laughter for it is irrational and has no purpose such as merriment which is unbecoming to the body such as agitated breathing, commotion of one's entire body, facial contortions, bearing of teeth, gums and palate, twisting of neck and the uncontrollable breaking of a strained voice accompanied by short breaths of air. What can this be except madness? HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.¹

2:2 *Madness of Laughter*

IMMODERATE LAUGHTER IS UNBECOMING.

BASIL THE GREAT: Those who live under discipline should avoid very carefully even such intemperate action as is commonly regarded lightly. Indulging in unrestrained and immoderate laughter is a sign of intemperance, of a want of control over one's emotions, and of failure to repress the soul's frivolity by a stern use of reason. It is not unbecoming, however, to give evidence of merriment of soul by a cheerful smile, if only to illustrate that which is written: "A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance,"² but raucous laughter and uncontrollable shaking of the body are not indicative of a well-regulated soul, or of personal dignity, or self-mastery. This kind of laughter Ecclesiastes also reprehends as especially subversive of firmness of soul in the words: "Laughter I counted error," and again, "As the crackling of thorns burning under a pot, so is the laughter of fools."³ Moreover, the Lord appears to have experienced those emotions that are of necessity associated with the body, as well as those that betoken virtue, as, for example, weariness and compassion for the afflicted; but, so far as we know from the story of the gospel, he never laughed. On the contrary, he even pronounced those unhappy who are given to laughter.⁴ THE LONG RULES 17.⁵

REAL JOY IN THE LORD. LEANDER OF SEVILLE: Let your rejoicing of the heart in God be calm

and moderate, in accordance with the words of the apostle: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice."⁶ In another place, he says, "The fruit of the spirit is joy."⁷ Such happiness does not disturb the mind with the base act of laughter but lifts the soul to the place of rest that is above where you can hear "Enter into the joy of your master."⁸ One can usually tell what is in a nun's heart by her laughter. A nun would not laugh impudently if her heart were pure. A man's face is the mirror of his heart: a nun does not laugh wantonly unless she is wanton in her heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart," says the Lord, "the mouth speaks";⁹ likewise, the face of a nun laughs from the abundance of a vain heart. See what is written about this: "Of laughter I said: 'Mad!' and of mirth: 'What good does this do?'" And again, in the same place: "Let laughter be mingled with sadness, and the end of joy may be sorrow."¹⁰ And the Lord says, "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted."¹¹ And the apostle spoke the truth to those insanely joyful: "Let your laughter be turned into mourning."¹² Flee laughter, therefore, sister, as a sin and change temporal joy into mourning, that you may be blessed if you grieve that you are a sojourner in the world; for those who mourn, according to God, are blessed and shall be comforted. THE TRAINING OF NUNS 21.¹³

2:3 *The Search for the Good*

EQUALITY OF WISH AND FULFILLMENT. GREGORY OF NYSSA: "I," however, said Ecclesiastes, "have sought the good proper to youth and every other stage of life. We are never satiated; rather, appetite is common to us all while passion flows with enjoyment and is not circumscribed by the attainment of its desire." But inasmuch as we perceive the good in pleasure, any delight sets desire aflame, for pleasure is united to desire and is

¹McCamby. ²Prov 15:13. ³Eccles 7:6. ⁴Lk 6:25. ⁵FC 9:271. ⁶Phil 4:4. ⁷Gal 5:22. ⁸Mt 25:21. ⁹Mt 12:34. ¹⁰Prov 14:13. ¹¹Mt 5:4. ¹²Jas 4:9. ¹³FC 62:214-15.

always attractive to each stage of our growth. Neither is the good associated with instability; it provides instruction and is a model in both prosperous and calamitous situations whether they occur at night or day, travelling, on the sea, at work or rest, ruling or serving or in any of life's circumstances. Neither does the good suffer diminution or grown in anything which may befall us whether it happens to be harmful or beneficial. In my opinion this is the true good which Solomon seeks and which men do under the sun while they are alive. For me it is nothing more than the work of faith common to all men who wish to have it abide throughout their entire lives. This is the good work done in us in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever. Amen. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 2.¹⁴

NOT THE MIND BUT THE SOUL. OLYMPIODORUS: It is not the acuity of the mind but rather the disposition of the soul, being employed beneficially or shamefully in making use of the gift, which is to be praised or condemned. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 2.3.¹⁵

2:4 Vanity of Worldly Labor

SOLOMON'S INVOLVEMENT IN WORLDLY PLEASURE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: But if from personal experience Ecclesiastes condemns the apparent existence [of vanity] to make us avoid a similar situation, or if he freely rejects the enjoyment coming from pleasure in order to diligently train his senses through unpleasant experiences, let us willingly pay attention to his words and draw our own conclusions. We will now respond to anyone who claims that Ecclesiastes' experience results in pleasure. Persons who traverse the sea and explore its depths in the hope of finding pearls exert themselves in profitable labor, not in pleasure. If Solomon resembles these men and devotes himself to fishing, he becomes submerged in pleasure; he is not filled with sea salt which to me represents pleasure but seeks that which is profitable for his mind in these depth.

HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 3.¹⁶

VAIN IS THAT WHICH HAS NO USEFUL END.

CHRYSOSTOM: "Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity." Hear also what the prophet says, "He heaps up riches and knows not who shall gather them."¹⁷ Such is "vanity of vanities," your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts and your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end. Riches are vain when they are spent upon luxury; but they cease to be vain when they are "dispersed and given to the needy."¹⁸ HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS 12.¹⁹

ON VANITY AND THE KINGDOM. CHRYSOSTOM: Hear what Solomon says, who knew the present world by actual experience. "I built houses, I planted vineyards, I made gardens, and orchards and pools of water. I gathered also silver and gold. I got myself men singers and women singers, and flocks and herds." There was no one who lived in greater luxury or higher glory. There was no one so wise or so powerful, no one who saw all things so succeeding to his heart's desire. What then? He had no enjoyment from all these things. What after all does he say of it himself? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him, and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth; and what is based upon a solid rock, where there is no old age or decline but all things bloom and flourish, without decay, or waxing old, or approaching dissolution. Let us, I beseech you, love God with genuine affection, not from fear of hell but from desire of the kingdom. For what is comparable to seeing Christ? Surely nothing! What to the enjoyment of those good things? Surely nothing! Well may there be nothing [com-

¹⁴McCambly. ¹⁵PG 93:493. ¹⁶McCambly. ¹⁷Ps 39:6 (38:7 LXX). ¹⁸Ps 112:9 (111:9 LXX). ¹⁹NPNF 1 13:109*.

parable]; for “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him.”²⁰ *HOMILIES ON I TIMOTHY 15.*²¹

HOMES BUILT UPON GOOD DEEDS ARE BUILT UPON CHRIST AS THE ROCK. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: If one wants to understand houses as good deeds, then every good deed is the house of its owner. Those who “hear the words of Jesus and do them” . . . build their foundation on a rock.²² Since virtue as a whole is one, one who strives after it builds one house, establishing it upon the rock, upon God’s unbreakable Word, that is, upon Christ. *COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 35.29.*²³

REAL JOY COMES WITH TEARS. CHRYSOSTOM: Serve God with tears, that you may be able to wash away your sins. I know that many mock us, saying, “Shed tears.” Therefore it is a time for tears. I know also that they are disgusted, who say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”²⁴ “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” It is not I that say it, but he who had had the experience of all things says thus: “I built for me houses, I planted vineyards, I made me pools of water, [I had] men servants and women servants.” And what then after all these things? “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Let us mourn therefore, beloved, let us mourn in order that we may laugh indeed, that we may rejoice indeed in the time of unmixed joy. For with this joy [here] grief is altogether mingled, and never is it possible to find it pure. But that is simple and undeceiving joy: it has nothing treacherous, nor any admixture. *ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 15.9.*²⁵

VINEYARDS AND DRUNKENNESS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: We correctly assume that the text [Ecclesiastes] offers further elucidation to what we have just read, that is, mental incoherence and the indignity of drunkenness. “I enlarged my work, built my houses” to which Ecclesiastes adds “I planted my vineyards.” The words “I enlarged”

and what follows commonly mean abundance. The text does not mean the expansion of personal needs by the planting of vines. “I planted my vineyards,” that is, I have provided material to burn fuel through the increase of pleasures because my mind sank low just as strong drink covers the mind with earth. “I planted my vines.” I have not exercised self-control, Ecclesiastes says, like the drunken Noah because this lovely plant is both an object of pity and ridicule after it is stripped. The more well-disposed sons of Noah pitied their father’s indecency while others laughed and ridiculed him. Vineyards contain an entire list of passions which are aggravated by wine, for who does not know that an immoderate use of wine fuels undiscipline? It includes a multitude of pleasures, youthful outrage, unbecoming old age, disgrace for women, a drug for madness, insanity, obnoxiousness for the soul, death to the mind and alienation from virtue. Drunkenness produces unreasonable laughter and crying, spontaneous tears, hollow boasting, irrational fear, indifference to fear, no reason for arrogance, thoughtless generosity and the promise of unfulfilled work. We may omit further unbecoming behavior such as indecent drowsiness, drunken stupor, unsteady feet and the twisting of one’s neck which cannot remain steady. What kind of abomination makes a person commit incest with one’s daughter? How was Lot deceived to perpetrate a deed of which he was unaware?²⁶ What new names were mysteriously given to those children? How did the mothers of such a polluted birth become sisters of their own children? How did a son have both a father and grandfather? Did not wine, which makes the mind irrational, cause this tragedy of disobedience? Did not inebriation form the subject of this story and its excesses contribute to the invention of fables? *HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 3.*²⁷

2:6 Pools for Water

²⁰1 Cor 2:9. ²¹NPNF 1 13:462*. ²²Mt 7:24. ²³PTA 25:169. ²⁴Is 22:13; 1 Cor 15:32. ²⁵NPNF 1 14:442*. ²⁶Gen 19:30-38.

²⁷McCambly.

ALLEGORICAL MEANING OF POOLS THAT SOLOMON MADE. AMBROSE: With reference to the natural sense, you find it said in Ecclesiastes, "I made for myself pools of water to water from them a flourishing woodland." And do not be concerned that he said "pools" instead of "a well," because Moses said "the Well of Room-enough." For the man who has transcended this world with a pious mind is freed of all care and anxieties. There Ecclesiastes says "pools" with reason, for he sees that there is no abundance under the sun,²⁸ but if anyone wishes to abound, let him abound in Christ.²⁹ There remains for us the well in the mystical sense, and we find it in the Canticle of Canticles, where the Scripture says, "the fountain of gardens, the well of living water which runs with a strong stream from Lebanon."³⁰ Indeed if you pursue the depth of the mysteries, the well appears to you to be mystical wisdom set in the deep, as it were. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 4.25-26.³¹

2:7 Male and Female Slaves

WHY SLAVERY IS WRONG. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Among those things he includes is an expensive home, many vineyards, beautiful gardens, pools and orchards, do we find a person who regards himself as lord over his fellow man? "I obtained servants, maidens, servants born to me in my house." Do you see here a pride which makes false pretensions? Such words as these rise up against God. As prophecy has told us,³² all things serve [God] whose power is over them. As for the person who appropriates to himself what belongs to God and attributes to himself power over the human race as if he were its lord, what other arrogant statement transgressing human nature makes this person regard himself as different from those over whom he rules? . . . You have forgotten the limit of your authority which consists in jurisdiction over brutish animals. Scripture says that man shall rule birds, beasts, fish, four-footed animals and reptiles.³³ How can you transgress the servitude bestowed upon you and raise

yourself against man's freedom by stripping yourself of the servitude proper to beasts? . . . Man, who was created as lord over the earth, you have put under the yoke of servitude as a transgressor and rebel against the divine precept. You have forgotten the limit of your authority which consists in jurisdiction over brutish animals. . . . He who knows human nature says that the world is not an adequate exchange for man's soul. When the Lord of the earth bought man, he acquired nothing more precious. He will then proclaim this surpassing possession along with the earth, island, sea and everything in them. What is the deposit God puts down? What will he receive from the contract by which he has received possession? . . . How can you who are equal in all things have superiority so that as man, you consider yourself as man's ruler and say "I have servants and maidens" as if they were goats or cattle? When Ecclesiastes said that "I have servants and maidens" he also speaks of his prosperity in flocks and herds: "I also had abundant possessions of flocks and herds," both of which were subject to his authority. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 4.³⁴

2:8 Silver and Gold

GOLD INDICATES THINGS OF THE SPIRIT, SILVER THE SPOKEN WORD AND ITS VIRTUE.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: In many places of the divine teaching the Spirit and spiritual things are expressed by the image of gold, the spoken word and its virtue by the image of silver. "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver,"³⁵ that is, his spoken word and everything which he teaches by this spoken word. In the same way the following saying is to be understood: "The promises³⁶ of the Lord are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground."³⁷ But the spirit is gold. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 39.19.³⁸

²⁸See Eccles 9:6. ²⁹1 Cor 1:31. ³⁰Song 4:15. ³¹FC 65:26. ³²Ps 119:91 (118:91 LXX). ³³Gen 1:26. ³⁴McCambly. ³⁵Prov 10:20. ³⁶Gk *logia*. ³⁷Ps 12:6 (11:7 LXX). ³⁸PTA 25:189.

THE USELESSNESS OF GOLD. GREGORY OF NYSSA: What is more harmful than gold mixed with earth in those locations where the Creator had originally placed it? What is more advantageous for you than the earth's bounty which the Creator has made? Do not fruit trees contribute to your nourishment? Then why do you violate the bounds of authority? Show what the Creator has bestowed upon you such as mining, digging, burning and gathering what you have not scattered. This is not an accusation against gathering metal from the earth to manufacture money but since the mind cannot be free of avarice, Ecclesiastes adds "The special treasures of kings and princes." Kings gather wealth from provinces, a clear indication that they impose burdens, collect taxes and take money from their subjects. And so Ecclesiastes says that he gathers gold and silver. But whether or not this is true, I know that a great benefit lies in store for the person who collects such material possessions. Let us exchange neither a mina, drachma or talent with avaricious persons; instead, let us hasten to turn everything into gold. As soon as possible let us exchange the earth, sand, mountains plains and vales for this material. What contribution do these have for happiness? If one sees in the universe what he now beholds on a small scale, how can such wealth benefit the soul or body? How can gold make a person wise, ingenious, contemplative, skilled, dear to God, pure, lacking passion and free from evil? Or if this is not the case, what good is there in being strong in body or in seeing one's life prolonged for many years and free from illness and harm? However, no one is so vain nor inattentive to human nature to realize that these benefits are available for men even though a great amount of money is available for everyone. We now observe many wealthy persons living pitiful lives; if it were not for people capable of healing them, they would not deem life worth living. If neither body nor soul benefits from our opinion of gold's abundance, then how much more futile is it to prove gold's value to persons who possess it! For what material

advantage is our lack of taste, smell, hearing or the sense of touch? As for me, let no one offer food or clothing in exchange for gold. The person who gives bread or clothing for gold exchanges a benefit for something useless in order to live, whereas anyone who takes nourishing food instead of gold lives. What profit, advice, lesson, warning or consolation for bodily pains can we derive from such material aggrandizement? A greedy person counts money, stores it up, signs documents, seals them, denies requests and swears falsely to another unfaithful person. Such is his happiness, the goal of his efforts and pleasure, as long as prosperity fuels his false oaths. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 4.³⁹

THE CASE AGAINST USURY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Is there any beautiful object worth pursuing which brings neither health to the body nor relief to pain? And what about deceived persons who cling to gold with their whole heart even though such possessions trouble their consciences? What do they promise themselves when they have something of so great a value? If they could change gold's substance, would they also desire to change their humanity into gold, a substance which lacks reason, intelligence and sensation as well as being pale in color, heavy, speechless and without soul and feeling? I do not think they would choose these things nor crave after gold. If people of sound mind curse the properties of inanimate nature, what insanity makes them commit murder and steal to possess such a useless object? Not only do they carry this out, but they fail to see how it differs from the fruit [tokos] of evil thoughts, robbery or murder. How does a burglar differ from other robbers when he establishes himself as lord by committing murder or when he possesses what does not belong to him through usury [tokos]? . . . Anyone who forcefully takes or steals provisions is a violent and rapacious person, but the person who

³⁹McCambly.

reveals in public the injustice he committed in contracts and so bears bitter witness to the distress it caused and who acknowledges his transgression is loving, kind, a guardian and the like. Gain which results from stealing is called theft, a euphemism for the bitter deprivation of a debtor. Such miserable persons are indeed despicable: "I collected for myself both silver and gold," but a wise person learns from what Ecclesiastes has listed and enumerated. In this way we may learn from his experience of the need to guard against evil before its assault and not to be associated with thieves and harmful beasts by taking heed of such dangers before they occur. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 4.⁴⁰

HARMONY COMES FROM THE CHOIR DIRECTOR WHO IS THE SAVIOR OF SOLOMON. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: As the choir directors assign a place and a pitch to each male and female member of the choir so that a harmony of sound emerges, so those who sing to God and do so in harmony have the Savior himself as choir director. Or the [choir director could also be the] wise man, who here is Solomon, if we understand him in his role as wise man. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 41.10.⁴¹

2:9 Greater Excellence Than Before

ACTUALIZATION OF POTENTIALITY IS MOVING TOWARD PERFECTION. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The wise person always finds himself "increasing" when he prospers. But in life, it is the last and the first thing to reach perfection. In Scripture it is said, "When human beings have finished, they are just beginning."⁴² Of course, even if human beings reach the perfection possible in this life, still, as it is said, "We know only in part."⁴³ In the activity of "increasing" there is always something virtuous. . . . [The prophets and Moses] prophesied what Jesus would do and teach. But Jesus fulfilled the prophecy. The actualization of potentialities is always an "increase." These prepared the way, but he has perfected the

way when he de-clared about himself: "I am the way, the truth."⁴⁴ And he says to his disciples: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees."⁴⁵ In this you see that Jesus' disciples had more righteousness than the previous ones. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 42.24.⁴⁶

2:10 My Heart Rejoiced

DESIRE FOR VISIBLE THINGS SHOULD BE APPROPRIATE BUT NOT CONSUMING. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: In the literal sense the following is meant: If I desired something among the things in the visible world, I did not keep my eyes from them. I got everything that I longed for. John says in his letter: "The desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches comes not from the Father but from the world."⁴⁷ Even if they do "not come from the Father" as the gifts of grace and of the Spirit, they are nevertheless from God. Desire for visible things, however, should not be consuming but should instead be appropriate to that which is desired. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 43.23.⁴⁸

THE HEART INDICATES REASON. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: "Heart" does not here signify the organ but reason. In a different passage [we read]: "Blessed are the pure in heart."⁴⁹ This means with regard to reason. And: "Listen to me, you stubborn of heart."⁵⁰ The heart thus understood does not need to be "kept from pleasure." It derives pleasure from appropriate views and meditations based on knowledge. By knowledge I mean knowledge that is in accordance with God. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 44.17.⁵¹

TOIL IN THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE HAS ITS REWARD. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: As is well known, the person who toils for something in his

⁴⁰McCambly. ⁴¹PTA 25:197. ⁴²Sir 18:7. ⁴³1 Cor 13:9. ⁴⁴Jn 14:6.

⁴⁵Mt 5:20. ⁴⁶PTA 25:205-7. ⁴⁷1 Jn 2:16. ⁴⁸PTA 25:211. ⁴⁹Mt 5:8.

⁵⁰Is 46:12. ⁵¹PTA 25:215.

heart suffers if he does not succeed with it. Ecclesiastes thus wants to say: I did not fail in any of the things I hoped for in my toil. Further: The person who strives for knowledge and pursues virtue “toils.” . . . The person who toils for the things that are useful for the soul and that adorn the inner person says about himself: “I found pleasure in all my toil.” COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 44.23.⁵²

SELF-INDULGENCE. BEDE: They nourish their hearts in self-indulgence who, according to the word of Ecclesiastes, do not prevent their heart from enjoying every wish and from delighting itself in the things which they have prepared. And they count it their due if they themselves make use of their own labors, having no care for the support and solace of the poor. COMMENTARY ON JAMES 5.5.⁵³

2:11 *All Things Considered*

TOIL CAN BE USEFUL IF ONLY TO KNOW WHAT ONE IS REJECTING. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: My hands are busy and tools fit for work. They toil and are active. And I saw that all that has been created by these visible hands and their activities, was vanity. . . . This kind of toil is to be rejected indeed—it is vanity. And still, most human beings act vainly. Ecclesiastes counts himself among these people; he is himself a human being. I said it already: No one who talks against wealth is heard if he is poor himself. But one who teaches this needs to have experienced all these human things himself. A teaching thus only reaches its goal and is successful if he who delivers it is acquainted with what he is rejecting. He thereby shows that he himself is able to

handle them in an appropriate way. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 45.4.⁵⁴

“UNDER THE SUN” AND “IN THE SUN.” DIDYMUS THE BLIND: A person who is enlightened by the “sun of righteousness” is not “under” it but “in” it. Thus it is said in the Gospel: “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father,”⁵⁵ not “under” the sun. If a person says about himself that he is a Christian and enlightened by the true light, by the “sun of righteousness,” and still concentrates his actions on earthly things and strives after them (and we all are for the most part like these people) this person is “under the sun.” If he is “under the sun” in this way, he has no gain. Even if he quotes much from Scripture but does not act accordingly, he has no gain. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 46.7.⁵⁶

A SUMMARY THAT ENDS IN FUTILITY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: When tracing formless letters in water, this act of writing only has existence while we perform it because our hand always follows the water’s surface and smoothes over the impressions just made. Our exertions and energy on behalf of pleasure are similar. Once the action ceases, pleasure is blotted out and nothing remains; neither do those persons who have experienced pleasure have any trace of it. Such is the meaning of Ecclesiastes’ words when he says that nothing remains under the sun for those who labor, for their end is vanity. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 4.⁵⁷

⁵²PTA 25:215-17. ⁵³CS 82:57. ⁵⁴PTA 25:217-19. ⁵⁵Mt 13:43.

⁵⁶PTA 25:225. ⁵⁷McCambly.



THE CONTRAST BETWEEN
WISDOM AND FOLLY
ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

OVERVIEW: Evil is deprivation of the Good and the same as nonexistence (GREGORY OF NYSSA). As far as light excels darkness, so wisdom excels foolishness (CHRYSOSTOM), but the love of money is a foolishness that will never satisfy (AMBROSE). Those who are wise will not share the fate of those who are foolish (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). The kingdom of heaven and its virtues are worth far more than the lure of temporal possessions (ATHANASIUS). Far better it is to care for the or-

phan and the widow (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS).

2:12 *Wisdom and Madness and Folly*

EVIL IS DEPRIVATION OF THE GOOD AND THE SAME AS NONEXISTENCE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: He teaches human wisdom, namely, the following of true wisdom and presents those things which have substance and are not subject to vanity. In-

deed, this is the summit of human wisdom. In my opinion true wisdom and counsel are simply another kind of wisdom which provides for creation by which God makes all things. As the prophet says, "You have made all things in wisdom."¹ However, Christ is the power wisdom of God in whom all things are made and ordained.² . . . "After I have seen these things," Ecclesiastes says, "and judged in a scale being with non-being, I discovered the difference between wisdom and foolishness as when I had compared light with darkness. It seems to me that this example is a favorable judgment for that which is beautiful." Because darkness has no substance while light does (if nothing obstructs the sun's rays, we have no darkness), this example shows that evil does not exist by itself but is a deprivation of the good, while the good always remains fully itself and is not preceded by deprivation. However, anything contrary to the good lacks substance; it cannot exist by itself nor be complete because evil is a deprivation, not a substance. Therefore the difference between light and darkness, wisdom and foolishness, is similar. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 5.³

2:13 *Light Is to Darkness As Wisdom Is to Folly*

LOVE OF MONEY AS DARKNESS. CHRYSOSTOM: And what is the use of understanding, you will say, to the poor person? As might be expected you are ignorant; for neither does the blind person know what is the advantage of light. Listen to Solomon, saying, "As far as light excels darkness, so does wisdom excel folly."

But how shall we instruct him that is in darkness? For the love of money is darkness, permitting nothing that is to appear as it is, but otherwise. For much as one in darkness, though he should see a golden vessel, though a precious stone, though purple garments, supposes them to be nothing, for he does not see their beauty. So also he that is covetous, knows not as he ought the beauty of those things that are worthy of our

care. Disperse then I pray you the mist that arises from this passion, and then will you see the nature of things.

But nowhere do these things so plainly appear as in poverty, nowhere are those things so disproved which seem to be, and are not, as in self-denial. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 83.3.⁴

2:14 *The Eyes of the Wise Person*

ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HUMAN BODY. AMBROSE: Let us make note of the fact that the body of a person is constructed like the world itself. As the sky is preeminent over air, earth and sea, which serve as members of the world, so we observe that the head has a position above the other members of our body. In the same way, the sky stands supreme among the other elements, just as a citadel amid the other outposts in a city's defense. In this citadel dwells what might be called regal Wisdom, as stated in the words of the prophet: "The eyes of a wise man are in his head." That is to say, this position is better protected than the others and from it strength and prevision are brought to bear on all the rest. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 6.9.55.⁵

CHRIST AND THE WISE PERSON. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: If we think about "eyes" in the visible sense, then (one can say) that both the foolish and the wise have eyes in their head. The wise [person], insofar as he is wise, turns upwards to Christ, his head. Thus it is written: "Christ is the head of every man."⁶ The head of the wise is the mind; therefore it is written: "But we have the mind of Christ."⁷ COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 48.23.⁸

2:16 *No Memory Endures of the Wise or of the Foolish*

THE WISE DO NOT SHARE THE FATE OF THE

¹Ps 104:24 (103:24 LXX). ²1 Cor 1:24. ³McCambly. ⁴NPNF 1 10:500*. ⁵FC 42:268*. ⁶1 Cor 11:3. ⁷1 Cor 2:16. ⁸PTA 25:239-41.

STUPID. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: A wise person and a foolish person have nothing in common, either in terms of human remembrance or in terms of divine recompense. As for human works, the end already overtakes them all while they still seem to be beginning. But a wise person never shares the same fate as a stupid person. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 2.16.⁹

2:17 *Hatred of This Life*

WE SHALL NEVER BE SATISFIED. AMBROSE: Therefore incline to him of whom the psalmist says, "He has not taken his soul in vain."¹⁰ To speak now of the troubles of this life, the person has taken his soul in vain who is constructing the things of the world and building the things of the body. We arise each day to eat and drink; yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing."¹¹ He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance. DEATH AS A GOOD 7:28.¹²

2:18 *Bequeathed to the One Who Follows*

WEALTH PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL. ATHANASIUS: If the whole earth is not worth the kingdom of heaven, surely he who has left a few fields leaves nothing, as it were; even if he has given up a house or much gold, he ought not to boast nor grow weary. Moreover, we should consider that if we do not relinquish these things for virtue's sake, we leave them behind later when we die and often, as Ecclesiastes reminds us, to those to whom we do not wish to leave them. Why, then,

do we not relinquish them for the sake of virtue, so that we may inherit a kingdom? LIFE OF ST. ANTHONY 17.¹³

2:25 *Eat and Enjoy*

PRAISE GOD FOR ALL GIFTS. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: We exhort, therefore, the widows and orphans to partake of those things that are bestowed upon them with all fear and all pious reverence, and to return thanks to God who gives food to the needy, and to lift up their eyes to him. For, "Which of you shall eat, or who shall drink without him? For he opens his hand and fills every living thing with his kindness: giving wheat to the young men, and wine to the maidens, and oil for the joy of the living, grass for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men, flesh for the wild beasts, seeds for the birds, and suitable food for all creatures."¹⁴ Wherefore the Lord says, "Consider the fowls of heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, and your Father feeds them. Are not you much better than they? Be not therefore solicitous, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? For your Father knows that you have need of all these things."¹⁵ Since you therefore enjoy such a providential care from him and are partakers of the good things that are derived from him, you ought to return praise to him that receives the orphan and the widow, to Almighty God, through his beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord; through whom glory be to God in spirit and truth forever. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 4.1.5.¹⁶

⁹GTPE 43. ¹⁰Ps 24:4 (23:4 LXX). ¹¹Eccles 1:8. ¹²FC 65:91*. ¹³FC 15:151. ¹⁴Ps 144:16 LXX; Zech 9:17 LXX; Ps 104:14-15 (103:14-15 LXX). ¹⁵Mt 6:26, 31-32. ¹⁶ANF 7:434*.



A SEASON FOR
EVERYTHING
ECCLESIASTES 3:1-9

OVERVIEW: Everything has its own time, just as there was an appropriate time for the apostles to proclaim Jesus as Messiah (BASIL, CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). At all times you should be engaged upon the work of your salvation, because every time is suitable for a life pleasing to God (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Every time is also suitable for prayer and continual remembrance, although theological discussions should be reserved for times that are proper (BASIL, GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). Also there are times to rejoice and times to weep, a time to live and a time to die (CAESARIUS, ATHANASIUS), and weeping and laughing each have different meanings (DIDYMUS). After all, death follows birth, as Exodus follows Genesis. Just as mourning is for the body and dancing for the soul, so now is more a time for weeping and the future a time for laughter (GREGORY OF NYSSA). In baptism death and birth coincide at the same time (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), and this can be seen also in Jesus' birth and death (GREGORY OF ELVIRA), whereas in marriage there is a time for love and a time for abstinence (TWELVE PATRIARCHS). Even the story of Jerusalem, like a booth in a vineyard, is an example of a time to keep and a time to cast away

(GREGORY OF ELVIRA). To cast off the law, likewise, can be seen as a parallel to death by martyrdom (DIDYMUS). Every time, however, is the right time to seek the Lord (GREGORY OF NYSSA), and one can always embrace wisdom (DIDYMUS). There is also a time for silence and a time to speak (AMBROSE, GREGORY THE GREAT), although the way to wisdom is through silence (BEDE). We should be silent about God's being, but we can speak about God's activity. We must love God and hate evil, but remember that virtues and vices can at times be loved and at other times be hated (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Every soul, after all, has a reprehensible companion and a praiseworthy one (DIDYMUS).

3:1 *Everything Has Its Time*

EVERY TIME IS SUITABLE FOR PRAYER. BASIL THE GREAT: It is necessary to bear in mind that for certain other tasks a particular time is allotted, according to the words of Ecclesiastes: "All things have their season." For prayer and psalmody, however, as also, indeed, for some other duties, every hour is suitable, that, while our hands are busy at their tasks, we may praise

God sometimes with the tongue (when this is possible or, rather, when it is conducive to edification); or, if not, with the heart, at least, in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, as it is written.¹ Thus in the midst of our work we can fulfill the duty of prayer, giving thanks to him who has granted strength to our hands for performing our tasks and cleverness to our minds for acquiring knowledge, and for having provided the materials, both that which is in the instruments we use and that which forms the matter of the arts in which we may be engaged, praying that the work of our hands may be directed toward its goal, the good pleasure of God. *THE LONG RULES* 37.²

WHY THE APOSTLES WAITED TO PROCLAIM JESUS AS MESSIAH.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: When, however, the disciple had professed his faith, he charged them, it says, and commanded them to tell it to no one: “for the Son of man,” he said, “is about to suffer many things, and be rejected, and killed, and the third day he shall rise again.”³ And yet how was it not rather the duty of disciples to proclaim him everywhere? For this was the very business of those appointed by him to the apostleship. But as the sacred Scripture says, “There is a time for everything.” There were things yet unfulfilled which must also be included in their preaching of him, such as were the cross, the passion, the death in the flesh, the resurrection from the dead, that great and truly glorious sign by which testimony is borne of him that Emmanuel is truly God and by nature the Son of God the Father. For that he utterly abolished death, and effaced destruction, and spoiled hell, and overthrew the tyranny of the enemy, and took away the sin of the world, and opened the gates above to the dwellers upon earth, and united earth to heaven; these things proved him to be, as I said, in truth God. He commanded them, therefore, to guard the mystery by a seasonable silence until the whole plan of the dispensation should arrive at a suitable fulfillment. *COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY* 49.⁴

THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE

DONE IN PROPER TIME. **GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS:** We ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath; and if the expression is permissible, we ought to do nothing else. Yea, I am one of those who entirely approve that Word which bids us meditate day and night, and tell at eventide and morning and noon day, and praise the Lord at every time;⁵ or, to use Moses’ words, whether a person lie down, or rise up, or walk by the way, or whatever else he is doing⁶—and by this recollection we are to be molded to purity. So that it is not the continual remembrance of God that I would hinder, but only the talking about God; nor even that as in itself wrong, but only when unreasonable; nor all teaching, but only want of moderation. As of even honey, repletion and satiety, though it be of honey, produce vomiting. As Solomon says and I think, there is a time for everything, and that which is good ceases to be good if it be not done in a good way; just as a flower is quite out of season in winter, and just as a man’s dress does not become a woman, nor a woman’s a man; and as geometry is out of place in mourning, or tears at a carousal. Shall we in this instance alone disregard the proper time, in a matter in which most of all due season should be respected? Surely not, my friends and brethren (for I will still call you brethren, though you do not behave like brothers). Let us not think so nor yet, like hot-tempered and hard-mouthed horses, throwing off our rider reason, and casting away reverence, that keeps us within due limits, run far away from the turning point. But let us philosophize within our proper bounds and not be carried away into Egypt, nor be swept down into Assyria, nor sing the Lord’s song in a strange land.⁷ By this I mean before any kind of audience, strangers or kindred, hostile or friendly, kindly or the reverse, who watch what we do with great care, and would like the spark of what is wrong in us to become a flame, and secretly kindle and fan

¹Col 3:16. ²FC 9:308. ³Lk 9:22. ⁴CGSL 221*. ⁵Ps 1:2; 55:17 (54:18 LXX); 34:1 (33:1 LXX). ⁶Deut 6:7; 11:19. ⁷Ps 137:4 (136:4 LXX).

it and raise it to heaven with their breath and make it higher than the Babylonian flame which burned up everything around it. For since their strength lies not in their own dogmas, they hunt for it in our weak points. And therefore they apply themselves to our, shall I say "misfortunes" or "failings," like flies to wounds. But let us at least be no longer ignorant of ourselves or pay too little attention to the due order in these matters. And if it be impossible to put an end to the existing hostility, let us at least agree upon this, that we will utter mysteries under our breath and holy things in a holy manner, and we will not cast to profane ears that which may not be uttered, nor give evidence that we possess less gravity than those who worship demons, and serve shameful fables and deeds; for they would sooner give their blood to the uninitiated than certain words. But let us recognize that as in dress and diet and laughter and demeanor there is a certain decorum, so there is also in speech and silence; since among so many titles and powers of God, we pay the highest honor to the Word. Let even our disputings then be kept within bounds. **AGAINST THE EUNOMIANS, THEOLOGICAL ORATION 1(27).5.**⁸

EVERY TIME IS SUITABLE FOR LIFE PLEASING TO GOD. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: Sow in good season, and gather together, and open your barns when it is the time to do so; and plant in season, and let the clusters be cut when they are ripe, and launch boldly in spring, and draw your ship on shore again at the beginning of winter, when the sea begins to rage. And let there be to you also a time for war and a time for peace; a time to marry, and a time to abstain from marrying; a time for friendship, and a time for discord, if this be needed; and in short a time for everything, if you will follow Solomon's advice. And it is best to do so, for the advice is profitable. But the work of your salvation is one upon which you should be engaged at all times; and let every time be to you the definite one for baptism. If you are always passing over today and waiting for tomorrow, by

your little procrastinations you will be cheated without knowing it by the evil one, as his manner is. Give to me, he says, the present, and to God the future; to me your youth, and to God old age; to me your pleasures, and to him your uselessness. How great is the danger that surrounds you. How many the unexpected mischances. War has expended you, or an earthquake overwhelmed you, or the sea swallowed you up. Or a wild beast carried you off, or a sickness killed you, or a crumb going the wrong way (a most insignificant thing, but what is easier than for a man to die, though you are so proud of the divine image), or a too freely indulged drinking bout. Or a wind knocked you down, or a horse ran away with you, or a drug maliciously scheming against you, or perhaps was found to be deleterious when meant to be wholesome. Or [there was] an inhuman judge, or an inexorable executioner, or any of the things which make the change swiftest and beyond the power of human aid.

But if you would fortify yourself beforehand with the seal and secure yourself for the future with the best and strongest of all aids, being signed both in body and in soul with the unction, as Israel was of old with that blood and unction of the first-born at night that guarded him,⁹ what then can happen to you, and what has been wrought out for you? Listen to the Proverbs: "If you sit," he says, "you shall be without fear; and if you sleep, your sleep shall be sweet."¹⁰ And listen to David giving you the good news: "you shall not be afraid for the terror by night, for mischance or noonday demon."¹¹ This, even while you live, will greatly contribute to your sense of safety (for a sheep that is sealed is not easily snared, but that which is unmarked is an easy prey to thieves), and at your death a fortunate shroud, more precious than gold, more magnificent than a sepulcher, more reverent than fruitless libations, more reasonable than ripe firstfruits, which the dead bestow on the dead, making a law out of custom. No, if all things forsake you or be taken violently away from you;

⁸LCC 3:130-31*. ⁹Ex 12:22. ¹⁰Prov 3:24. ¹¹Ps 91:5 (90:5 LXX).

money, possessions, thrones, distinctions, and everything that belongs to this early turmoil, yet you will be able to lay down your life in safety, having suffered no loss of the helps which God gave you unto salvation. ON HOLY BAPTISM, ORATION 40.14-15.¹²

TIME TO FIND A PEARL OF GREAT PRICE. ORIGEN: “To everything then is its season, and a time for everything under heaven,” a time to gather the goodly pearls, and a time after their gathering to find the one precious pearl, when it is fitting for a person to go away and sell all that he has in order that he may buy that pearl. COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 10.10.¹³

GRADUAL ADVANCEMENT IN SPIRITUAL LIFE. TERTULLIAN: What, then, is the Paraclete’s administrative office but this: the direction of discipline, the revelation of the Scriptures, the reformation of the intellect, the advancement toward the “better things”? Nothing is without stages of growth: all things await their season. In short, the Preacher says, “A time to everything.” Look how creation itself advances little by little to fruitfulness. First comes the grain, and from the grain arises the shoot, and from the shoot struggles out the shrub. Thereafter boughs and leaves gather strength, and the whole that we call a tree expands. Then follows the swelling of the germen, and from the germen bursts the flower, and from the flower the fruit opens. That fruit itself, rude for a while, and unshapely, little by little, keeping the straight course of its development, is trained to the mellowness of its flavor. So, too, righteousness—for the God of righteousness and of creation is the same—was first in a rudimentary state, having a natural fear of God. From that stage it advanced, through the law and the prophets, to infancy. From that stage it passed, through the gospel, to the fervor of youth; now, through the Paraclete, it is settling into maturity. ON THE VEILING OF VIRGINS I.¹⁴

3:2 *A Time to Be Born and a Time to Die*

THE LINKAGE OF DEATH TO BIRTH. GREGORY OF NYSSA: It He does well to mention right away the binding union between birth and death; death necessarily follows birth, and each generation passes away. To show the connection between death and birth, the former is like a spur to arouse persons immersed in the flesh who love this present existence that they may pay attention to the future. Moses, the friend of God, quietly philosophizes over these matters as we see in the first titles of his books; he immediately writes Exodus right after Genesis. Thus these titles teach us about the order of our lives, for there is no birth [genesis] without death [exodos]. The great Ecclesiastes shows that death holds the same rank as birth: “There is a time to be born and a time to die.” HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 6.¹⁵

A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE. ATHANASIUS: This is written in the Scriptures and is manifest to all. For although it be hidden and unknown to all, what period of time is allotted to each, and how it is allotted; yet every one knows this, that as there is a time for spring and for summer, and for autumn and for winter, so, as it is written, there is a time to die, and a time to live. DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT 14.¹⁶

DEATH AND BIRTH IN BAPTISM. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: For as our Savior passed three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth, so you by your first rising out of the water represented Christ’s first day in the earth, and by your descent the night. For as in the night one no longer sees, while by day one is in the light, so you during your immersion, as in a night, saw nothing, but on coming up found yourselves in the day. In the same moment you were dying and being born, and that saving water was at once your grave and your mother. What Solomon said

¹²NPNF 2 7:364. ¹³ANF 9:418. ¹⁴ANF 4:27-28*. ¹⁵McCambly.

¹⁶NPNF 2 4:260*.

in another context is applicable to you: “A time for giving birth, a time for dying,” although for you, contrariwise, it is a case of “a time for dying and a time for being born.” One time brought both, and your death coincided with your birth. MYSTAGOGICAL LECTURES 2.4.¹⁷

THE INCARNATE LORD WAS BORN AND DIED AND ROSE AGAIN AS A MAN. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: “A time to live and a time to die”: you can see, therefore, beloved brothers, that this was said concerning the time of the Lord’s birth and death. Thus you must accept his virgin birth if we are to believe not only that the Word in the beginning who was called “is” was born, but, as I said, also that the humanity which he adopted and put on was born, both Lord and man. For it says, “what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit.”¹⁸ Yet, what suffered, died, was buried, and resurrected was not God but man, since he raised man to God, not God to man. EXPOSITION OF ECCLESIASTES, FRAGMENT I.¹⁹

3:4 *Time to Weep and Time to Laugh*

WHEN REJOICING IS APPROPRIATE. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: Let no one believe that he possesses any happiness or true joy in this world. Happiness can be prepared for, but it cannot be possessed here. Two times succeed each other in their own order, “a time to weep, and a time to laugh.” Let no one deceive himself, brethren; there is no time to laugh in this world. I know, indeed, that everyone wants to rejoice, but people do not all look for joy in the place where it should be sought. True joy never did exist in this world, it does not do so now, and it never will. For thus the Lord himself warned his disciples in the Gospel when he said: “You will suffer in the world,”²⁰ and again, “While the world rejoices, you will grieve for a time, but your grief will be turned into joy.”²¹ For this reason, with the Lord’s help let us do good in this life through labor and sorrow, so that in the future life we may be able to

gather the fruits of our good deeds with joy and exultation according to that sentence: “Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.”²² SERMON 215.2.²³

NOW IS MORE A TIME FOR WEeping THAN FOR LAUGHING. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Now, is the time to weep while the time to laugh consists in hope because our present sadness is a mother who begets joy which is stored up for the future. Who does not squander his life in lamentation and sullenness? He returns to his senses and realizes what he had and then lost, that is, his original condition and that which is present. Both you and I were subject neither to death nor sickness because these pernicious elements had been banished from our lives. The sun, air and God’s grace belong to everyone and share his common blessing. While God freely offered us a share in every good, he did not acknowledge the sickness of avarice; neither does the person with less have reason to hate the one who has more (for such was not the case). There are other examples too innumerable to list which require lengthy explanation. I mean the honor bestowed upon the angels, our confidence in God’s presence, contemplation of transcendent blessings and the incorruptible beauty of [God’s] blessed nature which adorns us and is manifested by the soul’s beauty in its resplendent divine image. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 6.²⁴

WEeping AND LAUGHING HAVE DIFFERENT MEANINGS. DIDYMUUS THE BLIND: Since weeping has different meanings, laughing needs to be understood accordingly; for weeping does not have only one meaning, nor does laughing. And since laughing is split in two meanings—sometimes praiseworthy, sometimes reprehensible—even weeping must be seen in this way, so that praiseworthy laughing corresponds to praiseworthy weeping and the same with reprehensible

¹⁷FC 64:164-65. ¹⁸Jn 3:6. ¹⁹CCL 69:263. ²⁰Jn 16:33. ²¹Jn 16:20.

²²Ps 126:5 (125:5 LXX). ²³FC 66:114*. ²⁴McCamblly.

laughing and weeping.

Often, thus, a life which is prone more to lust than to the love of God is laughing in such a way that the laughter itself is made into a god. And as some consider their stomachs divine and others consider them mammon, so a third person who loves entertainment and wants to be witty and so on, builds altars for laughter by making it divine so that he sacrifices to it. One sacrifices to it if one teaches what is suitable for laughing or what excites laughter.

That kind of laughter is reprehensible. It is blissful to abandon this kind of laughter and to devote one's self to the weeping opposed to it. This is what the virtuous one was striving for when he said, "Every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping."²⁵

There is, however, also a praiseworthy laughter. It is said that God "will yet fill your mouth with laughter"²⁶—with (of course) praiseworthy laughter. This corresponds to the fruit of the Spirit, which is joy, for "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."²⁷ Laughter, therefore, that corresponds with joy is praiseworthy.

Any weeping that is opposed to this kind of laughter and to the condition that opposes the joy of the Holy Spirit is reprehensible. That kind of weeping did not help Jerusalem.²⁸ . . . And why was that so? It is because it did not repent at the time when it should have repented, but after it was too late. . . .

Now, we want to look for the spiritual meaning: The ascetical life, which is appropriate for pious people, is called weeping; the uninhibited life, however, which is prone more to lust than to the love of God, is laughter. Those who weep in this life will laugh later on, so that they are even blessed: "Blessed are you who weep now."²⁹ . . . But those who have laughed here, because they lived prone more to lust than to the love of God, will weep, after the punishment that will follow, so that the following is said to them: "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."³⁰ Those, however, who here greatly weep out of repentance

pray to God with the words: "You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure."³¹ COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 71.4.³²

MOURNING IS FOR THE BODY, DANCING FOR THE SOUL. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Scripture refers the term "mourning" to any person subject to passion and who is grieved inwardly. Similarly, dancing signifies intense joy as we learn from the Gospel: "We piped to you, and you did not dance."³³ History says that the Israelites mourned Moses' death³⁴ while David preceded the ark in dance when the Philistines returned it from captivity.³⁵ David expressed himself in harmonious songs by striking his harp while his feet and body moved to the rhythm which revealed his disposition. Since man's nature is two-fold, body and soul, mourning is beneficial for our corporeal existence (there are many occasions for affliction in this existence) because it enables us to prepare our souls for this harmonious dancing [of David]. Although we abhor dejection, the occasions for gladness are certainly more numerous. Contenance is confining, humility is sad, suffering is burdensome and sorrow cannot equal these. However, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted,"³⁶ and he who afflicts himself by poverty will be crowned. The person who subjects himself to violence and proves himself worthy through affliction in everything will rest in the patriarch's [Abraham] bosom.³⁷ This is our rightful place through the mercy of him who saved us, Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 6.³⁸

3:5a *Throwing Stones and Gathering Them*

THOUGHTS DIRECTED TO BETTER THINGS

²⁵Ps 6:6 (6:7 LXX). ²⁶Job 8:21. ²⁷Gal 5:22. ²⁸See Lk 19:41, 23:28.

²⁹Lk 6:21. ³⁰Mt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk 13:28. ³¹Ps 80:5 (79:6 LXX). ³²PTA 22:33-39. ³³Mt 11:17. ³⁴Deut 34:8.

³⁵2 Sam 6:14-17. ³⁶Lk 14:11. ³⁷Lk 16:22. ³⁸McCambly.

ARE DESTRUCTIVE OF WORSE THINGS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Persons who look only at the letter and the superficial sense also accommodate Ecclesiastes' words to the Law of Moses which bids us to cast stones at law breakers.³⁹ History has taught us about persons who break the Sabbath⁴⁰ and who have stolen sacred objects⁴¹ in addition to other transgressions which the Law has commanded to be punished by stoning.⁴² If Ecclesiastes does not provide an opportunity to gather stones of which neither the Law nor any historical record speaks, I would concur with those who interpret the Law as an occasion to cast stones at any violator of the Sabbath or at anyone who removed sacred objects. Another occasion to gather stones which is not legislated offers us another interpretation, that is, it teaches us about this stone after it is cast; the person who threw the stone can possess it again. . . . We would be correct in understanding wood as any thought inclined to evil, so we must perceive these stones which Ecclesiastes rightly casts at the destructive thoughts of evil. We should always cast them and then gather them. An enemy comes to lay waste our noble life; however, the bosom of our souls must always be prepared to cast [stones] against the foe if we perceive that he is ready to assault us in another manner. Where do we gather stones to hurl against our foe? I have heard the prophet saying "for holy stones are rolled upon the land."⁴³ We must gather into our soul's bosom these divinely inspired words which come down for use against our foes. Our casting of stones destroys the enemy, a deed closely associated [with the stone itself] because whoever casts the stone of temperance at an unchaste thought which feeds the fire through pleasure is victor and always bears a weapon in his hand. Once righteousness becomes a stone against injustice, it destroys this evil and is kept in our bosom. In this way everything we understand about the good which destroys evil is associated with a person who conducts himself virtuously. Thus our interpretation [of Ecclesiastes' words] requires a time to

cast stones and a time to gather them that we may always cast goodness to destroy evil and never lack such weapons. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 7.⁴⁴

THE PURPOSE OF THROWING STONES. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: In the literal sense the following is said: The law prescribes that Israel's judges have to investigate the behavior of the people; and if someone was found to have done prohibited things, he was to be convicted to be stoned. . . .

Now, we relate the verse to rebuke instead of stoning. The wise teacher knows whom he has to rebuke and whom not, and in a certain way he throws the rebuke like stones in order to dissuade the rebuked from a bad way of life. If the person improves through the rebuke, the rebuke is gathered in and no more stones are thrown against him. Paul indicates this when he says, "Convince, rebuke and encourage!"⁴⁵ By rebuking and convincing he was throwing stones. After seeing the one who was rebuked improve, he encourages and gathers the stones together. The following is meant: There is a time to punish and a time not to punish. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 73.22.⁴⁶

3:5b *Marriage and Abstinence*

MARRIAGE AND ABSTINENCE HAVE TO BE OBSERVED. ANONYMOUS: For there is a season for a man to embrace his wife, and a season to abstain from embrace for his prayer. So then there are two commandments; and unless they be done in due order, they bring about sin. So also is it with the other commandments. Be wise in God, then, and prudent, understanding the order of the commandments, and the laws of every work, that the Lord may love you. TESTAMENTS OF THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS 8.8.⁴⁷

³⁹See Ex 19:13; Lev 20:2; Deut 17:5. ⁴⁰Num 15:32-36. ⁴¹Josh 7:10-25. ⁴²Lev 24:10-23. ⁴³Zech 9:16 LXX. ⁴⁴McCamby. ⁴⁵Tim 4:2. ⁴⁶PTA 22:47-49. ⁴⁷ANF 8:28*.

A TIME FOR MARRYING AND A TIME FOR CONTINENCE. AUGUSTINE: Now this propagation of children which among the ancient saints was a most bounden duty for the purpose of begetting and preserving a people for God, among whom the prophecy of Christ's coming must have had precedence over everything, now has no longer the same necessity. For from among all nations the way is open for an abundant offspring to receive spiritual regeneration, from whatever quarter they derive their natural birth. So that we may acknowledge that the Scripture which says there is "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing," is to be distributed in its clauses to the periods before Christ and since. The former was the time to embrace, the latter to refrain from embracing. ON MARRIAGE AND CONCUPISCENCE 14.⁴⁸

EXCELLENCE OF VIRGINITY. AUGUSTINE: As for you, you both have children and live in that end of the world when the time has already come not "to scatter stones but to gather; not to embrace but to refrain embraces." [This is a time] when the apostle cries out, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remains that those who have wives be as if they had none."⁴⁹ Surely, if you had sought a second marriage, it would not have been in obedience to a prophecy or a law, or even the desire of the flesh for offspring, but merely a sign of incontinence. You would have followed the advice of the apostle, when, after having said, "It is good for them if they so remain, even as I," he immediately added, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for I prefer them to marry rather than to burn."⁵⁰ THE EXCELLENCE OF WIDOWHOOD 8.II.⁵¹

GATHERING STONES. GREGORY THE GREAT: According to Solomon's words, there is "a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them." Because the end of the world presses upon us, it is necessary to gather living stones for the heavenly building, in order to make our Jerusalem grow to its full stature. DIALOGUE 3.37.⁵²

DEEPER MEANING OF EMBRACING AND AVOIDING AN EMBRACE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The text reads "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing," words which will become clear only if we first look at them in the context of scripture and enable us to clearly know how the divinely inspired text is used for obtaining insight. The great David cries out in the Psalter "Walk around Zion, go round about her."⁵³ Solomon himself made a spiritual connection by yoking our capacity for love to wisdom and utters other words to unite us to virtue, "Honor her in order that she will embrace you."⁵⁴ If David bids us to walk around Zion and if Solomon says that wisdom will embrace those who honor her, we will not be mistaken about the meaning [of the text] before us which instructs us about an opportune time. Mount Zion is Jerusalem predominantly situated upon a mountain-top; therefore he who urges you to embrace her bids you to be united to that lofty manner of life in order to attain the peak of virtues as symbolized by Zion. He who wishes wisdom to dwell with you announces her embrace. And so, it is time to walk [*perilambanein*] around Zion and be embraced [*perilambanesthai*] by wisdom for the word "Zion" represents an exalted manner of life. However, wisdom in itself signifies every virtue. If we had known the opportune time for embracing as expressed by [Ecclesiastes], separation is perceived as superior to union. Ecclesiastes says "There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing." Anyone joined to virtue is hostile to evil. . . . When we lovingly cling to the beautiful (that is, what is opportune) we alienate ourselves from any previous hostility. If you truly loved temperance, you hate its opposite. If you lovingly contemplate purity, you despise the foul stench of filth. If you cling to the good, you would indeed distant yourself from clinging to evil. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 7.⁵⁵

⁴⁸NPNF 1 5:269*. ⁴⁹1 Cor 7:29. ⁵⁰1 Cor 7:9. ⁵¹FC 16:290. ⁵²FC 39:185. ⁵³Ps 48:12 (47:13 LXX). ⁵⁴Prov 4:8 LXX. ⁵⁵McCamby.

ONE CAN ALWAYS EMBRACE WISDOM. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: “A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.” In the literal sense this means men who live together with their wives have a time when they get together with them and a time when they do not. . . . When it is time for prayer, when it is a day on which one has to remain clean and send up prayers, one has to avoid embraces. When the days of prayer are over, they come together and embrace. . . .

According to a superficial explanation, but perhaps also against it, the following remark is valid. “The appointed time has grown short,” Paul writes; “from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none.”⁵⁶ He says, Since time has grown short and humankind has increased to a large number, it is not necessary any more to increase it; one has to cease. . . . When it was necessary that humankind increase, it was a time to embrace. But after the population had become numerous and the begetting of the faithful spread, one needed to avoid embracing. . . .

In the spiritual sense this is the meaning: Some have acquired God’s wisdom as a wife, like the one who says, “I became enamored of her beauty”⁵⁷ and took her home as a spouse. About her it is said: “She will honor you if you embrace her.”⁵⁸ Then wisdom embraces the wise by communicating to him her character, and the wise man embraces her.

When therefore this wife is with a person from whom she can beget insight and thoughts and works of insight—for “wisdom begets insight for a man”⁵⁹—then it is the time to embrace. This time, however, is not interrupted by breaks. One can always embrace wisdom. This time is eternal. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 75.4.⁶⁰

3:6 *A Time to Keep and a Time to Cast Away*

THE RIGHT TIME TO SEEK THE LORD. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Do you wish to learn the opportune time for seeking the Lord? Let me briefly

state that your entire life is the only time to carry this out. Seeking the Lord is not defined by limit or time; rather, the truly opportune time for this consists in never putting an end to our search. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 7.⁶¹

JERUSALEM LIKE A BOOTH IN A VINEYARD.

GREGORY OF ELVIRA: Jerusalem, therefore, was abandoned “like a booth in a vineyard”⁶² because the guardian angels left it along with the Lord when Christ had suffered. A crop in the field is guarded by the Lord not for its own sake but only for the grain it yields, such that the stalk is permitted to be destroyed once its fruit is harvested. So also it was not principally for its own sake that Jerusalem was guarded temporarily, but on account of Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born according to the flesh within its borders. But when its fruit had been harvested, that is, the body of Christ, whence came the heavenly bread of life, then Jerusalem was abandoned like a field after the harvest, like a booth in a vineyard after its grapes had been gathered. This, then, is why it was said here in the divine Scriptures, “There is a time for guarding and a time for casting aside,” for there was a time when Jerusalem was guarded and a time when it was being cast aside. EXPOSITION OF ECCLESIASTES, FRAGMENT 2.⁶³

CASTING OFF THE LAW. DIDYMUS THE BLIND:

Before the good things were found (for example, the knowledge of truth), people were in ignorance. For them it was the time of losing. But this time was preceded by the time of seeking; for when some one seeks the good, the time has come to lose what in his case had been before the good. Likewise people lived according to the law before Christ’s life on earth, and they looked for the letter. But when the “Sun of righteousness” rose and truth finally had come, the time also had come to lose the letter and to supersede it.

⁵⁶1 Cor 7:29. ⁵⁷Wis 8:2. ⁵⁸Prov 4:8. ⁵⁹Prov 10:23 LXX. ⁶⁰PTA 22:53-57. ⁶¹McCambly. ⁶²Is 1:8. ⁶³CCL 69:263.

This is how one can sometimes lose in a good way. The Savior in the Gospel says: “Those who want to save their soul will lose it, and those who lose their soul will find it.”⁶⁴ One [can also] understand this as referring to martyrdom and to the time of persecution: Those who want to save their soul on the day of judgment and at the time of reward must lose it by offering themselves up to death; to lose the soul here means death, the dying for truth in martyrdom. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 77.18.⁶⁵

3:7 *Silence and Speech*

VALUE OF SILENCE. AMBROSE: Ought we to be dumb? Certainly not. For “there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak.” If, then, we are to give account for an idle word, let us take care that we do not have to give it also for an idle silence. For there is also an active silence, such as Susanna’s was, who did more by keeping silence than if she had spoken. For in keeping silence before others she spoke to God and found no greater proof of her chastity than silence. Her conscience spoke where no word was heard, and she sought no judgment for herself at the hands of men, for she had the witness of the Lord. She therefore desired to be acquitted by the One who she knew could not be deceived in any way.⁶⁶ The Lord himself in the gospel worked out in silence the salvation of humankind.⁶⁷ David rightly therefore enjoined on himself not constant silence but watchfulness. DUTIES OF THE CLERGY 1.3.9.⁶⁸

WAY TO WISDOM IS THROUGH SILENCE.

BEDE: Let anyone who loves wisdom, therefore, first beg this from God, then let the humble hearer seek out a teacher of truth, and all the while let him not only most carefully restrain his tongue from idle conversations but also hold back from preaching the very truth which he has recently learned. Hence Solomon, writing about differences of times, says, “There is a time for keeping silence and a time for speaking.” Hence

the Pythagoreans, who were endowed with the capacity to teach natural knowledge, order their listeners to keep silence for five years and thus at last they allow them to preach. The truth is more safely heard than preached, for when it is heard humility is safeguarded, but when it is preached it is difficult for the preacher to escape some minimal boasting. COMMENTARY ON JAMES 1.19.⁶⁹

A TIME TO BE SILENT AND A TIME TO SPEAK.

JEROME: I believe that the Pythagoreans, whose discipline it was to remain silent for five years and to speak with erudition afterwards, drew their practice from this principle. We too should learn to be silent before opening our mouths to speak. Let us remain still for an established time, meditating on the words of the Teacher, for nothing should seem right to us except what we have learned. In this way, only after much silence will we be made teachers from the disciples. As it is currently, for the sake of those who are falling into the worst wickedness of the world, we daily teach in the churches what we do not know. And if we provoke the people’s applause by our choice of words or by the instigation of the devil, who is the patron of errors, we bear witness against our own conscience that we are doing the very thing against which we are able to warn others. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 3.7⁷⁰

WHEN TO KEEP SILENCE AND WHEN TO

SPEAK. GREGORY THE GREAT: The tongue, therefore, should be discreetly curbed, not tied up fast. For it is written, “A wise man will hold his tongue until the time,”⁷¹ in order, assuredly, that when he considers it opportune, he may relinquish the censorship of silence and apply himself to the service of utility by speaking such things as are fit. And again it is written, “A time to keep silence and a time to speak.” For, indeed, the

⁶⁴Mt 16:25. ⁶⁵PTA 22:65-67. ⁶⁶Sus 35. ⁶⁷See Mt 26:63. ⁶⁸NPNF 2 10:2*. ⁶⁹CS 82:17-18. ⁷⁰CCL 72:276. ⁷¹Sir 20:7.

times for changes should be discreetly weighed, lest either, when the tongue ought to be restrained, it run loose to no profit in words, or, when it might speak with profit, it slothfully restrain itself. Considering which thing well, the psalmist says, "Set a watch, O Lord, on my mouth, and a door round about my lips."⁷² PASTORAL CARE 3.14.⁷³

BE SILENT ABOUT GOD'S BEING, SPEAK ABOUT GOD'S ACTIVITY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: When it comes to words about God and searching his essence there is a time for silence, but when it concerns some good operation of which we have knowledge, it is time to speak of God's power, miracles and works which necessitate words. A creature should not overstep its bounds with regard to transcendent matters but remain content with knowledge of himself. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 7.⁷⁴

3:8 *Love and Hate, War and Peace*

LOVE GOD AND HATE EVIL. GREGORY OF NYSSA: We must love one thing alone, that which the law of the Decalogue speaks, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, soul and mind."⁷⁵ There is one object deserving of our hatred, the inventor of evil, the enemy our lives of whom the Law says, "You shall hate your enemy."⁷⁶ The love of God strengthens the person who loves, whereas a disposition towards evil brings destruction upon anyone who loves it. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 8.⁷⁷

VIRTUES AND VICES CAN BE LOVED OR HATED. GREGORY OF NYSSA: If therefore the distinction between virtue and vice enables us to understand the opportunity which present. Ecclesiastes explains continence and pleasure, temperance and intemperance, modesty and arrogance, benevolence and maliciousness and anything else of this sort for imparting profitable advice. Thus we have a time to love continence and to hate pleasure that we may refrain from

licentious behavior and be devout. Strife, gain, love of glory and so forth do not benefit love but prevent us from maintaining a pleasant disposition. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 8.⁷⁸

THE TWO COMPANIONS OF EVERY SOUL.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Every soul has a reprehensible companion and a praiseworthy one: the bridegroom, which is the Logos, and the adulterer, which is the devil. If the devil is present, one should not give him room; one should not let him in, as Judas did. This kind of companion needs to be hated. But a "time to love" has come when the true bridegroom is present. He is worthy of love, so much so that one of the saints has said, "My love has been crucified." But love is intensified desire. Further, we have a commandment to love our enemies⁷⁹ and to approach those who hate us in such a way that we even send a prayer to heaven for them. Insofar as we desire that they be helped and do not want ourselves to be troubled by hostility, we love our enemies; but insofar as we do not imitate them and do not accept the same things or want to be enemies as they want to be, we hate them. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 81.4.⁸⁰

THE ARMY OF GOD'S PEACE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: If we have gained knowledge about the enemy against whom we must fight and take up arms, we ought to learn about another part of the text, that is, when to make a treaty of peace. Who is the good commander? He enables me to win favor by peaceful means. Who is the leader of this army? The divinely inspired scriptures clearly depict the battle array of angels belonging to the heavenly army. HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES 8.⁸¹

NECESSITY TO FIGHT. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: If powers, forces, rulers of the world of darkness and evil spirits tempt us, we are not supposed to

⁷²Ps 141:3 (140:3 LXX). ⁷³NPNF 2 12:38. ⁷⁴McCambly. ⁷⁵Deut 6:5, Mt 22:37 and parallels. ⁷⁶Mt 5:43. ⁷⁷McCambly. ⁷⁸McCambly. ⁷⁹Mt 5:43-45. ⁸⁰PATA 22:81-83. ⁸¹McCambly.

take issue with them or make peace with them, but we must fight them. But when we have subdued them and are given power “to tread on snakes and scorpions,”⁸² then it is a time for peace. Thus, first the devil has to be crushed under the feet of the saints. When it is time for war, one has to tread on “all the power of the

enemy.”⁸³ But when we have broken them down, we can live in enduring peace, our thinking is free from confusion, and we have a time for peace. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 8:1.21.⁸⁴

⁸²Lk 10:19. ⁸³Lk 10:19. ⁸⁴PTA 22:85.



THE TASK THAT GOD
HAS APPOINTED
ECCLESIASTES 3:10-22

OVERVIEW: God made everything beautiful and for a transcendent purpose (DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, AMBROSE). Thus even material things can be used in spiritual contemplation (EVAGRIUS). God's image is obliterated by the evil one, not by God (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). But neither should the stomach be substituted for God. God's primary creation is invisible, but creation is also made so that we know God is its ruler (DIDYMUS). Even those who are not yet born already exist for God (PETER CHRYSOLOGUS), for human beings have reason and a soul (DIDYMUS). But in this world that is passing away, the wicked are intermingled with the righteous (BEDE). Nothing in this world is permanent (JOHN CASSIAN), and at the end God will judge between believers and unbelievers (AUGUSTINE). God's judgment has different places for the godly and the ungodly (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). A person, unlike a beast, is destined for life everlasting (GREGORY THE GREAT) and should therefore heed the spiritual (OLYMPIODORUS), but a person can also reject that life and sink to a lower state (SHENOUTE). In this present life, in fact, it is difficult to distinguish between the righteous and the ungodly (EVAGRIUS), but Ecclesiastes guides us upward to the other life (OLYMPIODORUS). The resurrection and the existence of soul and spirit are designed by God (AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE).

3:11 *God Made Everything Beautiful*

BOTH BEAUTY AND PURPOSE IN EVERYTHING.

DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA: Of all these things there is not one either idle or useless. Not even the meanest of them—the hair, or the nails, or such like—is so; but all have their service to do, and all their contribution to make, some of

them to the soundness of bodily constitution and others of them to beauty of appearance. For Providence cares not only for the useful but also for the seasonable and beautiful. FRAGMENT I.4.¹

MATERIAL THINGS CAN BE USED IN SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATION. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: I have seen, he says, the material world that pre-occupies human minds, that which God gave to the human race prior to its cleansing so that they would occupy themselves. He means here that the beauty of the material world is temporal, not eternal. For, after cleansing, the one who is pure no longer needs to view material things only as a diversion of the mind. Rather, he can also use them in spiritual contemplation. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 15.3.10-13.²

THE EVIL ONE OBLITERATES GOD'S IMAGE.

GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: Indeed, an evil observer of the times has this age in his jaws and strives with a great effort to wipe out the image of God, having chosen to fight against him from the beginning until the end. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 3.II.³

3:13 *Everyone Should Eat and Drink and Take Pleasure*

BUT DO NOT TAKE YOUR STOMACH TO BE YOUR

God. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Whoever eats in a way that he takes his stomach to be God does not find anything good in eating and drinking, but rather ungodliness: "Such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own stomach."⁴

¹ANF 6:88*. ²SC 397:80-82. ³GTPE 65. ⁴Rom 16:18.

COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 86.2.⁵

3:14 *Whatever God Does Endures Forever*

GOD'S PRIMARY CREATION IS INVISIBLE. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: In the spiritual and higher sense one can also say the following: The invisible things are God's creations in the real sense. They are eternal. The timely and visible things are secondary and accidental and created for the sake of the eternal ones. These visible things have come into being for the sake of humankind, which by nature is invisible regarding the soul and the inner being. The visible things cannot primarily be called God's creations. God certainly has created them, but for the purpose of other things. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 87.6.⁶

CREATION IS MADE SO THAT WE KNOW GOD IS ITS RULER.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: God has made creation so that human beings, through an outward picture of the greatness and beauty of created things,⁷ might [understand] that God exists. He himself manages the cosmos and looks after it so that we—while the whole cosmos is orderly guided by one commander and provider and ruler and charioteer and king—get the outward picture that there is someone who rules the cosmos. When you see a ship which is piloted and holds its course, you perceive the idea of a helmsman even if he is not visible. And if you see a chariot which travels orderly, you get the idea of a charioteer. Likewise the Creator is known by his works and the order of his providence. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 88.29.⁸

3:15 *God Requires an Account of What Is Past*

THOSE NOT YET REBORN ALREADY EXIST FOR GOD.

PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: "Our Father." No one should be astonished that one not yet born⁹ calls God Father. With God, beings who will be born are already born; with God future beings have been made. "The things that shall be," Scrip-

ture says, "have already been." [Thus] it is that while John was still in the womb¹⁰ he perceived his creator, and he who was unaware of his own life served as a messenger to his mother. [Thus] too we read that Jacob waged war before he was born and triumphed before he lived.¹¹ [Thus] too, those who do not yet exist themselves are existent for God, that is, those who were chosen before the foundation of the world. SERMON 70.¹²

INSIGHT INTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF CREATED THINGS.

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: If those are "blessed who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"¹³ and at the same time the kingdom of heaven is the totality of the ideas¹⁴ of the things that have been and will come into being, then it follows that the persecuted are blessed because they have insight into the knowledge of created things. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 19.3.15.¹⁵

3:16 *Time for Judgment*

GOD'S JUDGMENT SETS DIFFERENT PLACES.

GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: I saw in the lower regions a pit of punishment awaiting the ungodly but a different place set apart for the godly. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 3.16.¹⁶

GOD WILL JUDGE THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

BEDE: "The shape of this world passes away,"¹⁷ not its substance; just as with our bodies too, the shape will be changed. The substance does not perish when "what is sowed as a physical body rises as a spiritual body."¹⁸ But we read nothing of this sort about the fire and the water. Rather we have in the book of Revelation, "And the sea is now no longer,"¹⁹ and in the prophets, "And the light of the lamp shall shine for you no more."²⁰ "We wait for his promises," he says, "in

⁵PTA 22:105. ⁶PTA 22:111. ⁷See Wis 13:5. ⁸PTA 22:119. ⁹A catechumen not yet reborn through baptism. ¹⁰Lk 1:44. ¹¹Gen 25:21-24. ¹²FC 17:120. ¹³Mt 5:10. ¹⁴Gk *logoi*. ¹⁵SC 397:88. ¹⁶GTPE 72. ¹⁷1 Cor 7:31. ¹⁸1 Cor 15:44. ¹⁹Rev 21:1. ²⁰Rev 18:23.

which righteousness dwells.”²¹ Righteousness dwells in the future age, because then the crown of righteousness will be given to each of the faithful in accord with the measure of their struggle. This is a thing that cannot at all happen in this life, according to the saying of Solomon, “I have seen beneath the sun wickedness in place of judgment and iniquity in place of righteousness and I said in my heart, ‘God will judge the righteous and the wicked, and there will be a time for everything.’” And again he says, “I saw the deceit that goes on beneath the sun and the tears of the innocent and that there was no comforter, nor were those deprived of the help of all able to resist their power, and I praised the dead rather than the living.”²² COMMENTARY ON 2 PETER 3:13.²³

3:17 *God Will Judge*

THERE WILL BE NO EXCUSE FOR UNBELIEF. AUGUSTINE: I ask you, then, are we to suppose that the only decree of God that will not come to pass, the only decree of God, will be the one which we read in those same writings as being about to judge between believers and unbelievers, when everything else that we read has happened as it was foretold? On the contrary, it will come to pass as all those other prophecies came to pass. Then there will be no person of our times who will be able at that judgment to find an excuse for unbelief when everyone shall call on Christ: the upright for justice, the perjurer for deceit, the king for power and the soldier for battle, the husband to maintain his authority and the wife to show her submission, the father for command and the son for obedience, the master for his right to rule and the servant for his subjection, the humble for piety and the proud for ambition, the rich man to distribute and the poor to receive, the drunkard at his wine cups and the beggar at the gate, the good person that he may excel in virtue and the bad one that he may cheat, the Christian worshiper and the pagan sycophant. All have the name of Christ upon their lips, and, with whatever intention and formula they invoke him,

without doubt they shall render an account of it to him whom they invoke. LETTER 232.²⁴

NOTHING IN THIS WORLD IS A PERMANENT GOOD. JOHN CASSIAN: IThe Divine Wisdom has pointed out in Ecclesiastes that for everything, that is for all things happy or those which are considered unfortunate and unhappy, there is a right time. As it says, “For all things there is a time, and a time for everything under the heaven.” . . . And later it says, “For there is a time for everything and for every deed.”

None of these things is laid down as always good, but only when they are fittingly done and at the right time. So these very things that turn out well, when done at the right moment, if they are ventured on at a wrong or unsuitable time are found to be useless or harmful. The only exceptions are those things that are in their own nature good or bad and that cannot ever be made the opposite—for example, justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance and the rest of the virtues; or on the other hand, those faults that cannot possibly be altered or classed as virtues. But those things that can sometimes turn out with either result—so that, in accordance with the character of those who use them, they are found to be either good or bad—these we consider to be not absolutely in their own natures useful or injurious, but only so in accordance with the disposition of the doer and the suitability of the time. CONFERENCE 21.12.²⁵

3:19 *Like Beasts*

PEOPLE HAVE THE ABILITY TO GO WHERE THERE IS LIFE. GREGORY THE GREAT: In describing the pleasures of the flesh, he puts all cares out of his mind and states that it is good to eat and drink. Later, he finds fault with this view from the standpoint of reason and says it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. Likewise, from purely carnal consider-

²¹2 Pet 3:13. ²²Eccles 4:1-2. ²³CS 82:151-52*. ²⁴FC 32:170-71*.

²⁵NPNF 2 11:508*

ations he advises a young man to find his pleasure in his youth, and later, modifying this statement, he blames youth and its pleasures as fleeting. So, too, when he speaks from the minds of the infirm, our Preacher voices an opinion based on suspicion. "For the lot of man and of beast," he says, "is one lot; the one dies as well as the other. Both have the same life breath, and man has no advantage over the beast." Later, however, he presents conclusions drawn from reason and says, "What has the wise man more than the fool? and what the poor man, but to go where there is life?"²⁶ So, after he says, "Man has no advantage over the beast," he again specifies that the wise person has an advantage not only over the beast but also over the foolish person, namely, his ability to go "where there is life." **DIALOGUE 4.4.**²⁷

HUMAN BEINGS ALSO HAVE REASON AND A SOUL. **DIDYMUS THE BLIND:** Animals are mortal beings without reason, angels are immortal beings with reason, human beings are mortal beings with reason. Regarding mortality the human being is grouped together with beings without reason. Regarding reason [the human being] is grouped together with the immortal beings, since angels also have reason. Regarding its senses . . . the human being is of the same kind as the beings without reason. But the human being is receptive to something to which no other mortal being is receptive: its soul can become perfect, as far as this can be achieved, and become like God, as far as it is possible. . . .

Thus, when he says that "the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same," he does not mean what happens to reason but what happens to the outward body. . . . The general judgment which enacts promises and punishments does not judge what human beings have in common with animals but what humans have in common with angels. As humans can be led into the kingdom of heaven and remain in heaven, so it is with angels; and as humans can be judged, so can angels be judged. . . .

If one investigates the nature of death, then the death of animals is not like the death of

humans. Human death divides the soul from the body, and after the division the soul remains. But the death of animals destroys soul and body, since they have been created simultaneously. **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 99.1.**²⁸

THEREFORE HEED THE SPIRITUAL. **OLYMPIODORUS:** Ecclesiastes teaches us from this not to attend to our physical needs but to our spiritual existence. **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 3.19.**²⁹

PEOPLE LIKENED TO A BEAST OR WORSE. **SHENOUTE:** Why did he write, "What advantage does man have over beast?" Perceive now what had happened. Understand now the scorn toward us when he saw that humanity had recognized gods other than the Lord God alone and had not obeyed this utterance, "No foreign god shall be in your midst, nor shall you worship a strange god."³⁰ Then, when he saw humanity had acted wickedly by [doing] what is contrary to nature, with abominable deeds, with pernicious deeds that no one should be able to mention [and] to which no one should be able to listen, he said this. For if a person does not recognize his value, not only is he reckoned with the beast but the beast is more esteemed than he, when it is said, "An ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib."³¹ **FRAGMENT ON ECCLESIASTES.**³²

NO DIFFERENCE IN THIS LIFE BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE UNGODLY. **EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS:** By "fate" he means everything that is part of the life of anyone in this world, whether that person is righteous or unrighteous—things such as life, death, sickness, health, affluence, poverty, loss of limbs, of wives, children or possessions. In all these it is impossible to discern between the right-eous and unrighteous before the last judgment. He also says that both have in common the fact that they are taken from dust and will return to dust. They also have one soul, not by

²⁶Eccles 6:8. ²⁷FC 39:194-95*. ²⁸PTA 22:153-59. ²⁹PG 93:521. ³⁰Ps 81:9 (80:10 LXX). ³¹Is 1:3. ³²CMWM 172.

number but by nature. For the Spirit, he says, “is one [and the same] in all.” Here he calls a man, who was born in honor, a beast instead of labeling him as someone of understanding. It is because of his foolish desires that he is compared with the senseless beasts and that he ends up becoming like them.³³ And not even through their acts can the righteous and unrighteous be clearly distinguished before the day of judgment, because a good number of the un-righteous become righteous and are elevated, while a good number of the righteous abandon virtue and are debased. “What is the advantage of the right-eous over the ungodly?” In this present time, he says, there is no advantage. Everything is vanity except for the spiritual joy that naturally occurs to each according to his deeds and virtues. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 21.3,19-22.³⁴

3:20 *From Dust to Dust*

ON THE RESURRECTION. AMBROSE: The resurrection as a fact is not to be rejected because of an exceptional situation. Yet, since all things earthly return and crumble into the earth, I wonder how there can be any doubt even concerning the instances noted. For the most part, the sea itself also casts up on neighboring shores whatever human bodies it has swallowed. And if this were not so, it surely would not be difficult for God to join what has been scattered and to unite again what has been dispersed. Could it be maintained for a moment that God, whom the universe and the silent elements obey and nature serves, did not perform a greater miracle in giving life to clay than in joining it together? ON HIS BROTHER SATYRUS 2.58.³⁵

GOD’S ABILITY TO CHANGE. PSEUDO-CLEMENT OF ROME: Yea, even a person, who is dust, he changed by the inbreathing of his breath³⁶ into flesh, and changed him back again into dust. And was not Moses, who himself was flesh, converted into the grandest light, so that the sons of Israel could not look him in the face?³⁷ Much more, then, is God completely able to convert himself into whatsoever he wishes. HOMILY 20.6.³⁸

SOUL AND SPIRIT. AUGUSTINE: In order, indeed, that you may have the fullest and clearest assurance that what is the *soul* is in the usage of the Holy Scriptures also called *spirit*, the soul of a brute animal has the designation of spirit. And of course cattle have not that spirit which you, my beloved brother, have defined as being distinct from the soul. It is therefore quite evident that the soul of a brute animal could be rightly called “spirit” in a general sense of the term; as we read in the book of Ecclesiastes, “Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, whether it goes upward; and the *spirit of the beast*, whether it goes downward into the earth?” In like manner, touching the devastation of the deluge, the Scripture testifies, “All flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth, and every man: and all things which have the spirit of life.”³⁹ Here, if we remove all the windings of doubtful disputation, we understand the term *spirit* to be synonymous with *soul* in its general sense. Of so wide a signification is this term, that even God is called “a spirit”;⁴⁰ and a stormy blast of the air, although it has material substance, is called by the psalmist the “spirit” of a tempest.⁴¹ For all these reasons, therefore, you will no longer deny that what is the soul is called also spirit. I have, I think, adduced enough from the pages of Holy Scripture to secure your assent in passages where the soul of the very brute beast, which has no understanding, is designated spirit. ON THE SOUL AND ITS ORIGIN 4.37.⁴²

3:21 *The Other Life May Be Upward or Downward*

THE FUTURE CAN BE POSITIVE. OLYMPIODORUS: Ecclesiastes, instructing us through enigmas, guides us to the other life. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 3.21.⁴³

³³See Ps 48:13-21 LXX. ³⁴SC 397:92-94. ³⁵FC 22:221. ³⁶Gen 2:7. ³⁷Ex 34:29. ³⁸ANF 8:341*. ³⁹Gen 7:21-22. ⁴⁰Jn 4:24. ⁴¹Ps 55:8 (54:9 LXX). ⁴²NPNF 1 5:370*. ⁴³PG 93:524.



THE VANITY OF TOIL
FOR ONESELF
ECCLESIASTES 4:1 - 8

OVERVIEW: It is a greater burden to live for sin than to die in sin, because at death sin ceases (AMBROSE). The death of the innocent, who have not toiled for their own advancement, betokens their reward of everlasting happiness (BEDE). Intimacy with our neighbors can generate envy in ourselves (BASIL), and even Satan can be jealous (EVAGRIUS), just as assistance to the idle does no good (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). Idleness in the spiritual life is not commendable, just as quietness is often better than eloquence. (AMBROSE). And those who teach are often the ones in need of instruction (JOHN CASSIAN), for wisdom also can be foolish (EVAGRIUS).

4:1 *Sufferings of the Oppressed*

IT IS A GREATER BURDEN TO LIVE FOR SIN THAN TO DIE FOR SIN. AMBROSE: We desire each day to know what is new, and what is knowledge itself but our daily sorrow and abasement? All things that are have already been, and “nothing is new under the sun,” but “all is vanity. Therefore I hated the whole of this life,” said Ecclesiastes. He who hated his life certainly com-

mended death. And so he praised the dead rather than the living and judged him happy that did not come into this life nor take up this vain toil. “My heart took a circuit to know the joy of the impious man and to examine carefully and to seek wisdom and a mode of calculating and to know joy through the impious man and trouble and disquietude, and I find that it is bitterer than death”¹—not because death is bitter, but because it is bitter for the impious one. And yet life is bitterer than death. For it is a greater burden to live for sin than to die in sin, because the impious person increases his sin as long as he lives, but if he dies, he ceases to sin. DEATH AS A GOOD 7.28.²

THE DEATH OF THE INNOCENT AND THE REWARD OF EVERLASTING HAPPINESS. BEDE: He praised the innocent dead rather than the living because the latter were still engaged in the struggle but the former had been given their reward of everlasting happiness. He complained that he had seen deceit beneath the sun because he knew that above the sun there is a just judge “who

¹Eccles 7:25-26 LXX. ²FC 65:91-92.

dwells on high and looks down upon humble things.”³ Above the sun there are dwelling places in which the righteous receive due rewards for their righteousness. COMMENTARY ON 2 PETER 3:13.⁴

4:4 *Envy of a Neighbor*

THE CLOSEST NEIGHBORS ARE THE OBJECTS OF ENVY. BASIL THE GREAT: Wise, therefore, was he who forbids us even to dine in company with an envious person, and in mentioning this companionship at table, he implies a reference to all other social contacts as well. Just as we are careful to keep material which is easily inflammable as far away as possible from fire, so we must refrain insofar as we can from contracting friendships in circles of which envious persons are members. By so doing, we place ourselves beyond the range of their shafts. We can be caught in the toils of envy only by establishing intimacy with it. In the words of Solomon, “A man is exposed to envy from his neighbor.” And so it is. The Scythian is not envious of the Egyptian, but each of them envies a fellow countryman. Among members of the same nation, the closest acquaintances and not strangers are objects of envy. Among acquaintances, neighbors and fellow workmen, or those who are otherwise brought into close contact, are envied, and among these again, those of the same age and kinsmen and brothers. In short, as the red blight is a common pest to corn, so envy is the plague of friendship. HOMILY CONCERNING ENVY.⁵

THE JEALOUSY OF SATAN. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: I have seen, he says, every sort of wickedness and boldness in the one who is evil. For, such a one [as Satan] thinks he is brave even when in [his] ungodliness he oppresses the poor⁶ or again, sees himself as a “creature” who was “made to be mocked by the angels”⁷ of God. Also I have seen all the jealousy that he has acquired towards human beings, which is vain and governs his heart,⁸ since God certainly “will become all in all.”⁹ And when God does so, this

will fulfill the prayer of Christ, which said, “Grant that they also may be one in us, as you and I are one, Father.”¹⁰ SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 25.4.4.¹¹

4:5 *Foolishness of Idle People*

THE IDLE DO NOT DESERVE ASSISTANCE. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: But if any one is in want by gluttony, drunkenness or idleness, he does not deserve any assistance or to be esteemed a member of the church of God. For the Scripture, speaking of such persons, says, “The slothful hides his hand in his bosom and is not able to bring it to his mouth again.”¹² And again, “The sluggard folds up his hands, and eats his own flesh.” “For every drunkard and whoremonger shall come to poverty, and every drowsy person shall be clothed with tatters and rags.”¹³ And in another passage [we read], “If you give your eyes to drinking and cups, you shall afterwards walk more naked than a pestle.”¹⁴ For certainly idleness is the mother of famine. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.2.4.¹⁵

IDLENESS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. AMBROSE: Let one who still doubts hear the testimony of the Gospel, for the Son of God said, “We have played for you, and you have not danced.”¹⁶ The Jews who did not dance and knew not how to clap their hands were abandoned, but the Gentiles were called and applauded God in spirit. “The fool folds his hands together and eats his own flesh,” that is, he becomes involved in the concerns of the body and eats his own flesh, just as does all-powerful death. And such a one will not find eternal life. But the wise person who lifts up his works that they may shine before his Father who is in heaven has not consumed his flesh; instead, he has raised it to the

³Ps 113:5-6 (112:5-6 LXX). ⁴CS 82:152*. ⁵FC 9:468-69. ⁶See Prov 28:3. ⁷Job 40:19 LXX. ⁸Eccles 8:11. ⁹1 Cor 15:28. ¹⁰Jn 17:21-22. ¹¹SC 397:100. ¹²Prov 19:24 LXX. ¹³Prov 23:21. ¹⁴Prov 23:31 LXX. ¹⁵ANF 7:397*. ¹⁶Mt 11:17.

grace of the resurrection. This is the wise person's honorable dance which David danced, mounting by the loftiness of his spiritual dance to the throne of Christ that he may see and hear the Lord saying to his Lord, "Sit at my right hand."¹⁷ LETTER 28, TO BISHOP SABINUS.¹⁸

4:6 *Quietness Is Better Than Eloquence*

TEACHERS NEED INSTRUCTION. JOHN CASSIAN: As Solomon says, "Better is a single handful with rest than both hands full with labor and vexation of mind." And in these allusions and inconveniences all that are in the least weak are sure to be entangled. Even as they doubt their own salvation and stand in need of the teaching and instruction of others, they are incited by the devil's tricks to convert and guide others. And

even if they succeed in gaining any advantage from the conversion of some, they waste whatever they have gained by their impatience and rude manners. CONFERENCE 24.13.¹⁹

A HANDFUL OF VIRTUE IS SUPERIOR TO FOOLISH WISDOM. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The "chasing after wind," I believe, refers to the will of the soul caught up with passions. That is why a handful of virtue is better than two handfuls of wickedness, ignorance and "chasing after wind." . . . It is as if someone said it is better to learn contemplation of one spiritual thing than to have numerous visions of foolish wisdom. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 27.4.6.²⁰

¹⁷Ps 110:1 (109:1 LXX). ¹⁸FC 26:146*. ¹⁹NPNF 2 11:537*. ²⁰SC 397:102-4.



COMPANIONSHIP LIGHTENS THE HUMAN LOAD ECCLESIASTES 4:9-16

OVERVIEW: Christ sent his disciples two by two, and it is dangerous to lead the spiritual life alone, whether one is a monk or not (PETER CHRYSOLO-

GUS, SYMEON, BASIL). Christ was not raised by the power of someone else (AMBROSE), but most of us do need a good spiritual guide (GREGORY OF

NYSSA). In fact, in such matters, even three are stronger than two (AMBROSE, GREGORY THE GREAT).

4:10 *Spiritual Guidance and Support*

NEED FOR A GOOD SPIRITUAL GUIDE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Since the majority of persons who intend to lead a life of virginity are still young and immature, they must concern themselves with this before all: the finding of a good guide and teacher on this path, lest, on account of their ignorance, they enter upon trackless places and wander away from the straight road. For, as Ecclesiastes says, “Two are better than one.” The one is easily overcome by the enemy lying in ambush on the divine road, and truly, “woe to the solitary man, for if he should fall he has no one to lift him up.” In the past, certain people have made an auspicious beginning in their desire for this life, but, although they have attained perfection in their intention, they have been tripped up because of their vanity. They deceived themselves, through some craziness, into thinking that that was fair toward which their own thought inclined. Among these, there are those called “the slothful”¹ in the Book of Wisdom, who strew their path with thorns, who consider harmful to the soul a zeal for deeds in keeping with the commandments of God, the demurrers against the apostolic injunctions, who do not eat their own bread with dignity but, fawning on others, make idleness the art of life. Then there are the dreamers who consider the deceits of dreams more trustworthy than the teachings of the Gospels, calling fantasies revelations. Apart from these, there are those who stay in their own houses, and still others who consider being unsociable and brutish a virtue without recognizing the command to love and without knowing the fruit of long-suffering and humility. ON VIRGINITY 23.²

CHRIST RAISED HIMSELF BY HIS OWN

POWER. AMBROSE: Fittingly does Ecclesiastes say, “For if one falls, he raises up his companion.” He

himself is not raised up, for Christ was not raised up by another’s help and power, but he himself raised himself. Indeed, he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. This he said of the temple of his body.”³ It is well that he who did not fall should not be raised by another, for one who is raised by another has fallen, and one who falls needs help to be raised up. Additional words also teach this when Scripture says, “Woe to him that is alone: for when he falls, he has none to lift him up. And if two lie together, they shall warm one another.” We have died with Christ, and we live together with him.⁴ Christ died with us to warm us, and he said, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth.”⁵ LETTER 58, TO HIS CLERGY.⁶

THE DANGER OF SOLITARY LIFE FOR A MONK.

BASIL THE GREAT: In the solitary life, what is at hand becomes useless to us and what is wanting cannot be provided, since God the Creator decreed that we should require the help of one another, as it is written, so that we might associate with one another. Again, apart from this consideration, the doctrine of the charity of Christ does not permit the individual to be concerned solely with his own private interests. “Charity,” says the apostle, “seeks not her own.”⁷ But a life passed in solitude is concerned only with the private service of individual needs. This is openly opposed to the law of love, which the apostle fulfilled, who sought not what was profitable to himself but to many that they might be saved.⁸ Furthermore, a person living in solitary retirement will not readily discern his own defects, since he has no one to admonish and correct him with mildness and compassion. In fact, admonition even from an enemy often produces in a prudent person the desire for amendment. But the cure of sin is wrought with understanding by him who loves sincerely. Holy Scripture says, “for he that loves, at times corrects.”⁹ Such a one it is very difficult to find in solitude, if in one’s prior

¹Prov 15:19. ²FC 58:70-71*. ³Jn 2:19, 21. ⁴Rom 6:8. ⁵Lk 12:49.

⁶FC 26:318*. ⁷1 Cor 13:5. ⁸1 Cor 10:33. ⁹Prov 13:24.

state of life one had not been associated with such a person. The solitary, consequently, experiences the truth of the saying, "Woe to him that is alone, for when he falls he has none to lift him up." Moreover, the majority of the commandments are easily observed by several persons living together, but not so in the case of one living alone, for while he is obeying one commandment, the practice of another is being interfered with. For example, when he is visiting the sick, he cannot show hospitality to the stranger, and in the imparting and sharing of necessities (especially when the ministrations are prolonged), he is prevented from giving zealous attention to [other] tasks. As a result, the greatest commandment and the one especially conducive to salvation is not observed, since the hungry are not fed nor the naked clothed. Who, then, would choose this ineffectual and unprofitable life in preference to that which is both fruitful and in accordance with the Lord's command? *THE LONG RULES* 7.¹⁰

CHRIST SENT DISCIPLES TWO BY TWO. *PETER CHRYSOLOGUS*: "And he began to send them forth two by two." He sent them two by two that no one of them, being abandoned and alone, might fall into a denial, like Peter, or flee, like John.¹¹ Human frailty quickly falls if it proudly relies on itself, despises companions and is unwilling to have a colleague. As Scripture says, "Woe to him that is alone, for when he falls, he has none to lift him up." The same Scripture testifies how much one is strengthened by another's aid, when it states, "A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city."¹² *SERMON* 170.¹³

THE DANGER OF LIVING THE SPIRITUAL LIFE ALONE. *SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN*: DO

not follow the wolf instead of the shepherd,¹⁴ or enter into a flock that is diseased.¹⁵ Do not be alone by yourself, lest you be seen carried off by the wolf who destroys souls or succumb to one disease after the other and so die spiritually, or, as you succumb, you attain to that woe. He who gives himself in the hand of a good teacher will have no such worries but will live without anxiety and be saved in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever. Amen. *DISCOURSE* 20.7.¹⁶

4:12 *Three Are Stronger Than Two*

AN EXAMPLE OF A THREEFOLD ROPE.

AMBROSE: Paul fled too, that he might pass out through a window and be lowered in a basket.¹⁷ Yes, he knew that the triple-stranded rope could not break, but he fled so that he might preach the gospel of the Lord in the entire world,¹⁸ and consequently he was taken up into paradise.¹⁹ Let us also flee through the window while heeding the Lord's precepts and keeping them with steady vision and chaste eyes. *FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD* 9.54.²⁰

BY THE CORD FAITH IS EXPRESSED. *GREGORY THE GREAT*: By a "cord," faith is expressed, as Solomon witnesses, who says, "A threefold cord is not easily broken" because the faith in truth that is woven by the mouth of preachers from the knowledge of the Trinity remains firm in the elect. It is broken only in the heart of the reprobate. *MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB* 6.33.18.²¹

¹⁰FC 9:248-49. ¹¹Mk 14:66-72, 50-52. ¹²Prov 18:19. ¹³FC 17:280.

¹⁴Mt 7:15. ¹⁵Ezek 34:4. ¹⁶SNTD 237. ¹⁷2 Cor 11:32-33. ¹⁸See 1 Cor 9:16-18. ¹⁹2 Cor 12:2-4. ²⁰FC 65:321. ²¹LF 31:573-74*.



FEAR GOD AND
KEEP YOUR VOWS
ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7

OVERVIEW: Our words to God in prayer should be few in number (EVAGRIUS). We should guard our mouth by humility (THEODORE OF TABENNESI), especially when discussing theology (ORIGEN). We should remember that God regards us from heaven and that his nature transcends our intelligence (ORIGEN, GREGORY OF NYSSA). Our faith without works would be like words without deeds (CAESARIUS), but it is better not to vow at all than to vow and then not to pay what we have promised (JOHN CASSIAN). Vows of virginity, especially, should not be undertaken rashly (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS).

5:2 *Watching the Mouth*

OUR WORDS TO GOD IN PRAYER SHOULD BE FEW IN NUMBER. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: “We do not know how to pray as we ought.”¹ He is not so much talking [about prayer] at this point as issuing a command not to theologize thoughtlessly. Indeed, anyone who belongs to this material world and whose thoughts have their origin in this world cannot speak about God without error—or on other matters that elude the senses. That is why he says, “And let your words be few,”

that is, they should be true and well chosen. I think also that “few” means the same as in the following texts: “Better a little with righteousness than an abundance of riches with sinners.”² And, “Better is the receiving of a little with righteousness.”³ But to those who do not observe this, he says, “For as a dream comes when there are many cares, so is the fool’s voice with many words.” . . .

He also talks about “the voice of a fool,” coming up with false words and beguiling the soul. This is “the voice of the slanderer and reviler.”⁴ He is also able to apply this to the voice of the fool who “by a multitude of words you will not escape sin.”⁵ SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 35.5.1-2.⁶

GUARD OUR MOUTHS BY HUMILITY. THEODORE OF TABENNESI: Truly, if a person guards his mouth⁷ and acquires humility, the angels will be his friends here below; his soul will be a perfume poured out; the angels will carry his remembrance before God day and night, whether he is a monk or a secular. Besides, many persons in the

¹Rom 8:26. ²Ps 37:16 (36:16 LXX). ³Prov 16:8 (15:29 LXX). ⁴Ps 44:16 (43:17 LXX). ⁵Prov 10:19 LXX. ⁶SC 397:116-18. ⁷Jas 1:26.

world are watchful on this point. As for me, I know many who have acquired a great humility and have watched themselves not to speak evil of anyone. On the contrary, they underestimate themselves constantly and praise the others, saying, "It is within the power of God that we should find a little place in heaven." FRAGMENT 2.⁸

WE SHOULD NOT HASTEN TO DISCUSS THEOLOGY. ORIGEN: [It might be that] a person dedicates himself rashly, without comprehending what is esoteric of the wisdom of God and of the Word who is "in the beginning with God"⁹ and who is himself God. And . . . it is by means of the Word and God and by means of the wisdom with him that one must examine and discover these things. [Then] it must happen that he, by falling into myths and nonsense and fictions, submits himself to the danger that surrounds impiety. For that reason one must remember also the commandment from Solomon in Ecclesiastes concerning such things, which says, "Do not hasten to express a word before the face of God. For God is in the heaven above, and you are on the earth below. Therefore let your words be few." FRAGMENTS ON JEREMIAH I.I.¹⁰

THOSE ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN. ORIGEN: The passage in Ecclesiastes "Be not in haste to utter speech before God, because God is in heaven above and you on earth below" is intended to show the gap which separates those who are in the "body of humiliation"¹¹ from him who is with the angels exalted by the help of the Word and from the holy powers with Christ himself. For it is not unreasonable that he should be strictly "at the Father's throne," allegorically called heaven, while his church, termed earth, is a footstool at his feet.¹² ON PRAYER 23.4.¹³

God's Nature Transcends Our Intelligence. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Listen to the Preacher exhorting not to be hasty to utter anything before God, "for God," (says he), "is in heaven above, and you upon earth beneath."

He shows, I think, by the relation of these elements to each other, or rather by their distance, how far the divine nature is above the speculations of human reason. For that nature which transcends all intelligence is as high above earthly calculation as the stars are above the touch of our fingers, or rather, many times more than that.

Knowing, then, how widely the divine nature differs from our own, let us quietly remain within our proper limits. For it is both safer and more reverent to believe the majesty of God to be greater than we can understand, than, after circumscribing his glory by our misconceptions, to suppose there is nothing beyond our conception of it. ANSWER TO EUNOMIUS'S SECOND BOOK.¹⁴

5:4 Vows Before God

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS LIKE WORDS WITHOUT DEEDS. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: It does a person no good to say that he possesses faith if he neglects to fulfill in deed what he promises in word. As the Scriptures say, "If you have vowed anything to God, defer not to pay it. For an unfaithful and foolish promise displeases him. It is much better not to vow than after a vow not to perform the things promised." In order that we may understand these facts clearly from our relations with our servants, let someone tell me whether it is enough for him if his servant says all day that he is his lord and ceases not to commend him with praises but refuses to do what has been commanded. Therefore, if words without deeds do not please us, how much more can faith without works fail to benefit us in the sight of God? Above all, we must fear lest someone believes so strongly that he will receive God's mercy that he does not dread his justice. If a person does this, he has no faith. Likewise, if he dreads God's justice so much that he despairs of his mercy, there is no faith. Since God is not only merciful but also just, let us believe in both. Let

⁸CS 47:133*. ⁹Jn 1:1. ¹⁰FC 97:277*. ¹¹Phil 3:21. ¹²Mt 5:34-35.

¹³Curtis 13**. ¹⁴NPNF 2 5:260*.

us not despair of his mercy because we fear his justice or love his mercy so much that we disregard his justice. Therefore we should neither hope wrongly nor despair wickedly. SERMON 12.5.¹⁵

WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THE VOWS THAT WE MADE. JOHN CASSIAN: This will be fulfilled in this way by each one of us. We pray when we renounce this world and promise that being dead to all worldly actions and the life of this world we will serve the Lord with full purpose of heart. We pray when we promise that despising secular honors and scorning earthly riches we will cling to the Lord in all sorrow of heart and humility of spirit. We pray when we promise that we will always maintain the most perfect purity of body and steadfast patience, or when we vow that we will utterly remove from our heart the roots of anger or sorrow that bring about death. And if weakened by sloth and returning to our former sins we fail to do this, we shall be guilty as regards our prayers and vows, and these words will apply to us: "It is better not to vow than to vow and not to pay," which can be rendered in accordance with the Greek: "It is better for you not to pray than to pray and not to pay." CONFERENCE 9.12.2.¹⁶

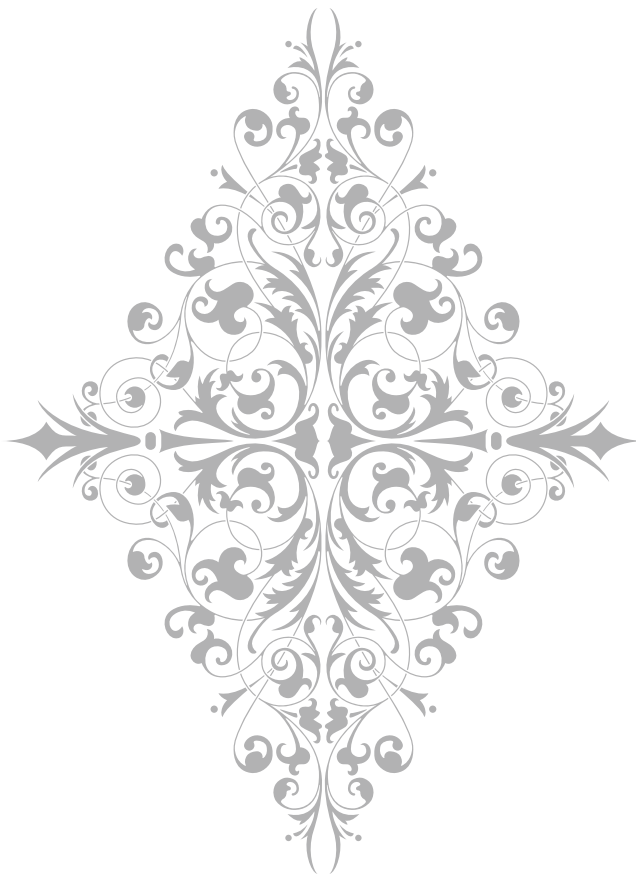
5:5 *Better Not to Vow*

REWARDS OF THOSE WHO WERE NOT DILIGENT. JOHN CASSIAN: For as unbounded glory hereafter is promised to those who faithfully

serve God and cleave to him according to the rule of this system, so the severest penalties are in store for those who have carried it out carelessly and coldly and have failed to show to him fruits of holiness corresponding to what they professed or what they were believed by people to be. For "it is better," as Scripture says, "that one should not vow rather than to vow and not pay"; and "Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord carelessly."¹⁷ INSTITUTES 4.33.¹⁸

ON THOSE WHO TAKE VOWS OF VIRGINITY. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: Concerning virginity we have received no commandment,¹⁹ but we leave it to the power of those that are willing, as a vow. [We exhort] them so far in this matter that they do not promise anything rashly, since Solomon says, "It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay." Let such a virgin, therefore, be holy in body and soul, as the temple of God,²⁰ as the house of Christ, as the habitation of the Holy Spirit. For she that vows ought to do such works as are suitable to her vow, and to show that her vow is real, and made on account of leisure for piety, not to cast a reproach on marriage. Let her not be one who wanders idly around, or one that rambles about unseasonably; not double-minded, but grave, continent, sober, pure, avoiding the conversation of many, and especially of those that are of ill reputation. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 4.2.14.²¹

¹⁵FC 31:71-72*. ¹⁶NPNF 2 11:391*. ¹⁷Jer 48:10. ¹⁸NPNF 2 11:230*. ¹⁹See 1 Cor 7:25. ²⁰See 1 Cor 7:34. ²¹ANF 7:436**.



THE VANITY OF THE
SELF-SEEKING LIFE
ECCLESIASTES 5:8 — 6:12

OVERVIEW: The well-cultivated soul has the Logos as its king (DIDYMUS). The desire to increase one's wealth is like a trap or a noose (GREGORY THE GREAT), and God grants suffering to the greedy but peace to those who are good. Evil can be revealed in wealth (EVAGRIUS), and it is certain that wealth does not profit the rich after their death (AMBROSE). In fact, more restful is the sleep of a poor laborer than that of a wealthy person (CHRYSOSTOM). Since all wealth comes to us from God and riches bring merely torment, we should not be slaves to wealth (DIDYMUS). True richness consists in virtue and faith (AMBROSE). We should work only for that which we can take with us after death (AMBROSE, ATHANASIUS), when true life begins (GREGORY THE GREAT). In fact, the enormity of a voracious appetite is an antecedent to the corrupting power of riches (TERTULLIAN). Far better it is for Christians to be forever hungry for God's Word, for that kind of appetite is, quite properly, never satisfied (JEROME). Not only are money and possessions gifts from God, but so also is wisdom (DIDYMUS).

5:9 *The Advantage of Having a King*

A SOUL THAT IS WELL CULTIVATED HAS THE LOGOS AS ITS KING. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Regarding the literal interpretation: No one is lord, owner and ruler over a field that lies fallow where thorns and thistles grow; but the field that is well tilled has a king. Thereby the owner is called a king. . . .

When the defenders of the teaching that God's providence rules over everything argue that there is providence, they generally say, Like a weaver clearly shows that there is a weaver—whether or not he is seen—in the same way he who sees a

well tilled field gets the impression that it has someone who leads and rules over it. . . .

When you, therefore, see a soul that is well tilled, that sows with tears and is ready to reap with shouts of joy,¹ then this tilled field has a king, the Logos, who leads, rules and reigns. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 145.2.²

5:10 *No Satisfaction in Increasing Wealth*

TRAP FOR THOSE WHO LOVE MONEY. GREGORY THE GREAT: When they are intent on increasing money, let them hear what is written: "The covetous man is not filled with money, and he that loves riches shall not reap fruit thereof." For indeed he would reap fruit of them, were he minded, not loving them, to disperse them well. But whoever in his affection for them retains them shall surely leave them behind here without fruit. When they burn to be filled at once with all manner of wealth, let them hear what is written: "He that makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent."³ For certainly he who goes about to increase wealth is negligent in avoiding sin; and, being caught after the manner of birds, while looking greedily at the bait of earthly things, he is not aware in what a noose of sin he is being strangled. PASTORAL CARE 3.20.⁴

GOD GRANTS SUFFERING TO THE GREEDY BUT PEACE TO THOSE WHO ARE GOOD. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: If, he says, you see among people those on the one hand who are oppressed and those on the other who do wrong in judgment, and still others who practice justice, do not be amazed

¹See Ps 126:5 (125:5 LXX). ²PTA 13:3-5. ³Prov 28:20. ⁴NPNF 2 12:46*.

that this occurs as if there were no divine foresight. Rather, know that God guards everything through Christ and that he also exercises his provision over everything through his holy angels, who excel in their knowledge of earthly events.⁵ God is the ruler of the world that he created,⁶ and he allots suffering to those who prefer greed and the vanity of this life to knowledge of Christ. But to those who live their lives in goodness, conduct themselves with courage and serve justly, he grants the knowledge of God and a peaceful rest. He grants this whether their knowledge was small or great here, for “we know in part and we prophesy in part.”⁷ But in the end, he will receive these, while those who were filled with wickedness will find no rest from the worm produced by their evil. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 38.5.7-11.⁸

5:12-13 Prosperity Brings No Peace, for Wealth Is Vain that Is Not Used for Good

EVIL CAN BE REVEALED IN WEALTH. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: An abundance of evil can be revealed in wealth. But this type of evil should be viewed as more of a weakness. Therefore, everyone who guards his wealth for himself does not know the wisdom of God, nor is his heart inclined to insight, nor to instructing his children. He has neither received the words of God’s commandments nor has he hidden them in his heart. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 39.5.12-13.⁹

NO PROFIT AFTER DEATH. AMBROSE: Ecclesiastes sees that riches are kept for ill by one who possesses them, for their loss causes a very great anxiety and disquiet. Indeed they are lost, for they are left here and can be of no advantage to one who is dead. And so, the dead man felt anxiety in regard to them and could not find rest; he left what would bring him shame and did not take with himself what he could keep.¹⁰ He was far different from him of whom it is written, “Blessed is the man that has filled his desire with them; he shall not be confounded when he speaks to his enemies in the gate.”¹¹ His inheritance is the Lord, his reward is

from the offspring of the Virgin Mary, and he is extolled with praises in the going forth of wisdom. THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 2.4.12.¹²

DO NOT BE A SLAVE TO WEALTH. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Of what use is wealth that belongs to someone? He is obviously lord over his wealth. The wealth somebody owns is his amenity and he himself is lord over his wealth. As he himself can use wealth well by being lord over it and not its slave, so also wealth can become lord over him who owns it. Woe to that person. That is the case if he is greedy and becomes a slave of mammon. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 155.11.¹³

WEALTH CAN BE AN EXCUSE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: People use their children as an excuse for gathering riches. At times they do injustice, rob and do similar things, saying: “I’m doing this for my children.” . . . I have seen a person who struggled to become rich, but his riches were of no use. He did not enjoy them himself, nor did his son receive them, but he remained poor and in the same state as he had entered the world. After all, he was not born with money or with clothes. . . .

Only the soul’s goods can be taken away into heaven. . . . If he has done good with his money, if he has a good reputation and honor, and if he has tried to help the weak, then he takes with him something of what he has labored for, namely, that he has done good. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 156.15.¹⁴

ADVANTAGE IN SLEEP OF SERVANTS OVER MASTERS. CHRYSOSTOM: The same thing happens as every one may perceive with regard to sleep. For not a soft couch, or a bedstead overlaid with silver, or the quietness that exists throughout the house, or anything else of this kind are so generally likely to make sleep sweet and pleasant, as labor and fatigue, and the need of sleep, and

⁵See 2 Sam 14:20. ⁶See Jn 1:10. ⁷1 Cor 13:9. ⁸SC 397:128-30. ⁹SC 397:132. ¹⁰See Lk 12:20-21, 33. ¹¹Ps 127:5 (126:5 LXX). ¹²FC 65:359. ¹³PTA 13:23. ¹⁴PTA 13:25-27.

drowsiness when one lies down. And to this particular the experience of facts, nay, before actual experience, the assertion of the Scriptures bears witness. For Solomon, who had passed his life in luxury, when he wished to make this matter evident, said, "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much." Why does he add, "whether he eat little or much"? Both these things usually bring sleeplessness, namely, indigence and excess of food; the one drying up the body, stiffening the eyelids and not suffering them to be closed; the other straitening and oppressing the breath and inducing many pains. But at the same time so powerful a persuasive is labor, that though both these things should befall them, servants are able to sleep. For since throughout the whole day, they are running about everywhere, ministering to their masters, being knocked about and hard pressed, and having but little time to take breath, they receive a sufficient recompense for their toils and labors in the pleasure of sleeping. And thus it has happened through the goodness of God toward humanity, that these pleasures are not to be purchased with gold and silver but with labor, with hard toil, with necessity, and every kind of discipline. Not so the rich. On the contrary, while lying on their beds, they are frequently without sleep through the whole night; and though they devise many schemes, they do not obtain such pleasure. But the poor person, when released from his daily labors, having his limbs completely tired, falls almost before he can lie down into a slumber that is sound, and sweet, and genuine, enjoying this reward, which is not a small one, of his fair day's toils. Since therefore the poor person sleeps, and drinks, and eats with more pleasure than the rich person, what further value is left to riches, now deprived of the one advantage they seemed to have over poverty? *HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES* 2.23.¹⁵

TRUE RICHES CONSIST IN VIRTUE AND FAITH. AMBROSE: Wherefore Ecclesiastes says, "There is a grievous illness which I have seen under the sun: riches kept to the hurt of the

owner." . . . If you are desirous of treasure, take the invisible and the intangible which is to be found in the heavens on high, not that which is in the deepest veins of the earth. Be poor in spirit and you will be rich, no matter what your worldly goods are.¹⁶ "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,"¹⁷ but in his virtue and in his faith. This richness will enrich you if you are rich in your relations to God. *CAIN AND ABEL* 1.5.21.¹⁸

5:19 Money and Possessions Are Gifts from God

BUT SO ALSO IS WISDOM. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: This is the literal interpretation. If someone has much money, if he has lots of good food and many wines, he still cannot eat and drink all of it. But he doubtless has a gift: whatever he can consume, if he has enough food to satisfy him and enough drink, this is a gift from God. But when someone eats and drinks more than necessary, then it is not a gift from God but a gift from desire.

Regarding the spiritual interpretation: God gives wisdom along with the riches and capabilities inherent in wisdom, that is, wisdom's insights, so that people eat and drink from the things they have received: the bread of wisdom, its water, the wine, which he mingled into a cup. This is a gift from God. If one takes the spiritual in the right way, it is, finally, the grace of his lot. *COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES* 164.1.¹⁹

6:2 Wealth Is Given to Us by God

WE SHOULD WORK FOR WHAT WE CAN TAKE WITH US AFTER DEATH. ATHANASIUS: Let none of us entertain the desire for possessions, for what gain is it to acquire those things which we cannot take with us? Why not rather acquire those that we can take: prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, understanding, charity, love of

¹⁵NPNF 1 9:352*. ¹⁶See Mt 5:3. ¹⁷Lk 12:15. ¹⁸FC 42:379-80.

¹⁹PTA 13:41.

the poor, faith in Christ, gentleness, hospitality? If we obtain these, we shall find them there before us preparing a welcome for us in the land of the meek. *LIFE OF ST. ANTHONY* 17.²⁰

RICHES BRING TORMENT. AMBROSE: What good is there for a person in this life? He lives in darkness and cannot be satisfied in his desires. And if he is sated with riches, he loses the enjoyment of his rest, because he is forced to guard the possessions he has acquired through his wretched greed. Thus he possesses them in greater wretchedness, seeing that they can do him no good. For what is more wretched than to be tormented with guarding them and derive no advantage from their abundance? *DEATH AS A GOOD* 2.4.²¹

6:7 *All Labor Is for One's Mouth*

RELATIONSHIP OF TOIL TO APPETITE. JEROME: Everything that human labor produces in this world is consumed by the mouth, ground by the teeth, and sent to the stomach for digestion. Even when a bite to eat delights the palate, it seems to give pleasure only for as long as it remains in the mouth, for when it passes into the belly, it can no longer be distinguished from other food. The soul of the diner is afterwards not fulfilled, because he will again desire what he has just eaten, since neither the wise nor the foolish is able to live without food, and the poor seeks nothing other than to sustain his frail body and to avoid starvation. Moreover, the soul derives no benefit from the refreshment of the body. Food is common to both the wise and the foolish, and the poor tend to go where they perceive wealth. It is better to understand this teaching as referring to the ecclesiastical person whose labor is in his mouth because he is learned in the heavenly Scriptures but whose soul is not fulfilled because he desires always to learn more. *COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES* 6.7.²²

FED BY RICHES. TERTULLIAN: To the corrupting power of riches [the Lord] made the enormity of

voracious appetite antecedent; indeed, the former generates the latter. *ON FASTING* 6.²³

THE FATE OF THOSE WHO ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE BUT NOT RIGHTEOUS. GREGORY THE GREAT: The rich man reveals the great burning in his tongue when he says, "Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, since I am tormented in this flame."²⁴ The unbelieving people keep the words of the law in their mouths but refuse to act on them. The burning will be greater in the place where they manifested that they knew what to do, but that they were unwilling to do it. Solomon said concerning those who are knowledgeable but remiss, "All the toil of a man is in his mouth, but his soul will not be filled." Whoever labors only for this, to know what he should say, fasts with an empty heart from the nourishment that should provide him with knowledge. *FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES* 40.²⁵

TRUE LIFE BEGINS AFTER BODILY DEATH. GREGORY THE GREAT: A person's true life is not found here on earth, for he claims that it is found elsewhere. This, then, is the great advantage humankind has over the animal: The animal does not live on after death, while a person begins to live only when he has completed this visible life through bodily death. *DIALOGUE* 4.4.²⁶

6:10 *The Vanity of Names*

TWO SORTS OF NAMES, AND THE VANITY OF ASKING QUESTIONS. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: There are two sorts of names: some names designate those things which by nature have a body; others designate those which by nature are without a body. The names of those with a body designate the characteristics of such a being, such as its size, color and structure. . . . The names of those without a body reveal a quality of their state of existence, such as their being worthy of

²⁰FC 15:151**. ²¹FC 65:72. ²²CCL 72:298-99. ²³ANF 4:105**. ²⁴Lk 16:24. ²⁵CS 123:373. ²⁶FC 39:195*.

praise or condemnation. But if the first class of names is applied in a straightforward manner, such is not the case with the second class. [With the second class] there are two options: the being has the ability of self-determination of either to incline toward virtue and honor in its knowledge of the Creator, which is the case with angels, archangels, thrones and dominions;²⁷ or to incline toward evil and increase in its ignorance of the Creator, as is the case with Satan and any other world ruler of the present darkness.²⁸ . . .

Let us not ask, “Why was I placed in this body? Or why was I not made an angel? Does not God show partiality?”²⁹ Do we not have free will?”

All these questions simply multiply vanity. How can the creature say to its Creator, “Why did you make me like this?” Or, how can a creature answer back to God? Let all those kinds of discussions cease. Instead, let those discussions prevail which guide us towards virtue and knowledge. All that is present in this age of shadows is called vanity and shadows, and all that belongs to this life will be covered with the darkness, becoming obsolete upon departing this life. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 52.6.10-12.³⁰

²⁷See Col 1:16. ²⁸See Eph 6:12. ²⁹See Rom 2:11. ³⁰SC 397:150-52.





THE VALUES OF
PRACTICAL WISDOM AND
RELATIVE GOOD
ECCLESIASTES 7:1-29

OVERVIEW: A good name consists in a virtuous life. Just as death is better than birth (DIDYMUS), so death in Christ is better than birth in evil and ignorance (EVAGRIUS). If one wishes to ascend to

God, it is better to be sorrowful than to rejoice, to mourn than to feast, to weep than to dance (AMBROSE, CHRYSOSTOM). There is a spiritual blessing that comes from mourning (EVAGRIUS),

which is better than feasting. Indeed, sorrow even in the sense of anger is good if its purpose is good (DIDYMUS). Anger is the rejection of wisdom, and arrogance the contrast to patience (GREGORY THE GREAT, JOHN CASSIAN). Flattery, however, is more often deceptive than helpful. Although God's providence is manifest in creation, crookedness is caused by personal moral decision, not by God's misleading, and a distinction must be made between corporate righteousness and that which is personal (DIDYMUS). Total love is reserved for God alone (ORIGEN). Apart from Jesus, there is no one in this world without sin (BEDE, GREGORY THE GREAT, ORIGEN, AUGUSTINE). Wisdom was a great distance even from Solomon, who was the wisest of all (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, ATHANASIUS, JOHN CASSIAN). Even for the impious, death would be better than life, because in life their sin increases (AMBROSE, ATHANASIUS). Many human schemes obscure the face that God has created (DIDYMUS). Humanity was created good by the good God; by our own decision we became bad, but God can make us good again (AUGUSTINE, BEDE).

7:1 A Good Name Is Better Than Ointment and Death Better Than Birth

A GOOD NAME IS A VIRTUOUS LIFE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The good name consists in a virtuous life. It is acquired with labor, effort and sweat. What, however, is pleasant in the moment often-times is gained without labor and one's own effort. . . .

Those who really make progress regarding their inner person and who lead a spotless life, they have a good name. This is better than ointment, better than pleasantness. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 196.22.¹

WHY DEATH IS BETTER THAN BIRTH. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Whoever does not focus attention on perishable goods and does not think highly of them but knows that "it is better to be with Christ after death" thinks that the day of

death is better than the day of birth. The latter is the beginning of many evils; the former, however, the end and termination of evil. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 197.14.²

DEATH IN CHRIST IS BETTER THAN BIRTH IN EVIL AND IGNORANCE. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: If the death by which the righteous die with Christ³ is praiseworthy because it separates the soul from evil and ignorance, then such a death is the opposite of the birth that unites the soul with evil and ignorance. Therefore, such a death is much more honorable than such a birth. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 54.7.1.⁴

7:2 Better Mourning Than Feasting

SORROW BETTER THAN REJOICING. AMBROSE: If anyone wants to ascend, let him seek not the joys of the world or the pleasant things or the delights but whatever is filled with pain and weeping; for it is better to go into a house of sorrow than into a house of rejoicing. Indeed, Adam would not have come down from paradise unless he had been beguiled by pleasure. FLIGHT FROM THE WORLD 1.3.⁵

THE SPIRITUAL BLESSING THAT COMES FROM MOURNING. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: The final end of human beings is a state of blessedness. If the Lord in the Gospel calls those who mourn "blessed"—"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"⁶—then Solomon quite rightly calls mourning the end of every human being, because those who live in that state of mourning are filled with an abundance of spiritual blessings. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 55.7.2.⁷

WHY MOURNING IS BETTER THAN FEASTING. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Where there is mourning, there is no moral superficiality. Happiness and laughter are avoided; the calamity prohibits it.

¹PTA 163:5. ²PTA 16:5. ³See Rom 6:8. ⁴SC 397:154-56. ⁵FC 65:282. ⁶Mt 5:4. ⁷SC 397:156.

Sometimes we refrain from appearing happy out of regard for those who mourn and for those who experience harm. In the house of feasting, however, the opposite happens: Dances and songs bring reproach, since they indicate a disorderly life. . . .

The “house,” however, signifies a condition or an attitude, not a location. . . . The one who goes to the house of mourning knows that everyone dies in the end. Once he knows that he has to die, he will not think about and dedicate his effort to owning something, if it is a possession that is lost in death such as wealth, reputation and honor. . . .

One can understand “the living” in the following way: one who lives according to God’s will. Those people were Abraham and his descendants. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 197.19—198.22.⁸

A HARD SAYING. CHRYSOSTOM: “It is better,” we read, “to go into the house of mourning than into the house of laughter.” But, likely enough, you do not like the saying and want to evade it. Let us however see what sort of man Adam was in paradise, and what he was afterwards; what sort of man Cain was before, and what he was afterwards. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 16.⁹

7:3 *Sorrow Better Than Laughter*

WEeping BETTER THAN DANCING. CHRYSOSTOM: Is it better to go where there is weeping, lamentation, and groans, and anguish, and so much sadness, than where there is the dance, the cymbals, and laughter, and luxury, and full eating and drinking? Yes, truly, [Solomon] replies. And tell me why it is so, and for what reason? Because, at the former place, insolence is bred; at the latter, sobriety. And when a person goes to the banquet of one who is more opulent, he will no longer behold his own house with the same pleasure, but he comes back to his wife in a discontented mood. In discontent he partakes of his own table and is peevish toward his own servants, and his own children, and everybody in his house, per-

ceiving his own poverty the more forcibly by the wealth of others. And this is not the only evil. But he also often envies him who has invited him to the feast and returns home having received no benefit at all. But with regard to the house of mourning, nothing of this sort can be said. On the contrary, much spiritual wisdom is to be gained there, as well as sobriety. For when once a person has passed the threshold of a house which contains a corpse and has seen the departed one lying speechless, and the wife tearing her hair, mangling her cheeks, and wounding her arms, he is subdued; his countenance becomes sad. And every one of those who sit down together can say to his neighbor but this: “We are nothing, and our wickedness is inexpressible!” What can be more full of wisdom than these words, when we both acknowledge the insignificance of our nature and accuse our own wickedness and account present things as nothing? Giving utterance, though, in different words, to that very sentiment of Solomon—that sentiment which is so marvelous and pregnant with divine wisdom—“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” He who enters the house of mourning indeed weeps for the departed, even though he is an enemy. Do you not see how much better that house is than the other? For there, though he is a friend, he envies; but here, though he is an enemy, he weeps. HOMILIES CONCERNING THE STATUES 15.5.¹⁰

SORROW IS GOOD IF ITS PURPOSE IS GOOD.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Take the case that someone has subjects, for example, children or slaves. If he is angry¹¹ with them and in a fury so that he limits the evil, then his anger is good, not anger as such, but the anger of a father over his child, of a guardian’s anger over his charge. . . .

He calls that kind of anger good that prevents sins from becoming so big that punishment has to follow. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 199.22.¹²

⁸PTA 16:7-11. ⁹NPNF 1 11:104. ¹⁰NPNF 1 9:440*. ¹¹Sorrow (Eccles 7:3) being understood as anger. ¹²PTA 16:13-15.

7:5-8 *Contrasts for the Better*

FLATTERY IS MORE OFTEN DECEPTIVE THAN HELPFUL. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: For most people it seems to be right to avoid the critique of a wise man, especially if they like to sin. Whoever desires amusement and sin avoids the person who wants to hinder it. Whoever has no insight is pleased with flatterers, preferring flattery to critique. It is the characteristic of the wise man that he criticizes the one he loves. . . . The flatterers sing in a certain way. Even when they give ethical speeches, they want to make their audience happy instead of looking out for their best interests. Such song is a speech that gives joy, but a rebuke helps one to find the right way. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 202.2.¹³

THE LAUGHTER OF FOOLS. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Thorns that burn under a pot make loud crackling noises. This is like the laughing of the foolish. It makes noise and is crackling, but not because it educates the soul. . . . As the thorns produce noise when they as plants are burned under a pot, in the same way the laughter of the foolish comes out of a bad soul that is burning. . . . Thorns are earthly worries, shameful desires and uncurbed joys. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 203.3.¹⁴

THE IDEAL OF A TEACHER WHO IS PATIENT. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The end of words is more likely to be good than their beginning. . . . A speech is given in order to actualize something. . . . Oftentimes someone who teaches has with patience led someone who is not highly intelligent to learning. He does not give up after the first or second admonition but tries to heal him in every case. Such a patient teacher is better than an arrogant one, or someone proud in spirit. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 204.22.¹⁵

7:9 *Anger in Fools*

ANGER THE REJECTION OF WISDOM. GREGORY

THE GREAT: When the peace of the mind is lashed with anger, torn and rent, as it were, it is thrown into confusion, so that it is not in harmony with itself and loses the force of the inward likeness. Let us consider, then, how great the sin of anger is, by which, while we part with mildness, the likeness of the image of the Most High is spoiled. By anger, wisdom is cast off, so that we are left wholly in ignorance of what to do and in what order to do it. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 1.5.78.¹⁶

PATIENCE CONTRASTED WITH ARROGANCE. GREGORY THE GREAT: When anyone lacks patience about being looked down upon in this world, he tries to display any hidden good qualities he may have, and so through impatience is drawn on to arrogance. While he cannot bear contempt, he boasts ostentatiously in self-display. Therefore Scripture says, "Better is the patient than the arrogant." Indeed, one who is patient chooses to suffer evil rather than have his hidden good qualities come to be known through the vice of ostentation. But the arrogant, on the contrary, prefers to have good attributed to him falsely, rather than to suffer the slightest evil. PASTORAL RULE 3.9.¹⁷

THE EFFECTS OF THE DEADLY POISON OF ANGER. JOHN CASSIAN: The deadly poison of anger has to be utterly rooted out from the inmost corners of our soul. For as long as this remains in our hearts and blinds with its hurtful darkness the eye of the soul, we can neither acquire right judgment and discretion nor gain the insight which springs from an honest gaze, or ripeness of counsel. Nor can we be partakers of life, or retentive of righteousness, or even have the capacity for spiritual and true light, "for," says one, "mine eye is disturbed by reason of anger."¹⁸ Nor can we become partakers of wisdom, even though we are considered wise by universal con-

¹³PTA 16:19. ¹⁴PTA 16:23-25. ¹⁵PTA 16:27-29. ¹⁶LF 18:303*.

¹⁷NPNF 2 12:30**. ¹⁸Ps 31:9 (30:10 LXX).

sent, for “anger rests in the bosom of fools.”
INSTITUTES 8.1.¹⁹

7:13 *The Ways of God’s Providence*

THE WORKING OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE IS MANIFEST IN HIS CREATION. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Even among the Greeks there were many opponents to those who claimed that the cosmos came into being by itself. . . . Since providence of necessity is concerned with the details and God is providence, his providence concerns the cosmos that he himself has created. Now admit even something else: God watches over the cosmos that he himself has created out of providence, so that it might go well. . . . God knows the reasons for everything that came into being, and he knows why they are hidden. . . . In no way do you have sufficient knowledge of God’s creations, if you take offence at them, because you are not reasonable. Watch God’s creatures! What for others is a reason for offence will be for you knowledge of the Creator and of the created. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 209.26.²⁰

CROOKEDNESS CAUSED BY PERSONAL MORAL DECISION. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: God does not make crooked by causing destruction but by showing that someone is crooked. . . . It is written, “Those who turn to crooked ways, the Lord will lead away together with those who have committed injustice.”²¹ It is not God himself who leads them away against their will together with those who have committed injustice, but he has shown that those who turn from the way after their own moral decision are such people. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 212.12.²²

7:15 *The Mystery of Life*

DISTINCTION BETWEEN ABSOLUTE AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTEOUSNESS. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: There is an absolute righteousness and a righteousness that is only righteous for one. . . . A righteous person can get lost in what is only

righteous for him. Those, however, who are really righteous . . . do not remain in what is righteous for them alone and do not trust in this as their own right. This is why he does not perish in absolute righteousness, as the psalmist says: “In your righteousness I will live.”²³ Paul, for example, who was a great man who lived in Christ and for whom truth was revealed, said, “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.”²⁴ COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 213.23.²⁵

7:16 *Do Not Be Overly Righteous or Overly Wise*

TOTAL LOVE IS RESERVED FOR GOD ALONE. ORIGEN: Neither those who love too much nor those who hate, abide by the rule of truth. The former lie through love; the latter lie through hatred. It is right to place a bridle even on charity and to permit it freedom to roam only insofar as it does not rush headlong over a cliff. Scripture says, in Ecclesiastes, “Do not be righteous in excess, nor think yourself more than you are, lest perhaps you should be struck dumb.” Following this, I can say something similar. Do not love a man “with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with all your strength.” Do not love an angel “with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with all your strength.” In accord with the Savior’s words, keep this command in respect to God alone. For, he says, “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with all your strength.”²⁶ HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE 25.6.²⁷

LOCAL POSITION. GREGORY OF NYSSA: No one can say that he has strayed from ignorance into some silly fancy of separating, locally, the supreme from that which is below, and assigning

¹⁹NPNF 2 11:257. ²⁰PTA 16:43-47. ²¹Ps 125:5 (124:5 LXX). ²²PTA 16:51. ²³See Ps 119:40 (118:40 LXX). ²⁴1 Cor 4:4. ²⁵PTA 16:55-57. ²⁶Lk 10:27. ²⁷FC 94:107*.

to the Father as it were the peak of some hill, while he seats the Son lower down in the hollows. No one is so childish as to conceive of differences in space, when the intellectual and spiritual is under discussion. Local position is a property of the material, but the intellectual and immaterial is confessedly removed from the idea of locality. What, then, is the reason why he says that the Father alone has supreme being? For one can hardly think it is from ignorance that he wanders off into these conceptions, being one who, in the many displays he makes, claims to be wise, even "making himself overwise," as the Holy Scripture forbids us to do. *AGAINST EUNOMIUS I.14.*²⁸

7:17 *Do Not Be Overly Wicked*

LET MERCY ABOUND. AMBROSE: One is victorious who hopes for the grace of God, not he who presumes upon his own strength. For why do you not rely upon grace, since you have a merciful Judge in the contest? "For the Lord is merciful and just, and our God shows mercy."²⁹ Mercy is mentioned twice, but justice once. Justice is in the middle, enclosed by a double wall of mercy. Sins superabound. Therefore let mercy superabound. With the Lord there is an abundance of all powers, for he is the Lord of hosts. Yet there is neither justice without mercy, nor without the exercise of mercy is there justice, for it is written, "Be not overjust." What is above measure, you cannot endure, even if it is good. Preserve measure, that you may receive according to the measure. *ON THE DEATH OF THEODOSIUS 25.*³⁰

MERCY ESSENTIAL TO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

AMBROSE: He who endeavors to amend the faults of human weakness ought to bear this very weakness on his own shoulders, let it weigh upon himself, not cast it off. For we read that the Shepherd in the Gospel carried the weary sheep and did not cast it off.³¹ And Solomon says, "Be not overmuch righteous," for restraint should temper righteousness. For how shall he offer himself to you for healing whom you despise, who thinks

that he will be an object of contempt, not of compassion, to his physician? *CONCERNING REPENTANCE I.1.2.*³²

DEATH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. ATHANASIUS:

And as God promises to them that serve him truly, "I will fulfill the number of your days,"³³ Abraham dies "full of days," and David called on God, saying, "Take me not away in the midst of my days."³⁴ And Eliphaz, one of the friends of Job, being assured of this truth, said, "You shall come to your grave. . . like as a shock of corn comes in its season."³⁵ And Solomon confirming his words, says, "The souls of the unrighteous are taken away untimely."³⁶ And therefore he exhorts in the book of Ecclesiastes, saying, "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be hard: why should you die before your time?" *DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT 14.*³⁷

7:19 *Wisdom Is the Strength of the Wise*

FEED THE MIND BEFORE THE STOMACH. CAESARIUS OF ARLES:

Perhaps a person possesses no bread to extend as an alms to the needy, but still greater is what a person who has a tongue is able to give. It is more important to refresh a mind that will live forever with the food of the word than to satisfy with earthly food the stomach of a body that is going to die. Therefore, brethren, do not take from your neighbors the alms of the word. Paul says, "If we have sown for you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap from you carnal things?"³⁸ "Do good to the just, and you shall find great recompense: and if not of him, assuredly of God."³⁹ "It is good that you should hold up the just, and from him withdraw not your hand, for he that fears God neglects nothing." *SERMON 8.5.*⁴⁰

FROM THE WISDOM OF GOD. ORIGEN: The

²⁸NPNF 2 5:51. ²⁹Ps 116:5 (114:5 LXX). ³⁰FC 22:318*. ³¹Lk 15:5. ³²NPNF 2 10:329. ³³Ex 23:26. ³⁴Ps 102:24 (101:24 LXX). ³⁵Job 5:26. ³⁶Prov 10:27. ³⁷NPNF 2 4:260*. ³⁸1 Cor 9:11. ³⁹Sir 12:2. ⁴⁰FC 31:53-54*.

inhabited world arises in no other way than in the wisdom of God. For “wisdom gives strength to the wise beyond ten rulers who live in the city.” “And the one who despises wisdom and instruction is miserable, and his hope empty, and his labors unprofitable, and his works useless,”⁴¹ says the Book of Wisdom ascribed to Solomon. Hence insofar as possible, since the inhabited world is set aright in the wisdom of God,⁴² let us ourselves desire that our inhabited world, which perhaps has fallen, be set aright. For this inhabited world has fallen whenever we went to the place of affliction. This inhabited world has fallen whenever “we sinned, did wrong, acted wickedly,”⁴³ and it has need of being set aright. **HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 8.1.3.**⁴⁴

DIVINE WISDOM NECESSARY FOR SALVATION. **DIDYMUS THE BLIND:** Look for the might of a general in his wisdom rather than in the size of his troops. . . . If a city has many mighty men but lacks wisdom, these cannot help the city. In a spiritual exegesis the world is called city, that is, the earthly realm around us. No one can live without harm, if he is not given divine wisdom. If wisdom does not help, the mighty ones cannot do anything, whether you mean angels or holy men. If wisdom does not help, the city will not be saved. One can also see the soul of every human being as a city. Even if one had a thousand earthly thoughts that could help a city, it cannot be helped if God’s wisdom is not sent down to help and to create and sustain order. **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 219.8.**⁴⁵

7:20 *No One Is Without Sin*

THE SINS THAT ARE LESS SERIOUS. **BEDE:** There are less serious sins about which it has been written that “there is not a righteous person on earth who does what is good and does not sin,” and, “No living person will be made righteous in your sight.”⁴⁶ **COMMENTARY ON 2 PETER 1.10.**⁴⁷

NO ONE IS FREE FROM MORAL FAULTS. **BEDE:** The Lord himself gives us sure confidence of

obtaining what we properly ask when he adds, “Therefore if you, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give his good Spirit to those who ask him?”⁴⁸ His disciples were good, as far as human judgment can see. He calls them “evil” because there is surely no one in this life who is capable of being free from moral faults, as Solomon states when he says, “There is not a just person on earth, who does good and does not sin.” **HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 2.14.**⁴⁹

THE PROPHET HAS SAID. **GREGORY THE GREAT:** Because the prophet says, “Behold, I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother bring me forth,”⁵⁰ no one coming into the world with sin can be sinless. That is why the same prophet says, “No one living shall be considered righteous in your sight,”⁵¹ and Solomon, “There is no righteous man on earth, who does good, and does not sin.” **FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 39.**⁵²

BE NOT DELUDED BY DEMONS. **ORIGEN:** And it is likely also that in countless other things demons delude us and influence us to act according to their will. And it is possible that, just as no one among us is “clean from defilement,”⁵³ and there is no “just person on the earth who will do good and will not sin,” so also there is no one who has always been free of demons and has never fallen victim to their influence. **COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 20.328.**⁵⁴

ONLY JESUS IS WITHOUT SIN. **ORIGEN:** If you wish to recall some other of the saints, the word of Scripture replies to you, saying, “There is no one upon the earth who does good and sins not.” Therefore only Jesus rightly “has perfect hands”; who alone “does not sin,”⁵⁵ that is, who has per-

⁴¹Wis 3:11. ⁴²See Jer 10:12. ⁴³See Dan 9:5. ⁴⁴FC 97:75. ⁴⁵PTA 16:73. ⁴⁶Ps 143:2 (142:2 LXX). ⁴⁷CS 82:129. ⁴⁸Mt 7:11. ⁴⁹CS 111:132*. ⁵⁰Ps 51:5 (50:7 LXX). ⁵¹Ps 143:2 (142:2 LXX). ⁵²CS 123:365*. ⁵³Job 14:4. ⁵⁴FC 89:274. ⁵⁵1 Pet 2:22.

fect and whole works of his hands. HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 12.3.2.⁵⁶

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF LIVING WITHOUT SIN. AUGUSTINE: The following is one of the many arguments that Pelagius uses in treating this subject: “Once more I repeat: I say that it is possible for a person to be without sin. And what do you say? That it is impossible for a person to be without sin? But I do not say,” he adds, “that there is a person without sin, nor do you say that there is not a person without sin. We are disputing about what is possible and impossible, not about what is and is not.” Next he notes that a number of the passages of Scripture which are usually invoked against them do not bear upon the question in dispute, namely, whether or not a person can be without sin: “For there is no one who is free from pollution,”⁵⁷ and, “There is no one that does not sin,”⁵⁸ and, “There is no just person on the earth,” and, “There is no one that does good.”⁵⁹ “These and other similar texts,” he says, “apply to nonexistence, not to impossibility. By examples of this kind it is shown how some persons were at a given time, not that they could not have been something else. For this reason they are justly found to be guilty. For if they were as they were because they could not have been otherwise, then they are free from blame.” ON NATURE AND GRACE 8.⁶⁰

7:23 *Wisdom Is Far Off*

WISDOM A GREAT DISTANCE EVEN FROM SOLOMON. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: Now the subject of God is harder to come at, in proportion as it is more perfect than any other, and is open to more objections, and the solutions of them are more laborious. For every objection, however small, stops and hinders the course of our argument and cuts off its further advance, just like people who suddenly check with the rein the horses in full gallop and turn them right around by the unexpected shock. Thus Solomon, who was the wisest of all⁶¹ whether

before him or in his own time, to whom God gave breadth of heart, and a flood of contemplation, more abundant than the sand, even he, the more he entered into profundities, the more dizzy he became. And he declared the furthest point of wisdom to be the discovery of how very far away wisdom was from him. ON THEOLOGY, THEOLOGICAL ORATION 2(28).21.⁶²

7:24 *Wisdom Is Far Off and Deep*

I WILL BE WISE. ATHANASIUS: Consider therefore how it is written in the book of Ecclesiastes, “I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who shall find it out?” [Consider] what is said in the Psalms, “The knowledge of you is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”⁶³ And Solomon says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.”⁶⁴ [Therefore] I frequently designed to stop and to cease writing; believe me, I did. But lest I should be found to disappoint you, or by my silence to lead into impiety those who have made enquiry of you and are given to disputation, I constrained myself to write briefly, what I have now sent to your piety. LETTERS TO MONKS 1.2.⁶⁵

NO WORTHY RESULT. BASIL THE GREAT: Even if all minds, in fact, should combine their researches and all tongues would concur in their utterance, never, as I have said, could anyone achieve a worthy result in this matter. Solomon, the wisest of all, presents this thought clearly to us when he says, “I have said: I will be wise; and it departed farther from me”; not that it really fled but because wisdom appears unattainable particularly to those to whom knowledge has been given in an exceptionally high degree by the grace of God. CONCERNING FAITH.⁶⁶

⁵⁶FC 83:222*. ⁵⁷Job 14:4 LXX. ⁵⁸1 Kings 8:46. ⁵⁹Ps 14:3 (13:3 LXX). ⁶⁰FC 86:27-28*. ⁶¹1 Kings 3:12. ⁶²NPNE 2 7:296*. ⁶³Ps 139:6 (138:6 LXX). ⁶⁴Prov 25:2. ⁶⁵NPNE 2 4:563*. ⁶⁶FC 9:63*.

THE IMMEASURABLE VASTNESS. JOHN CAS-SIAN: As the breath of the Divine Spirit drives us further in, so is there an ever-widening and immeasurable vastness opened to us, reaching beyond the sight of our eye. As Solomon says, "It will become much further from us than it was, and a great depth. Who shall find it out?" Therefore let us pray to the Lord that both his fear and his love, which cannot fail, may continue steadfast in us, make us wise in all things, and ever shield us unharmed from the darts of the devil. For with these guards it is impossible for anyone to fall into the snares of death. CONFERENCE 8.28.⁶⁷

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE INCREASES SORROW. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: Who is it, who made all things by his Word,⁶⁸ and formed man by his Wisdom, and gathered into one things scattered abroad, and mingled dust with spirit, and compounded an animal visible and invisible, temporal and immortal, earthly and heavenly, able to attain to God but not to comprehend him, drawing near and yet far off? "I said, I will be wise," says Solomon, "but she"⁶⁹ was far from me beyond what is," and, "Verily, he that increases knowledge increases sorrow."⁷⁰ For the joy of what we have discovered is no greater than the pain of what escapes us; a pain, I imagine, like that felt by those who are dragged, while yet thirsty, from the water, or are unable to retain what they think they hold, or are suddenly left in the dark by a flash of lightning. IN DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT, ORATION 2.75.⁷¹

GOD'S MAGNIFICENCE. JEROME: What Ecclesiastes is saying is this: Before I turned my thoughts to ponder over God's work, I was not aware of God's magnificence. I said, I must have wisdom; that is, I must inquire into the nature of every cause; and wisdom withdrew farther away from me than it ever was before. By that I mean, formerly I was not in quest of wisdom because I was unaware of it, and afterwards, when I began to seek it, I could not find it. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 21 (PSALM 91).⁷²

7:26 Snares and Nets More Bitter Than Death

LIFE MORE BITTER THAN DEATH FOR THE IMPIOUS. AMBROSE: "My heart took a circuit to know the joy of the impious man and to examine carefully and to seek wisdom and a mode of calculating and to know joy through the impious man and trouble and disquietude, and I find that it is bitterer than death" —not because death is bitter, but because it is bitter for the impious one. And yet life is bitterer than death. For it is a greater burden to live for sin than to die in sin, because the impious person increases his sin as long as he lives, but if he dies, he ceases to sin. DEATH AS A GOOD 7.28.⁷³

THE MADNESS OF THE IMPIOUS IS MORE BITTER THAN DEATH. ATHANASIUS: Although a perfect apprehension of the truth is at present far removed from us by reason of the infirmity of the flesh, yet it is possible, as the Preacher himself has said, to perceive the madness of the impious, and having found it, to say that it is "more bitter than death." Therefore for this reason, as perceiving this and able to find it out, I have written, knowing that to the faithful the detection of impiety is a sufficient information wherein piety consists. For although it is impossible to comprehend what God is, yet it is possible to say what he is not. LETTERS TO MONKS 1.2.⁷⁴

RUIN THROUGH WOMEN. PSEUDO-CLEMENT OF ROME: Be admonished, O man: for, if such men as these have been brought to ruin through women, what is your righteousness, or what are you among the holy, that you consort with women and with maidens day and night, with much silliness, without fear of God? Not thus, my brethren, not thus let us conduct ourselves; but let us be mindful of that word which is spo-

⁶⁷NPNF 2 11:386-87*. ⁶⁸See Ps 33:6 (32:6 LXX). ⁶⁹Wisdom.

⁷⁰Eccles 1:18. ⁷¹NPNF 2 7:220*. ⁷²FC 48:168-69. ⁷³FC 65:92.

⁷⁴NPNF 2 4:563*.

ken concerning a woman: “Her hands lay snares, and her heart spreads nets; but the just shall escape from her, while the wicked falls into her hands.” Therefore let us, who are consecrated, be careful not to live in the same house with females who have taken the vow. For such conduct as this is not becoming nor right for the servants of God. *LETTERS ON VIRGINITY 2.10.*⁷⁵

FLEE FROM EVIL WOMEN. *CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA:* Solomon seems to me very wise in bestowing upon an indecent woman the face of every heresy and then saying about her that it is necessary to repudiate and to flee such a woman, “who is a hunter’s snare, and her heart is a net, and in her hands are bonds.” The good man before the face of God will be rescued from her and the sinner will be ensnared by her. *LETTER 31.3.*⁷⁶

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMALE IMAGERY. *DIDYMUS THE BLIND:* In many passages of divine instruction, thoughts and mindsets are called “women” of those who have them, both in a positive and in a negative sense. So it is said, for example, “Sophia gives birth to a man’s insight,”⁷⁷ and, “Your wife is like a good vine, your sons like offshoots of olive trees.”⁷⁸ Out of this woman male offshoots emerge, nourishment for fire and light, since the blessing from these plants gives nourishment for fire and light. In the negative sense again it is said, “Do not pay attention to a bad woman; honey runs from the lips of every prostitute who makes your throat sweet only for a brief time. Later you will find it more bitter than bile.”⁷⁹ . . . If you want to understand it in an allegorical sense the bad and frivolous thought is a temptation. It is sophisticated and heretical; it is like an evil woman. *COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 227.7.*⁸⁰

7:29 Upright by Creation, Fallen by Choice

INCITING TO ZEAL FOR GOOD. *EZNIK OF KOLB:* But because [God] knows that some humans act according to his will and some do not, for that

very reason he proclaims the virtue of the one part in order to incite the others to a zeal for the good from the womb. In the same way too, concerning those others, he proclaims their worthlessness. It is not as if he creates one worthless from the womb, and another useful. And if such were the case, why would it be necessary to praise the worthy and to blame the worthless if he himself is the creator of worthiness and worthlessness? Thus one ought not to be held blameable for that worthlessness if he had created him so from the womb.

And now it is clear that God’s saying beforehand, “Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated”⁸¹ means that this one will become beloved by his conduct, and that one hateful. . . . As it also says elsewhere: “God made man upright, and they thought a thought of evil.” *ON GOD 248.*⁸²

MADE TO SEE GOD. *ATHANASIUS:* For [the soul] is made to see God and to be enlightened by him; but of its own accord in God’s stead it has sought corruptible things and darkness, as the Spirit says somewhere in writing, “God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” Thus it has been then that people from the first discovered and contrived and imagined evil for themselves. But it is now time to say how they came down to the madness of idolatry, that you may know that the invention of idols is wholly due not to good but to evil. But what has its origin in evil can never be pronounced good in any point—being evil altogether. *AGAINST THE HEATHEN 7.5-6.*⁸³

HUMAN BEINGS CANNOT HEAL THEMSELVES. *AUGUSTINE:* The reason that we, being bad, have a good Father is in order that we may not always remain bad. No bad person can make a good one. If no bad person can make a good one, how can a bad man make himself good? The only one who can

⁷⁵ANF 8:64*. ⁷⁶FC 76:123. ⁷⁷Prov 10:23 LXX. ⁷⁸Ps 128:3 (127:3 LXX). ⁷⁹Prov 5:3-4. ⁸⁰PTA 16:105-7. ⁸¹Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:11, 13. ⁸²EKOG 139*. ⁸³NPNF 2:47*.

make a good person out of a bad one is the one who is always good. “Heal me, Lord,” he says, “and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.”⁸⁴ Why do they say to me, silly people saying silly things, “You can save yourself if you want to”? “Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed.” We were created good by the good God, seeing that “God made man upright.” But by our own decision we became bad. We were able to change from good to bad, and we shall be able to change from bad to good. But it is the one who is always good that can change bad to good, because man, by his own will, cannot heal himself. You don’t look for a doctor to wound you; but when you have wounded yourself, you look for one to heal you. *SERMON 61.2.*⁸⁵

WHAT DISPLEASES GOD SHOULD ALSO DISPLEASE US. *AUGUSTINE:* Let us be displeased with ourselves when we sin, because sins displease God. And because we are not in fact without sin, let us at least be like God in this respect, that what displeases him displeases us. Now you are displeased with that in yourself which he also hates who made you. He designed and constructed you; but take a look at yourself and eliminate from yourself everything that does not come from his workshop. For God, as it says, “created man upright.” *SERMON 19.4.*⁸⁶

THE WHOLE IS VITIATED IN ITS ROOT. *AUGUSTINE:* There is also a good world consisting of people, but made so out of a bad one. The whole world, you see, if you take the world as meaning people, leaving aside world in the sense of heaven and earth and all things that are in them; if you mean people by world, then the whole world was made bad by the one who first sinned. The whole mass is vitiated in its root. God made man good; that is what Scripture says: “God made man upright, and they themselves have sought out many devices.” *SERMON 96.6.*⁸⁷

THE CATHOLIC TEACHING. *AUGUSTINE:* The Manichaeans deny that to a good man the beginning of evil came from free will; the Pelagians say

that even a bad man has free will sufficiently to perform the good commandment. The Catholic church condemns both, saying to the former, “God made man upright,” and saying to the latter, “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” *AGAINST TWO LETTERS OF THE PELAGIANS 2.2.*⁸⁸

SCHEMES AND THOUGHTS THAT OBSCURE GOD’S FACE. *DIDYMUS THE BLIND:* God has created human beings straightforward, that is, morally perfect without anything crooked or oblique. But they themselves found many thoughts. . . . They did not devise one thought but many. Evil, thus, is manifold. . . . There is only one single human form that makes a person like God, but there are many into which he can transform himself. If he is cunning, he has the face of a fox; if he shows a poisonous, dangerous face, he has the face of a snake; if he looks wild, he has the face of a lion; if his face is ungovernable, flattering and desiring pleasures, he has the face of a dog. Generally out of one human being and one form emerge a whole plurality of characters and forms. Thus it is the goal to get rid of all forms—even if some people do not share this opinion—in order to show that he has the face that God created. *COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 231.13.*⁸⁹

EVIL IS EXTRANEOUS TO OUR CREATION. *BEDE:* Our struggle against the vices has not been naturally implanted in us by God our Father and Creator but is proved to have befallen us from our love of this world, which we preferred to our Creator. For God made human beings upright, and they have involved themselves in endless questions, as Solomon bears witness. Hence James also says, “Let no one, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted by God. For God is not the instigator of evil, for he himself tempts no one. Each one, in fact, is tempted, drawn on and lured by his own concupiscence.”⁹⁰ *COMMENTARY ON I JOHN 2.16.*⁹¹

⁸⁴Jer 17:14. ⁸⁵WSA 3 3:142-43. ⁸⁶WSA 3 1:380. ⁸⁷WSA 3 4:32.

⁸⁸NPNF 1 5:392. ⁸⁹PTA 16:121-25. ⁹⁰Jas 1:13-14. ⁹¹CS 82:174.



WHO IS LIKE THE WISE MAN?
ECCLESIASTES 8:1-17

OVERVIEW: Wisdom is needed to recognize a wise person, the sort of wisdom that illuminates the face of the inner person (DIDYMUS). It is not wrong to know evil but to do it or associate with it (AMBROSE, DIDYMUS). It is clear that no one can

be deceived by the devil except the person who has chosen to offer him the assent of his own will (JOHN CASSIAN). But God will deal with each as each deserves (ORIGEN). Solomon's ultimate purpose in the book of Ecclesiastes is to lead those

who are wise to yearn for another kind of life that is the substantial reality of the One who created the sun. This was foreshadowed in the sacrifices of the Old Testament and is now, for Christians, completed in the table of the Eucharistic sacrifice (AUGUSTINE).

8:1 *The Shining Face of the Wise Person*

WISDOM IS NEEDED TO RECOGNIZE A WISE PERSON. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: As it is impossible to recognize a white thing if one does not know the color white, and as it is impossible to recognize science if one does not know what science is, so it is also impossible to recognize a wise person by someone who does not know wisdom according to which the wise person is formed and called. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 233-5.¹

INWARDLY, NOT BODILY. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Here he means that the wisdom of a person makes the face shine, but not the face of the body, not a part of the flesh, but the face of the inner person. . . . The face of the inner person is illuminated by wisdom. But wisdom, light, Logos, truth and the other conceptions are identical when applied to Christ. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 233.16.²

8:5 *Nothing Harmful to Those Who Keep the King's Command*

ASSOCIATION WITH WICKEDNESS IS CULPABLE. AMBROSE: And you find in another passage, "For he that keeps the commandment does not know the wicked word" when it is altogether clear that knowledge of wickedness is not culpable, but association with it is. THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 4.7.27.³

TO KNOW THE GOOD IS ALSO TO KNOW EVIL AND TO AVOID IT. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Whoever knows what is good also knows at the same time what is bad. "To know" here does not mean "to do" but simply "to know about something."

Because when the commandment is given to turn away from evil and do good, we must also know evil in order to be able to turn away from it and to choose good. About these things the apostle writes with the following words: "But test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil."⁴ One sees here that whoever tests everything, knows that the good is to be chosen and obeyed and that the evil is to be avoided. . . . Ecclesiastes means that he who obeys the command does not know an evil word, that is, he does not say that he does not "understand" it, but that he does not "use" it. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 236.2.⁵

8:8 *Neither the Spirit Nor Death Can Be Regulated by Humans*

NO HUMAN CONTROL. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: In the direct and literal sense, there is no person who has power over the spirit⁶ so as to understand the movement of air, that is, the wind as breath. The human being has no great power as long as he does not have power over the wind. He can do nothing to cause it and nothing to prevent it when it wants to harm him. Sailors have no power to direct the wind in accordance to their direction, and they cannot stop it when it is fierce and dangerous, even if they are excellent sailors. Thus we have to understand it in this sense in the literal meaning. Since, however, the soul of human beings often is called breath, we also can say: There is no one who has the power to cause the soul to remain within him or who has the power to take it from other living beings. This depends on providence. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 240.20.⁷

8:11 *A Heart Set to Do Evil*

THE DEVIL DECEIVES THOSE WHO ASSENT. JOHN CASSIAN: It is clear, then, that no one can

¹PTA 16:127. ²PTA 16:129. ³FC 65:411. ⁴1 Thess 5:21-22. ⁵PTA 16:139. ⁶Gk *pneuma*, understood by Didymus as "wind" or "breath." ⁷PTA 16:155.

be deceived by the devil except one who has chosen to yield to him the consent of his own will. As Ecclesiastes clearly puts it in these words: "For since there is no speedy opposition to those who do evil, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set to do evil." It is therefore clear that each person goes wrong from this; namely, that when evil thoughts assault him he does not immediately meet them with refusal and contradiction. CONFERENCE 7.8.⁸

NO EVIL SHALL DISTURB YOU. JOHN CASSIAN: Up Until now, never confuting him with your own answer or that of another, you allowed him to lord it over you, according to that saying of Solomon's: "Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the heart of the children of men is full within them to do evil." Therefore after his exposure that evil spirit will no longer be able to disturb you, nor will that foul serpent ever again make his lurking place in you, since he has been dragged out into light from the darkness by your life-giving confession. CONFERENCE 2.II.⁹

GOD DEALS WITH EACH AS EACH DESERVES. ORIGEN: Let them rest assured that punishment shall be inflicted on the wicked, and rewards shall be bestowed upon the righteous, by him who deals with everyone as each deserves, and who will proportion his rewards to the good that each has done, and to the account of himself that he is able to give. And let all know that the good shall be advanced to a higher state, and that the wicked shall be delivered over to sufferings and torments, in punishment of their licentiousness and depravity, their cowardice, timidity, and all their follies. AGAINST CELSUS 8.52.¹⁰

8:14 Remarkable Vanities

YEARNING FOR ANOTHER KIND OF LIFE. AUGUSTINE: In fact, Solomon gives over the entire book of Ecclesiastes to suggesting, with

such fullness as he judged adequate, the emptiness of this life, with the ultimate objective, to be sure, of making us yearn for another kind of life which is no unsubstantial shadow under the sun but substantial reality under the sun's Creator. For a person becomes as insubstantial as the insubstantiality that surrounds him, and it is by God's righteous decree that he, too, must pass away like a shadow. CITY OF GOD 20.3.¹¹

GOD ORDAINS IT. GREGORY THE GREAT: So Solomon bears witness, saying, "There are just men to whom many things happen, as though they had done the deeds of the wicked; and there are wicked, who are as secure as though they had the deeds of the just." God no doubt so ordains it of his inestimable mercy, that scourges should torture the just, lest their doings should elate them, and that the unjust should pass this life at least without punishment, because, by their evil doings, they are hastening onward to those torments that are without end. For that the just are sometimes scourged in no way according to their deserving is shown by this very history that we are considering. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 5.23.44.¹²

8:15 Enjoyment of Food and Drink

SACRIFICE FORESHADOWED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. AUGUSTINE: Now, to be made a sharer at the table is to begin to have life, as we see from a text in Ecclesiastes: "There is no good for a man except what he shall eat and drink." How can we reasonably interpret these words save as an allusion to partaking at the table which the Mediator of the New Testament, priest according to the order of Melchizedek, provides with his own body and blood? This sacrifice, indeed, has taken the place of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament that foreshadowed it. CITY OF GOD 17.20.¹³

⁸NPNF 2 11:385*. ⁹NPNF 2 11:312*. ¹⁰ANF 4:659*. ¹¹FC 24:254*. ¹²LF 23:85*. ¹³FC 24:76.



DEATH IS INEVITABLE ECCLESIASTES 9:1-12

OVERVIEW: There is a difference between knowing and merely looking (EVAGRIUS). We are like the brutes except that our belief in Christ promises eternity (JEROME). The living may still correct their lives, whereas the dead cannot (GREGORY THE GREAT). The mystical bread and wine, the oil and the white garments, to which Solomon calls us, all have Christian significance (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, ORIGEN, JEROME). The white garments and oil on the head can also signify a call to pure works and active charity (BEDE), and our anointing follows

because of the anointing of Christ (DIDYMUS). Since we do not know the time of our coming death, and we cannot work after death, we must make best use of the times we now have (GREGORY THE GREAT, PACIAN OF BARCELONA), neither exceeding nor diminishing our ability (DIDYMUS). Thus, we should take care not to put things off from day to day (HORSIEST), and this is especially true as we journey through life making choices for which we shall later be examined (BABAI). We must remember that our days are definitely num-

bered, and any success we do have comes from God (DIDYMUS). Our Lord as God knew his own time, which he had appointed for himself, but as man he hid himself from it until he was ready for it (ATHANASIUS). Spiritual time, moreover, must be contrasted to chronological time, especially when death is concerned (DIDYMUS).

9:1 *Considering in the Heart*

KNOWING AND MERELY LOOKING. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS: One acquaints the heart with what one has decided to investigate. The heart in turn longs to know more about these things, which is why it is said, "I turned my heart to know."¹ Those "spheres"² are the matters [of inquiry]. The one who directs the heart by meditating on these spheres causes the heart to know them. However, one should note that those spheres that encircle human beings and those that the heart knows are not the same, because we may look into a lot of things, yet only know a very few of them. SCHOLIA ON ECCLESIASTES 68.9.1.³

9:2 *The Same Fate for All*

CHRIST REDEEMS THE COMMON FATE. JEROME: Except that our belief in Christ raises us up to heaven and promises eternity to our souls, the physical conditions of life are the same for us as for the brutes. LETTER 108.27.⁴

9:4 *A Living Dog Better Than a Dead Lion*

CORRECTING THE PAST. GREGORY THE GREAT: "Better" by far "is a living dog" in this problem "than a dead lion." For a living saint may correct what had not been corrected by another who came before him. LETTER 127.⁵

9:7 *Bread and Enjoyment*

THE MYSTICAL BREAD AND WINE. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: For this reason Solomon also, in Ecclesiastes, covertly alluding to this grace, says,

"Come hither, eat your bread with joy," that is, the mystical bread. "Come hither," he calls, a saving, beatific call. "And drink your wine with a merry heart," that is, the mystical wine. "And let oil be poured out upon your head": you see how he hints also of the mystical chrism. "And at all times let your garments be white, because the Lord approves what you do." It is now that the Lord approves what you do, for before you came to the grace your doings were "vanity of vanities." MYSTAGOGICAL LECTURES 4.8.⁶

9:8 *Mystical Meanings*

WASHED IN BAPTISM. ORIGEN: No one, therefore, can hear the Word of God unless he has first been sanctified, that is, unless he is "holy in body and spirit,"⁷ unless he has washed his garments. For a little later he shall go in to the wedding dinner, he shall eat from the flesh of the lamb, he shall drink the cup of salvation. Let no one go in to this dinner with dirty garments. Wisdom also has commanded this elsewhere, saying, "Let your garments be clean at all times." For your garments were washed once when you came to the grace of baptism; you were purified in body; you were cleansed from all filth of flesh and spirit. HOMILIES ON EXODUS 11.7.⁸

WHITE GARMENTS. JEROME: Walk about adorned in white garments, anoint your head, embrace with joy whatever delights your femininity, pursue this vain, brief life with a vain, brief relish, quickly seize whatever it is that pleases you lest it perish, for you will have nothing more beyond this that you currently enjoy. Neither should you fear the frivolous fantasy that an account will be required in the afterlife for each of your deeds, whether good or evil. For there is no wisdom in death, nor any consciousness after the dissolution of this life. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 9.8.⁹

¹Eccles 7:25 LXX. ²Gk *kykloi*. ³SC 397:172. ⁴LCC 5:378. ⁵NPNF 2 13:40. ⁶FC 64:184. ⁷1 Cor 7:34. ⁸FC 71:365. ⁹CCL 72:325.

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE. HORSIESI: The Holy Spirit actually teaches us not to put things off from day to day but to do to our soul all the good that is possible. [This we do] to adorn it with every virtue worthy of heaven, so as to clothe it with brilliant vestments according to this agreeable voice: "Let your clothes be brilliant at all times; let your head not lack in oil." INSTRUCTIONS 4.I.¹⁰

AN EXAMPLE OF TROPOLOGY. BEDE: Tropology (that is, a moral manner of speech) has regard to the establishment and correction of manners, pronounced in words that are either plain or figurative; in plain words, as when John admonishes, saying, "My little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and in truth,"¹¹ or in figurative words, as when Solomon said: "Let your garments be always white and let not oil be lacking on your head," which is to say openly, "At all times let your works be pure and let not charity be lacking from your heart." ON THE TABERNACLE I.¹²

OUR ANOINTING FOLLOWS FROM THE ANOINTING OF CHRIST. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."¹³ See, even the companions are anointed. But he himself was anointed before them, since he has not been anointed because of them, but they because of him. After all, they are called "Christ's companions," not Christ their companion. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 273.13.¹⁴

9:9 *Live Joyfully*

OUR DAYS ARE DEFINITELY NUMBERED.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The time of the days has an end and a definite number. The psalmist as well says, "Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is."¹⁵ . . .

The days of life which are given under the sun

are days of vanity. Even if our lives which we live now are good and filled with illumination, they will be replaced with greater joys, about which God says: "I will satisfy him through the length of the days."¹⁶ COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 277.7.¹⁷

VAIN LIFE IS EMPTY EXISTENCE. BABAI: You, who travel on the road of virtue, should be mindful of your departure from your parental home and know how to acquire your salvation with due precaution. For your temporal life is dissipated as a result of neglect during "the days of your empty existence," and everything which is done neglectfully by the discerning during their lifetime brings them to be questioned once they have shaken off dust and corruption and woken up from the sleep of mortality. LETTER TO CYRIACUS 3.¹⁸

9:10 *Fill Your Remaining Time with Good Work*

NEITHER EXCEED NOR DIMINISH YOUR OWN ABILITY. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: May your action be according to your ability! "Do with your might!" Act, according to the might you have received. . . . That might consists in the gifts of grace from the Holy Spirit. The one who has might and still does not increase his spiritual capacity does not use his might. The one, however, who forcefully does more than is right, not out of real desire, but out of ambition or for another reason, commits a sin. . . .

The beginner acts like a novice, the one who has made progress like one who is on his way, the one who has reached perfection like one who is perfect. Thus, one has to act in accordance with one's ability. If you are not weak, do not act in a way that would diminish your ability to assert your will. On the other hand, do not attempt

¹⁰CS 47:141. ¹¹1 Jn 3:18. ¹²CCL 119A:25. ¹³Ps 45:7 (44:8 LXX).

¹⁴PTA 24:3-5. ¹⁵Ps 39:4 (38:5 LXX). ¹⁶Ps 91:16 (90:16 LXX). ¹⁷PTA 24:19-21. ¹⁸CS 101:139*.

something which you cannot do! COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 278.16.¹⁹

WAGES OF A GOOD WORK. GREGORY THE GREAT: Since the hours and their moments are running away, see to it, dearly beloved, that they are filled with what will earn the wages of a good work. Listen to what Solomon in his wisdom says: “Do vigorously everything your hand can do, because there will be no work or plan or wisdom or knowledge in the lower world, to which you are hurrying.” Since we do not know the time of our coming death and we cannot work after death, it remains for us to seize the time granted us before death. So death itself will be defeated when it comes, if we always fear it before it comes. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 20 (13).²⁰

NO CONFESSION AFTER DEATH. PACIAN OF BARCELONA: Remember, my brethren, that there is no confession in the grave; nor can penance be granted when the time for repentance is past. Hurry while you are still alive. ON PENITENTS 12.1.²¹

9:11 *The Race Is Not to the Swift Nor the Battle to the Strong*

ANY SUCCESS WE HAVE COMES FROM GOD. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Those who believe that human things are guided by providence do not ascribe anything accomplished by humans to their own effort. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.”²² He does not say that no one should build or no one guard the city but that one should remember: if the Lord does not grant success to the effort, both the effort and those who strive for it will be without success. It is up to us to start, but it is up to God to grant success. We start to build the house; God helps and perfects the construction. We guard our own city and are watchful of that decision to guard it, but God preserves it, undestroyed and undefeated by the aggressors.

This is also expressed in Proverbs: “Keep your heart with all vigilance.”²³ But even if you yourself keep your heart with all vigilance, say nevertheless to God: “You, Lord, will guard and preserve us.” This thought is also affirmed by Paul, when he says, “So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.”²⁴ He does not prohibit running towards the goals of our endeavor and to desire them. But he does prohibit belief that they are reached through one’s own effort. Many who have had this expectation have been found without success in their efforts.

Question: How should we understand “the swift?”

Answer: You can understand it clearly in the visible world: Some who are runners run fast, but in spite of that they still do not always escape their pursuers. And the slow are often not caught because the pursuers sometimes stumble. Therefore it is up to God, not to the swift, to finish the race. . . . The strong do not necessarily finish a war victoriously. Goliath was strong, and the war nevertheless did not end well for him.²⁵ He was struck down like someone unarmed, like one who is not a general or someone inexperienced in war. For David the war ended successfully, although he did not trust in many armed forces. Rather, he defeated this mighty giant “in the name of the Lord.” Goliath, on the other hand, who was so proud of himself, had no success in war. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 282.1.²⁶

9:12 *People Do Not Know Their Time*

SPIRITUAL TIME CONTRASTED WITH CHRONOLOGICAL TIME. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Many can know chronological time. Everybody, for example, knows that noon is the time for healthy people to eat lunch. The time, however, which is determined by physicians, is not known to everyone but only to the physician. And since there is

¹⁹PTA 24:25-27. ²⁰CS 123:156. ²¹FC 99:85. ²²Ps 127:1 (126:1 LXX).

²³Prov 4:23. ²⁴Rom 9:16. ²⁵1 Sam 17:41-51. ²⁶PTA 24:41-45.

only one physician for the soul, to whom we say, "O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you,"²⁷ only this physician knows our time. But the individual does not know his time. The inhabitants of Tyre, for example, who would have been ready to repent if the supernatural miracles had occurred among them²⁸—they did not know the time. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 286.I.²⁹

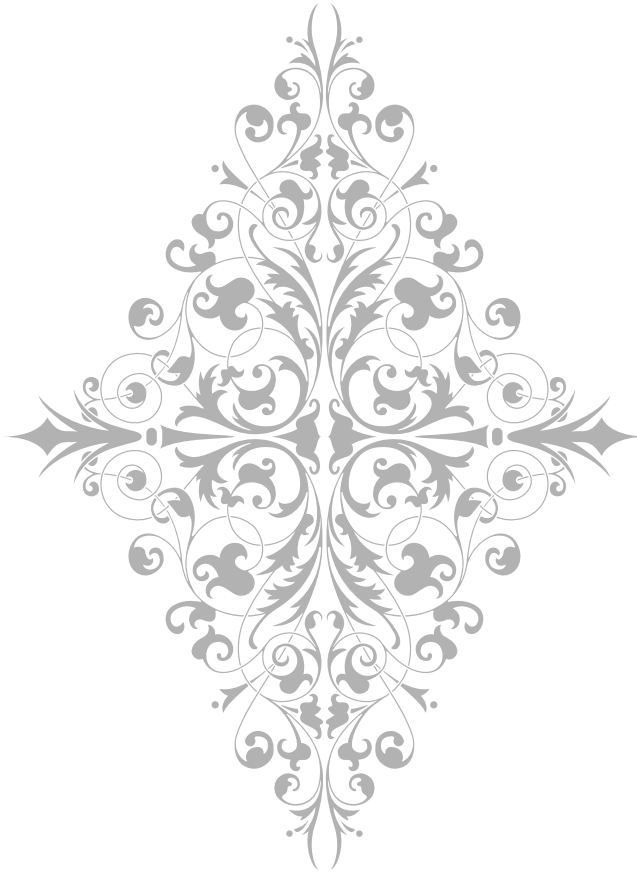
JESUS, AS GOD, DID KNOW HIS OWN TIME.

ATHANASIUS: Now as these things are written in the Scriptures, the case is clear, that the saints know that a certain time is measured to every person, but that no one knows the end of that time is plainly intimated by the words of David, "Declare unto me the shortness of my days."³⁰ What he did not know, that he desired to be informed of. Accordingly the rich man also, while he thought that he had yet a long time to live, heard the words, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be which you have provided?"³¹ And the Preacher speaks confidently in the Holy Spirit, and says, "Man also knows not his time." Wherefore the patriarch Isaac said to his son Esau,

"Behold, I am old, and I know not the day of my death."³² Our Lord, therefore, although as God and the Word of the Father, both knew the time measured out by him to all and was conscious of the time for suffering, which he himself had appointed also to his own body. Yet since he was made man for our sakes, he hid himself when he was sought after before that time came, as we do; when he was persecuted, he fled; and avoiding the designs of his enemies he passed by, and "so went through the midst of them."³³ But when he had brought on that time which he himself had appointed, at which he desired to suffer in the body for all men, he announces it to the Father, saying, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son."³⁴ And then he no longer hid himself from those who sought him but stood willing to be taken by them; for the Scripture says, he said to them that came unto him, "Whom do you seek?" And when they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," he said unto them, "I am he whom you seek."³⁵ DEFENSE OF HIS FLIGHT 15.³⁶

²⁷Ps 41:4 (40:5 LXX). ²⁸See Mt 11:21. ²⁹PTA 24:55-57. ³⁰Ps 102:23 (101:24 LXX). ³¹Lk 12:20. ³²Gen 27:2. ³³Lk 4:30. ³⁴Jn 17:1. ³⁵Jn 18:4-5. ³⁶NPNF 2 4:260*.





WISDOM AS
SUPERIOR TO FOLLY
ECCLESIASTES 9:13 — 10:20

OVERVIEW: Neither riches nor poverty can be evil because they both come from the Lord. (CHRYSOSTOM). Just as dead flies spoil an entire pot of sweet ointment, so even one transgressor can infect the entire church (FULGENTIUS, APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS). The dead flies are like foolishness but the sweet ointment is like wisdom (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). The bite of a silent snake is especially dangerous (JOHN CASSIAN), and its head, which represents the beginning of sin, is pride (AUGUSTINE). The teacher who charms, in fact, should take care to be without guile (DIDYMUS). Our intellect is not brought into submission until our body is subject to it, and our intellect is not subject to God unless our free will is subject to it (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). The princes of the city of the devil are unwilling to await the true happiness of the world to come, whereas the princes of the city of Christ await in patience the blessedness that is sure to be theirs (AUGUSTINE). A house seldom collapses unless the rot has already set in (JOHN CASSIAN, JEROME), but on this side of death repair can be made by way of repentance (JOHN OF DAMASCUS). Secret utterances are always heard (ATHANASIUS), and one should take special care not to curse the king (DIDYMUS).

9:16 *The Poor Person's Wisdom*

NEITHER RICHES NOR POVERTY CAN BE EVIL. CHRYSOSTOM: If riches and poverty are from the Lord, how can either poverty or riches be an evil? Why then were these things said? They were said under the Old Covenant, where there was much account made of wealth, where there was great contempt of poverty, where the one was a curse and the other a blessing. But now it is no longer

so. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 18.4.¹

10:1 *Flies in the Ointment*

THE FLIES ARE LIKE FOOLISHNESS BUT THE OINTMENT LIKE WISDOM. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: Flies falling into perfume, and drowning, make the appearance and use of that pleasant oil unseemly; so, too, it is improper to have both wisdom and foolishness together in one's mind. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 10.1.²

PRINCE OF FLIES. AUGUSTINE: Indeed, it is said that Beelzebub means prince of flies; and it has been written of them, "Dying flies spoil the sweetness of the oil." TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 1.14.3.³

A DIVINIZED FLY INDICATES A WORTHLESS ENTERPRISE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: These flies bring death as well as life. For example there is a divinized fly about which Elijah has said, "Is there no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of the fly, the God of Ekron?"⁴ I would be astonished if they really did divinize a fly. Rather he hereby has described the worthlessness of their enterprise. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 291.3.⁵

FALSE FAITH AND EVIL WAYS. FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE: What is called the prince of flies is shown to be prince of the wicked; another text of Scripture refers to him by saying, "Dead flies destroy the perfumer's sweet ointment." Who destroy except those who grieve the Holy Spirit either by

¹NPNF 1 14:452. ²GTPE 249. ³FC 78:54. ⁴See 2 Kings 1:6 LXX. ⁵PTA 24:73-75.

the crime of infidelity or by the filthy obscenity of unclean deeds, while befouling themselves either with a false faith or an evil way of life? **LETTER 48, TO SCARILA.**⁶

ONE TRANSGRESSOR MAKES A DEN OF THIEVES. **APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS:** “Dead flies spoil the whole pot of sweet ointment,” and “when a king hearkens to unrighteous counsel, all the servants under him are wicked.”⁷ So one scabbed sheep, if not separated from those that are whole, infects the rest with the same distemper; and a person infected with the plague is to be avoided by all; and a mad dog is dangerous to everyone that it touches. If, therefore, we neglect to separate the transgressor from the church of God, we shall make the “Lord’s house a den of thieves.”⁸ **CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 2.3.17.**⁹

10:4 *Be Constant in Your Place*

THE RULER WILL HAVE POWER IF YOU SUBJECT YOURSELF. **DIDYMUS THE BLIND:** “If the anger of the ruler rises against you”—if he seems to have power over you, it is only because you have subjected yourself to him. For as “sin reigns in the mortal bodies” of those who want to “obey their passions,”¹⁰ and as someone is ruled over if he is ruled by mammon and has focused his thinking on the desire for money, so he [the ruler] has power over the one who subjects himself as slave. **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 294.2.**¹¹

THE DEVIL WANTS TO CARRY YOU AWAY. **AMBROSE:** Do not say of your God, “He is grievous to me,”¹² or of your position, “It is useless to me,” for it is written, “Leave not your place.” The devil wishes to take it from you, he wishes to carry you away, for he is jealous of your hope and jealous of your task. **LETTER 58, TO HIS CLERGY.**¹³

GIVE NO PLACE TO THE DEVIL. **BASIL THE GREAT:** He who sins gives place to the devil, taking no heed of him who said, “Do not give place to the devil,”¹⁴ or to Ecclesiastes, “If the spirit of

him that has power ascends upon you, leave not your place.” Let us, then, who are in the Lord and who, as much as we are able, observe closely his wonders, so draw joy to our hearts from the contemplation of them. **HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 15.1 (PSALM 32).**¹⁵

BANISH THE DEVIL’S THOUGHTS. **CYRIL OF JERUSALEM:** You alone are not the source of the trouble, but there is also one who instigates you, the accursed devil. He makes his suggestions to all, but he does not prevail by force over those who do not give way to him. Therefore Ecclesiastes says, “Should the anger of the ruler burst upon you, forsake not your place.” If you shut your door, you will be out of his reach and he will not harm you. But if you are so careless as to admit the lustful thought, reflection will cause it to strike roots within you; it will capture your mind and drag you down into an abyss of sins. **CATECHETICAL LECTURES 2.3.**¹⁶

SURRENDER TO THE DEVIL IS SIN. **JEROME:** We also read in Ecclesiastes, “If the spirit of him that has power, ascend upon your heart, leave not your place.” From this it is clearly evident that we have committed a sin if we surrender our place to him who ascends upon us and if we have not cast down headlong the enemy ascending upon the walls. However, it seems to me that when you call down upon the heads of your brothers, that is to say, upon your slanderers, eternal fires with the devil, you are not so much dashing your brothers to the ground as you are elevating the devil, since he is to be punished in the same fires as Christians. **AGAINST RUFINUS 2.7.**¹⁷

10:7 *Servants on Horses and Princes Walking*

TEMPORAL DIGNITY. **GREGORY THE GREAT:** By

⁶FC 95:467. ⁷Prov 29:12. ⁸Mt 21:13. ⁹ANF 7:403*. ¹⁰See Rom 6:12. ¹¹PTA 24:79-81. ¹²Wis 2:15. ¹³FC 26:320*. ¹⁴Eph 4:27. ¹⁵FC 46:228. ¹⁶FC 61:97. ¹⁷FC 53:112-13*.

the name *horse* is understood temporal dignity, as Solomon witnesses, who says, “I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.” For everyone who sins is the servant of sin, and servants are upon horses when sinners are elated with the dignities of the present life. **MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 6.31.43.**¹⁸

FROM PAGANISM TO THE GOSPEL. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Those who have come from paganism to the gospel—those who were slaves of desire, slaves of sin, slaves of the devil and of death—have become riders on horseback. About them it is said that, in the future, they will ride on divine words like on horses. **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 299.24.**¹⁹

10:8 *A Pitfall to Be Avoided*

PURPOSEFUL MISINTERPRETATION. ATHANASIUS: The Jews in their imaginings, and in their agreeing to act unjustly against the Lord, forgot that they were bringing wrath upon themselves. Therefore does the Word lament for them saying, “Why do the people exalt themselves, and the nations imagine vain things?”²⁰ For vain indeed was the imagination of the Jews, meditating death against the Life, and devising unreasonable things against the Word of the Father. For who that looks upon their dispersion, and the desolation of their city, may not aptly say, “Woe unto them, for they have imagined an evil imagination, saying against their own soul, let us bind the righteous man, because he is not pleasing to us.”²¹ And full well it is so, my brethren; for when they erred concerning the Scriptures, they knew not that “he who digs a pit for his neighbor falls into it; and he who destroys a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” And if they had not turned their faces from the Lord, they would have feared what was written before in the divine Psalms: “The heathen are caught in the pit which they made; in the snare which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known when executing judgments: by the works of his hands is the sinner taken.”²² **FESTAL LETTERS 9.5.**²³

SOME MYSTERIES NOT TO BE SOUGHT.

AUGUSTINE: Scripture says that there are deep things that must not under any circumstances be looked into, and the one who searches in a hedge will be bitten by a snake. **LETTER 12.10.**²⁴

TO BREAK THE BOUNDARY HARMS THE CATHOLIC FAITH. VINCENT OF LÉRINS: Once they begin not only to use the divine expressions but also to explain them, not only to present them but also to interpret them, then people will realize how bitter, how sharp, how fierce they are. Then will the poisonous breath of their new ideas be exhaled, then will profane novelties appear in the open, then will you see that “the hedge is broken,” that the ancient bounds have been passed,²⁵ that the dogma of the church is lacerated, that the Catholic faith is harmed. **COMMONITORIES 25.**²⁶

10:11 *The Bite of a Silent Snake*

SNAKE’S VENOM IN A PERSON’S HEART. JOHN CASSIAN: “If a snake bites without hissing,” Ecclesiastes says, “there is no advantage for the charmer,” showing that the bite of a snake in silence is dangerous. This means that if a suggestion or thought springing from the devil is not by means of confession shown to some charmer (I mean some spiritually minded person who knows how to heal the wound at once by charms from the Scripture and how to extract the deadly poison of the snake from the heart), it will be impossible to help the sufferer who is already in danger and will no doubt die. **CONFERENCE 2.9.**²⁷

IRRITATED BY GIFTS. JOHN CASSIAN: These silent bites are alone in fending off the medicine of the wise people. This deadly menace is so utterly incurable that it is worsened by soothing, inflamed by serious treatment, and irritated by gifts. **CONFERENCE 18.16.**²⁸

¹⁸LF 31:456-57. ¹⁹PtA 24:99. ²⁰Ps 2:1. ²¹Is 3:10 LXX; cf. Wis 2:12. ²²Ps 9:15-16. ²³NPNF 2 4:534-35. ²⁴FC 81:104. ²⁵Prov 22:28. ²⁶FC 7:317. ²⁷NPNF 2 11:131*. ²⁸JCC 200.

THE TEACHER WHO CHARMS SHOULD BE WITHOUT GUILE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The snake is powerful, when it spreads its poison secretly. In the one who is tricked, an impression is created that he has received something good which in reality is not good. The teacher who charms should not do so in a superfluous way but in a way that accomplishes something. Then he shows his [student] the error, the guile of his seducer. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 304.20.²⁹

10:13 *The Words of a Fool*

SHUN THE BEGINNING OF SIN. AUGUSTINE: The church was admonished to shun the beginning of sin. Which is that beginning of sin, like the head of a serpent? The beginning of all sin is pride. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 74.13.³⁰

10:15 *The Heavenly City*

THE TOWN IS REALLY HEAVEN NOT A PLACE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: By “town” he does not mean a place but the deed according to the law. The fool does “not even know the way to town.” But the one who says, “Even if we live on earth, our citizenship is in heaven,”³¹ “knows the way to the town” in which he is a true citizen. And further: “As we have heard, so we have received in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.”³² COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 308.1.³³

UNABLE TO GET TO HEAVEN. JOHN CASSIAN: And thus wandering from the king’s highway, they can never arrive at that metropolis, to which our course should ever be directed without swerving. And this Ecclesiastes has distinctly expressed saying: “The labor of fools wearies those who do not know how to go to the city”—namely, to that “heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us.”³⁴ CONFERENCE 24.6.³⁵

10:16 *Spiritual Immaturity*

THE BODY MUST BE SUBJECT TO THE MIND.

ISAAC OF NINEVEH: Our intellect is not brought into submission unless our body is subject to it. The kingship of the intellect is the crucifixion of the body. The intellect is not subject to God unless the free will is subject to reason. It is hard to convey anything sublime to one who is still a beginner, and an infant in stature. “Woe to thee, O city, when thy king is a child!” ASCETICAL HOMILIES 36.³⁶

10:17 *Two Cities Have Two Kings*

FAULTS RAMPANT IN YOUTH. AUGUSTINE: The passage from this book which I gladly quote is one touching the two cities and their kings, the devil and Christ: “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a youth, and when the princes eat in the morning. Blessed is the land whose king is the son of freeborn parents and whose princes eat in due season, in strength and not in confusion.” Here, the devil is spoken of as a “youth” because of the foolishness, pride, rashness, unruliness, and other faults usually rampant at that age; and Christ is spoken of as the “son of freeborn parents” because he descended in the flesh from those holy patriarchs who were citizens of the free city. The princes of the devil’s city “eat in the morning,” that is, before the proper time—in the sense that, being overeager to attain perfect happiness at once in the society of this present world, they are unwilling to await the only true happiness which will come in due time in the world to come. But the princes of the city of Christ await in patience the time of a blessedness which is sure to be theirs. The conclusion, “in strength and not in confusion,” means that their hope will not cheat them. CITY OF GOD 17.20.³⁷

10:18 *The Results of Sloth*

A TINY LEAK BECOMES A STORMY TEMPEST.

²⁹PTA 24:117-19. ³⁰NPNF 1 8:346. ³¹See Phil 3:20. ³²See Ps 48:8 (47:9 LXX). ³³PTA 24:131. ³⁴Gal 4:26. ³⁵NPNF 2 11:542*.

³⁶AHSIS 161-62. ³⁷FC 24:76-77*.

JOHN CASSIAN: No house ever falls to the ground by a sudden collapse, but only when there is some long-standing flaw in the foundation or when by long-continued neglect of its inhabitants, what was at first only a little drip breaks through and the protecting walls are gradually ruined. In consequence of long-standing neglect the gap becomes larger and the walls break away, and in time the drenching storm and rain pours in like a river. For “by slothfulness a building is brought low, and through lazy hands the house shall leak.” CONFERENCE 6.17.³⁸

THE HOUSE IS OUR HOUSE. JEROME: Our house, which was built to human stature, along with the habitation we shall have in heaven, will collapse if we are lazy and hesitant to do good works. And every floor that depends upon a rafter for support will crush its inhabitant when it falls to the ground. It is when the assistance of our hands and our strength is lacking that all the storm clouds and violent winds from above burst forth upon us. Moreover, because we translated this verse in the singular, it is better to understand it as pertaining to the church, all of whose sublimity will be ruined through the negligence of its leaders. And where the roof is thought to be strong, there will be found the enticements of wickedness. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 10.18.³⁹

SLOTH REMEDIED BY REPENTANCE. JOHN OF DAMASCUS: But as long as we are among the living, while the foundation of our true faith continues unshattered, even if somewhat of the outer roofwork or inner building be disabled, it is allowed to renew by repentance the part rotted by sins. BARLAAM AND JOSEPH II.94.⁴⁰

10:19 *Silence in the Bakery*

NO CHATTING OR SHOUTING. HORSIESI: Let each one do his work without chatting or shouting. Let absolutely no one laugh, so that there will not apply to us the reproach of the Scriptures, “They make bread for laughter.” If someone needs to ask his neighbor a question, he must do so quietly, without shouting. REGULATIONS 40.⁴¹

10:20 *Things Spoken in Secret*

SECRET UTTERANCES ARE ALWAYS HEARD. ATHANASIUS: If then those things, which are spoken in secret against you that are kings, are not hidden, is it not incredible that I should have spoken against you in the presence of a king and of so many bystanders? DEFENSE BEFORE CONSTANTIUS 3.⁴²

NEITHER CURSE THE KING NOR ANYONE ELSE. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Generally one is advised not to say bad things about others. A curse is nothing else but a wish for something bad. . . .

The word cautions against slander. Do not even have the intention, he says, of slandering someone—let alone actually slandering someone. Look at how great an evil this is: “Do not love speaking ill [of anyone], lest you be cut off.”⁴³ Thus, he says the following: Not even in your thoughts, not even in your consciousness, should you “curse the king.” But if one is not supposed to curse anyone, the king should be cursed even less. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 313.13.⁴⁴

³⁸NPNF 2 11:361*. ³⁹CCL 72:341-42. ⁴⁰LCL 34:159*. ⁴¹CS 46:210. ⁴²NPNF 2 4:239. ⁴³Prov 20:13 LXX. ⁴⁴PTA 24:153-55.



THE VALUE OF DILIGENCE
AND GENEROSITY
ECCLESIASTES 11:1-8

OVERVIEW: The bread upon the waters is the bread of heaven (AMBROSE), and if it is cast freely it will meet us again in due time (GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS). The seventh day symbolizes the mystery of the law, the Old Testament, whereas the eighth symbolizes the resurrection, the day of the Lord (AMBROSE, DIDYMUS, AUGUSTINE). The north wind indicates evil, the south the good (DIDYMUS). Infancy is in need of teaching and instruction, so that youth may escape sin (PETER OF ALEXANDRIA). Always give more than you are asked for, and do not try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy (ISAAC OF NINEVEH). Never be hesitant to pray at the hours that are stipulated (FRUCTUOSUS).

11:1 Casting Bread on the Waters

THE BREAD OF HEAVEN. AMBROSE: Tears are

aply called bread there, where a hunger for justice exists. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.”¹ And so there are tears which are bread and which strengthen the human heart.² The maxim of Ecclesiastes is also appropriate to this discussion, “Cast your bread on the face of the water.” For the bread of heaven is there, where the water of grace is; it is right that those from whose belly rivers of living water flow³ should receive the support of the Word and a nurture of a mystical kind. THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 4.2.7.⁴

OUR BREAD WILL MEET US AGAIN IN DUE TIME. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: It happens with most people that they give indeed, but they do not do so freely and readily, which is a greater

¹Mt 5:6. ²See Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX). ³Jn 7:38. ⁴FC 65:395.

and more perfect thing than the mere act of offering itself. It is far better to be generous to the unworthy for the sake of the worthy than to deprive the worthy out of fear of the unworthy. This seems to have a bearing on our duty of casting bread upon the waters, not that it may be swept away or perish in the eyes of the just examiner, but that it may come to that place where all our goods will be stored up. And [it will] be there to meet us in due time, even though we may think otherwise. ON THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER, ORATION 18.20.⁵

GIVE GENEROUSLY. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: When you give, give generously, with a joyous countenance, and give more than you are asked for, since it is said: “Send forth thy morsel of bread toward the face of the poor man, and soon you will find your recompense.” Do not separate the rich from the poor, nor try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy, but let all persons be equal in your eyes for a good deed. ASCETICAL HOMILIES 4.⁶

11:2 *The Number Eight*

AN OCTAVE. AMBROSE: The Old Testament took note of this number eight, called by us in Latin an octave, for Ecclesiastes says, “Give a portion to those seven, and also to those eight.” The seven of the Old Testament is the eight of the New, since Christ arose and the day of the new salvation has shed light upon all. It is the day of which the prophet says, “This is the day which the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.”⁷ LETTER 50, TO HORONTIANUS.⁸

THE EIGHTH DAY. AMBROSE: The seventh day symbolizes the mystery of the law, the eighth that of the resurrection, as you have in Ecclesiastes. LETTER 84, TO IRENAEUS.⁹

SIGNIFICANCE OF SEVEN AND EIGHT. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The one who “gives a part to the seven”¹⁰ commits to the Old Testament, which was before the arrival of the Savior. The number

seven indicates the institution of the sabbath. The one who “gives a part to the eight” is the one who believes in the resurrection of the Savior, since he came after the sabbath.

The Jews who “give a part to the seven” have not “given a part to the eight” and therefore they were not saved. The heretics . . . rejected the law and the Old Testament; since they did not “give a part to the seven,” they miss the goal. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 317.15.¹¹

THE LORD’S DAY. AUGUSTINE: Before the Lord’s resurrection there was rest for the departed but resurrection for none: “Rising from the dead he dies no more, death has no more dominion over him.”¹² But after such resurrection had taken place in the Lord’s body, so that the head of the church might foreshadow what the body of the church hopes for at the end, then the Lord’s day—that is the eighth, which is also the first—began to be observed. LETTER 55.¹³

SEVEN OR EIGHT HOURS TO PRAY. FRUCTUOSUS OF BRAGA: They need not be hesitant to pray at their own special hours, that is, the second, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, tenth, and eleventh, inasmuch as seven or eight are harmonious with the words of Solomon: “Make seven or eight portions.” [This is] in order that they may be able to climb through the sevenfold grace of the Spirit and the eight beatitudes on the day of resurrection with unhampered tread up the ladder of Jacob by its fifteen steps to the region of heaven, where Christ is resplendent above. GENERAL RULE FOR MONASTERIES 10.¹⁴

11:3 *Nature Takes Its Course*

READING AND UNDERSTANDING. AMBROSE: He who reads much and also understands is filled; he who has been filled sheds water upon

⁵FC 22:134*. ⁶AHSIS 37. ⁷Pss 118:24 (117:24 LXX). ⁸FC 26:266.

⁹FC 26:470. ¹⁰“Gives a part” in the sense of “divides.” ¹¹PTA 9:11.

¹²Rom 6:9. ¹³FC 12:279*. ¹⁴FC 63:191.

others. So Scripture says, "If the clouds be full, they will pour out rain upon the earth." LETTER 15, TO CONSTANTIUS.¹⁵

THE NORTH WIND INDICATES EVIL, THE SOUTH THE GOOD. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: This sentence obviously is meant in a figurative and spiritual sense. . . .

The south is in many ways distinguished from the north geographically, but also in a spiritual sense: The bride in the Song of Songs says, "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind!"¹⁶ So she sends the evil power away. The evil power was within her. When the evil was active, that is, the evil regarding faith and vocation, then she had the north wind living within. When she "turned away from evil"¹⁷ and went to the doing of good, she called for the south wind. Pay attention to the occasion: "Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad,"¹⁸ [she says to the south wind]; the north wind does not do this. She uses the terms in a quite physical sense, since the "cold wind" is called "north wind." The cold wind closes the openings of the trees, the so-called invisible pores, so that the elements of fragrance are kept inside. But when the warm south wind blows through the garden of the soul, . . . then the pores are widened. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 321.I.¹⁹

11:4 *Wind and Clouds*

TEMPTATIONS AND DISTRACTIONS. GREGORY THE GREAT: For what is expressed by the wind but the temptation of malignant spirits? And what are denoted by the clouds which are moved of the wind but the oppositions of bad people? The clouds, that is to say, are driven by the winds, because bad people are excited by the blasts of unclean spirits. He, then, that observes the wind sows not, and he that regards the clouds reaps not, because whosoever fears the temptation of malignant spirits, whosoever [fears] the persecution of bad people and does not sow the seed of good work now, neither does he then reap

handfuls of holy recompense. PASTORAL CARE 3.15.²⁰

WISDOM AS A STUMBLING BLOCK. ISAAC OF NINEVEH: Let not much wisdom become a stumbling-block to your soul and a snare before you; but trusting in God, manfully make a beginning upon the way that is filled with blood, lest always you be found wanting and naked of knowledge of God. For he who is fearful or watches the winds, sows not. ASCETICAL HOMILIES 6.²¹

11:5 *God's Work Unknowable*

BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING. GREGORY THE GREAT: Yet his work is not known, because even those who preach him venerate his impenetrable judgments. They therefore both know him whom they preach, and yet do not know his works: because they know by grace him by whom they were made, but cannot comprehend his judgments that are wrought by him above their understanding. MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 5.27.6.²²

11:6 *Morning and Evening*

YOUTH AND OLD AGE. [ATTRIBUTED TO] PETER OF ALEXANDRIA: Let us turn now and ponder the word just as the natural philosopher has said, and let us know its power. "Sow your seed," he said, "in the morning hour and do not cease in the evening hour." And I say according to my dull mind, "The morning hour is the young childhood of man, and the evening hour is old age." For infancy is in need of teaching and instruction for everyone so that they escape sin. Likewise moreover, he will continue to remember the sin into which he has fallen in the morning hour, which is his childhood, and he will not set his heart on his own teaching but will be first to the church, the

¹⁵FC 26:78. ¹⁶Song 4:16. ¹⁷Ps 34:14 (33:15 LXX); cf. 1 Pet 3:11.

¹⁸Song 4:16. ¹⁹PTA 9:27-31. ²⁰NPNF 2 12:39*. ²¹AHSIS 61.

²²LF 23:202*.

school for little and great, and he will listen to the Scriptures inspired by God, that he might not be unmindful or fall but become new again through repentance. The word extends to us, too, we who are called “bishop” and “presbyter” and “teacher,” that we might continue to abide in the word of teaching every day from morning until evening every day, just as it is written, “Speak [and] do not be silent.”²³ I am speaking with you, he said, personally, so that you will not be ashamed. I will sow in you the Word of God, the seed of truth and life from the morning hour to the evening hour. HOMILIES ON RICHES I.6-7.²⁴

11:8 Shortness of the Present Life

LIVE WITH PRUDENCE. GREGORY THE GREAT: He shows himself to live with prudence and circumspection. Considering the shortness of the present life, he does not look to the furtherance but to the ending of it, so as to understand from the end, that delights, while life is passing,

amount to nothing. For so it is said by Solomon: “But if a man should live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the time of darkness, and the days that will be many; and when they come, the past will be convinced of vanity.” MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 2.9.92.²⁵

YOUNG IN THE WORD OF GOD. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: In the spiritual sense [this saying] is even more valid, for “young men” are those who are strong because they have the Word of God and because they have power against evil. John, for example, writes, “I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”²⁶ He certainly does not write to a certain age group in a physical sense but to a soul made young, since it has “clothed [itself] with the new self.”²⁷ COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 335.5.²⁸

²³Cf. Eccles 3:7. ²⁴TCH 97-98. ²⁵LF 18:563*. ²⁶1 Jn 2:14. ²⁷Eph 4:24. ²⁸PTA 9:97.



VITALITY AND
OPTIMISM OF YOUTH
ECCLESIASTES 11:9 — 12:8

OVERVIEW: Youth should rejoice now, before the end of the world comes (GREGORY THE GREAT, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). Train yourselves, therefore, to be not idle (EPHREM THE SYRIAN), and let not anger become a permanent condition of the heart. At the last, when false teaching ceases and the almond blooms (DIDYMUS), there will be a division of the good and the bad, and a mighty blow will strike everything (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). Then the broken pitcher will be replaced by living water, and the water wheel at the cistern will no longer be needed (DIDYMUS). This is the meaning of the silver cord and the golden bowl (JEROME, DIDYMUS). The wheel of our life is like a ceaseless advance by which we are continuously moved from the day of our birth right up to death as if by the ever-turning wheel of a carriage (BEDE). At the end, our dust, or flesh, goes to earth and our spirit, or soul, to God, but it would be misleading to conclude from the common properties of our bodies that there is no individuality to our souls (AUGUSTINE, JOHN CASSIAN). Since we possess the body from the earth and the spirit from heaven, it is proper to pray that God's will may be done in both (CYPRIAN). There is, after all, only one salvation (GREGORY THAUMATURGUS). Things which humans create are vain because, ultimately, they have no useful end, as Solomon realized; therefore we should seek truth and love God, in whom there is no vanity (CHRYSOSTOM).

11:9 Rejoice Now, for Judgment Will Come

A TRUE JUDGMENT. GREGORY THE GREAT: One statement is introduced [by Solomon] through his impersonation of the weak, while the other is added from the dictates of reason, for he immediately discusses the dictates of reason and shows the advantage of a house of mourning. "For that is the end of every man," he says, "and the living should take it to heart."¹ And again he writes, "Rejoice, O young man, while you are young." While a little later he adds, "The dawn of youth is fleeting." In criticizing what he has just recommended, he indicates clearly that the former pronouncement proceeded from carnal desires, while the latter was based on a true judgment. DIALOGUE 4.4.²

11:10 Remove Sorrow and Evil

SHAMEFUL BOLDNESS. AUGUSTINE: Therefore, if anger has held out with most shameful boldness in the heart of any one of you until these holy days, now at least let it depart. [Thus] your prayer may proceed in peace and . . . may not stumble, tremble, or become mute under the pricking of conscience when it has come to that passage where it must say, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive also our debtors."³ SERMON 208.2.⁴

PUT SORROW AWAY. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: Put sorrow far from your flesh and sadness from your thoughts, except only that for your sins you should be constant in sadness. Cease not

¹Eccles 7:2. ²FC 39:194. ³Mt 6:12. ⁴FC 38:94.

from labor, not even though you are rich, for the slothful person gains manifold guilt by his idleness. HOMILY ON ADMONITION AND REPENTANCE 15.⁵

ANGER MUST NOT BECOME A PERMANENT CONDITION OF THE HEART. DIDYMUS THE BLIND: In Scripture the spirit is continuously called “heart.”

The passage therefore means: Even if we sometimes are caught up in anger, this “anger” should not be allowed into the “heart,” so that the anger does not become a permanent condition. And when suddenly a desire comes up in the part of the soul which deals with desire, this desire should not be transferred to the spirit and to the part of the soul that deals with reason. Otherwise it becomes a permanent condition and not just an affect or a precondition for this affect, but simply evil. . . . If “anger is banished from your heart,” you will not do evil through the members of your body. Whoever is caught by anger often fights and may even decide to kill. Thus, if you “banish anger from your heart,” then evil, which comes about through deeds, will vanish as well. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 337.20.⁶

12:1 Remember Now Your Creator

PLEASURE AWAITS THOSE WHO HAVE ACTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD’S PROMISES.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: When the punishing evil comes, the years arrive in which you have no pleasure. Nobody has pleasure in being punished. When the years of promise arrive, the good have pleasure in them. They have pleasure in enjoying the promises, since they have acted exactly in accordance with the promises. In a similar way, those who are prone to amusement and only recognize what can be experienced with the senses have not pleasure in the time of hunger, but only in the time of excess. The righteous have pleasure even in the times of retribution. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 340.9.⁷

THE PASSING OF WINTER. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Ecclesiastes knew of the Lord’s coming at the end of the world when he said, “Rejoice, O young man, while you are young.” Subsequently [he said], “Ward off grief from your heart, and put away trouble from your presence. Remember your Creator, before the evil days come, before the sun is darkened, and the light, and the moon, and the stars; and they who look through the windows go blind” (this signifies the power of sight). [Remember] “before the silver cord is snapped” (he means the cluster of the stars, silvery in appearance). [Remember before] “the golden fillet shrinks back” (here is indicated the sun with its golden aspect, for the fillet-like flower is a well-known plant, with ray-like shoots of foliage circling it), “and they shall rise up at the voice of the sparrow, and they shall see from the height, and terrors shall be in the way.” What shall they see? “Then they will see the Son of man coming upon clouds of heaven,”⁸ and they will mourn, tribe by tribe. What happens when the Lord comes? “The almond tree will bloom, and the locust will grow sluggish, and the caper berry will be scattered abroad.” According to the interpreters the blooming of the almond tree signifies the passing of winter; our bodies, after the winter, then, are to flourish with a heavenly bloom. CATECHETICAL LECTURES 15.20.⁹

THE WHEEL OF LIFE. BEDE: “The wheel of our life”: The ceaseless advance of our earthly life by which we are continuously moved from the day of our birth right up to death as if by the always turning wheel of a carriage. [Thus] Solomon, when he said well, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the time of affliction comes,” a little further on added, “And the wheel above the cistern is broken, and the dust returns to the earth it came from.” COMMENTARY ON JAMES 3.6.¹⁰

⁵NPNF 2 13:334*. ⁶PTA 9:109-11. ⁷PTA 9:125. ⁸Mt 24:30. ⁹FC 64:66. ¹⁰CS 82:40.

12:4 *The Bird and the Daughters*

SYMBOL OF TRUTH AND THE SAVIOR. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: “Bird” can here mean the Savior in his human nature. . . .

But also the message of truth itself can be called “bird” for this time. It can be compared for this time with a bird that comes from on high, from where truth came to the listeners. Since, however, now even the perfect listeners are lifted up and strive for what is above the earth, the “bird on the roof” calls to them. Standing above the cosmos it has announced the perfect, the encounter with truth “from face to face.” **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 352.12.**¹¹

THE DAUGHTERS ARE FALSE TEACHERS.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: “The daughters of song” are false teachers, the daughters only of the voice but not of the spirit, not of wisdom, not of knowledge, not of light. Because of their unmanliness and their feminization in the treatment of the perishable they are called daughters.

They will be brought low. Like darkness ends when light appears, they will be unveiled as nothing when the “call of the bird,” that is, of the “market” or the Savior or the divine teacher, the “rising” [human being], is here. It turns out that the teaching [of the daughters of song] is valid only for this present life and that—to say briefly what has been treated extensively by people elsewhere—human wisdom, which promises a program of nice speeches and good rhetoric, lasts only as long as the voice. Since, however, this voice will vanish, because no air is moving any more when they rise above the sphere of the air, they will be brought low. The “daughters of song” will be seen as nothing, since the wise teachers are not called daughters or daughters of song, but “sons of light,” and “sons of wisdom.” **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 353.26.**¹²

12:5 *The Last Things*

THERE WILL BE A DIVISION. GREGORY THAU-

MATURGUS: Cities and their bloodstained leaders will wait for punishment from above. A most bitter and bloody time will arise like a blossoming almond tree, continuous punishments will be imposed like a swarm of flying locusts, and lawbreakers will be thrown out of the way like a black and contemptible caper plant. The good person will enter into his eternal home with rejoicing, but the bad people will fill all their homes with mourning. **PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 12.5.**¹³

THE MEANING OF THE ALMOND TREE. DIDY-MUS THE BLIND: Those who have dealt with the world of plants say the following about the almond: Among all the plants it grows leaves in springtime and sheds them not before all the other trees have gotten bare; it is very durable.

This is why it is said about the “priestly rod”¹⁴ that it was of almond wood. It did not last a short time; from Moses until the coming of the Savior it was a visible sign. . . .

This is what we think: Even if there are plants from other teachings, they bloom later, that is, after the true teaching, and cease before it; they vanish when it appears. This rod, therefore, has extinguished the other rods, those of the false apostles, and of the false prophets. . . .

The sentence “the almond blooms” can be understood in a moral sense. The almond has two layers around the edible kernel: something hard that has to be cracked and something bitter, that is, the outer shell. The outer shell can be seen as the body, since it is bitter, tending to the sensual. The hard part, however, is the soul, since it is strong and big. The edible in the kernel is the spirit. When the sentence of the apostle comes to fruition—“May the God of peace sanctify you, perfect your spirit, your soul, and your body”¹⁵—then the almond blooms. In its blooming it envelops all the three.

The human being blooms, when it progresses

¹¹PTA 9:187. ¹²PTA 9:193-95. ¹³GTPE 294. ¹⁴Num 17:8.

¹⁵1 Thess 5:23.

in virtue, when it transforms its body so that it imitates the body of Christ. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 356.10.¹⁶

12:6 *Signs of the End*

A MIGHTY BLOW WILL STRIKE EVERYTHING.

GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: Neither stored silver nor tested gold will be of any further use. A mighty blow will strike everything, right down to a water pot standing next to a well, and to a carriage wheel which happens to have been left in the ditch, its time of revolving ceased, and to the life that, by water, has passed through the age of washing. PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES 12.6.¹⁷

MEANINGS OF SILVER AND GOLD. DIDYMUS

THE BLIND: By “gold” in Scripture one has to understand the spirit; but if one understands by “silver” the spoken word, we have to understand here by “gold” the thought and by bowl the sphere of reason, since it is the bowl and storage place for gold. When Scripture describes the spoken word and the written word as silver, this means a weaving of the words that fit to each other and a linking of the meaning of the different words among each other. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 360.14.¹⁸

THE SILVER CORD AND THE GOLDEN BOWL.

JEROME: The silver cord indicates a pure life and the inspiration that is given to us from heaven. The return again of the golden band¹⁹ signifies the soul that returns to the place from which it descended. Moreover, there are two remaining [figures] which follow. The shattered pitcher at the spring and the broken wheel at the well, through the use of metaphor, are allegories for death. For if a pitcher is worn through it ceases to draw water, and when a wheel at the well is broken the water it would have drawn is left to become putrid. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 12.6²⁰

THE PITCHER AT THE FOUNTAIN. DIDYMUS

THE BLIND: Some are able to drink from the fountain without the pitcher. Rebecca, which means steadfastness in the good, stepped down to the fountain and scooped the water with the pitcher in order to give the thirsty servant [of Abraham] to drink; but she herself drank from the fountain without the pitcher. . . .

The imperfect knowledge and the imperfect prophecy²¹ are the pitcher filled from the fountain. When the imperfect will pass away,²² the pitcher is broken. Its content, however, is not lost. . . . When one does not need to drink from the pitcher anymore because the Savior has given to drink and prepared in the person who drinks a spring of living water, then the pitcher is not needed for the person who has the fountain of living water²³ inside. COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 361.9.²⁴

THE WATER WHEEL AT THE CISTERN. DIDYMUS

THE BLIND: One can understand the “cistern” accordingly: Inasmuch as it is possible to scoop water from a fountain with a pitcher, it is also possible to pull up water from a cistern with a water wheel. When there is no need any more to pull up water in this way, then the “[water] wheel will break at the cistern.” COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 362.13.²⁵

12:7 *Dust to Earth and Spirit to God*

THE SOUL GOES TO HEAVEN. ANONYMOUS: Do not therefore be afraid of death: for that which is from me—that is to say, the soul—goes to heaven; and that which is from the earth—that is to say, the body—goes to the earth, from which it was taken. REVELATION OF ESDRAS.²⁶

WE OURSELVES ARE BODY AND SPIRIT. CYPRIAN:

We ask that the will of God may be done

¹⁶PTA 9:205-9, 15. ¹⁷GTPE 296. ¹⁸PTA 9:229. ¹⁹Latin *vitta*, a band worn around the head as a symbol of sacred office. ²⁰CCL 72:356-57. ²¹1 Cor 13:9. ²²1 Cor 13:10. ²³Jn 4:14. ²⁴PTA 9:235-39. ²⁵PTA 9:243. ²⁶ANF 8:574.

both in heaven and in earth, each of which things pertains to the fulfillment of our safety and salvation. For since we possess the body from the earth and the spirit from heaven, we ourselves are earth and heaven; and in both—that is, both in body and spirit—we pray that God’s will may be done. *THE LORD’S PRAYER* 4.16.²⁷

THERE IS ONLY ONE SALVATION. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS: For people lying on earth there is one salvation, if their souls acknowledge and fly up to the One by whom they were brought into being. *PARAPHRASE OF ECCLESIASTES* 12.7.²⁸

BODY AND SOUL. AUGUSTINE: Near the end of the book called Ecclesiastes there is a passage about the dissolution of man, brought about by that death through which the soul is separated from the body, where the Scripture says, “And let the dust return into its earth, as it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it.” This authoritative statement is unquestionably true and leads no one into error. But if anyone wished to interpret it so as to try to defend the view that there was a posterity of souls and that all the subsequent ones come from that one which God gave to the first man, this passage seems to support him. [This is so] because flesh is there spoken of as dust—obviously, dust and spirit mean nothing else in this passage than flesh and soul—and in that way it declares that the soul returns to God, as if it might be a sort of branch, cut from that soul which God gave to the first man, just as the flesh is returned to the earth, since it is an offshoot of that flesh that in the first man was fashioned of the earth. Thus, he might contend from this that we ought to believe something that is not known about the soul, but is perfectly well known about the body. There is no doubt about the propagation of the flesh, but there is about the soul. *LETTER* 143.²⁹

ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF FLESH AND SPIRIT.

JOHN CASSIAN: “Before the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God

who gave it.” What could be said more clearly than that the matter of the flesh, which he styled dust because it springs from the seed of man and seems to be sown by his acts, must again return to the earth because it was taken from the earth? At the same time he points out that the spirit which is not begotten by intercourse between the sexes, but belongs to God alone in a special way, returns to its creator. This too is clearly implied in that breathing by God, through which Adam in the first instance received his life.³⁰ *CONFERENCE* 8.25.3.³¹

12:8 Therefore All Is Vanity

VANITY HAS NO USEFUL END. CHRYSOSTOM: Such is “vanity of vanities,” your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of your slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts, your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end. *HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS* 12.³²

SOLOMON KNEW VANITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. CHRYSOSTOM: Hear what Solomon says, who knew the present world by actual experience. “I built houses, I planted vineyards, I made gardens, and orchards and pools of water. I gathered also silver and gold. I got men singers and women singers, and flocks and herds.”³³ There was no one who lived in greater luxury or higher glory. There was no one so wise or so powerful, no one who saw all things so succeeding to his heart’s desire. What then? He had no enjoyment from all these things. What after all does he say of it himself? “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth and what is based

²⁷ANF 5:451. ²⁸GTPE 298. ²⁹FC 20:156. ³⁰Gen 2:7. ³¹NPNF 2 11:386*. ³²NPNF 1 13:109. ³³Eccles 2:4-6, 8.

upon a solid rock, where there is no old age or decline, but all things bloom and flourish, without decay or waxing old, or approaching dissolution. Let us, I beseech you, love God with genuine affection, not from fear of hell but from

desire of the kingdom. For what is comparable to seeing Christ? HOMILIES ON I TIMOTHY 15.³⁴

³⁴NPNF 1 13:462*.



THE WHOLE DUTY OF
HUMANKIND
ECCLESIASTES 12:9 - 14

OVERVIEW: The words of wisdom are useful to preachers in sermons, and even reproach is sometimes appropriate (AMBROSE, GREGORY THE GREAT, ORIGEN). Nonetheless, the writing of too many books and the fashioning of too many words is a danger that threatens those given to the pursuit of divinity (ORIGEN). Knowledge will pass away, but the whole duty of humanity is to fear God and keep his commandments (SHEPHERD OF HERMAS, CHRYSOSTOM, JEROME, BEDE). The function of Solomon as the Preacher is to bring into harmony the diverse opinions of many and to call them back to a unified way of thinking (GREGORY THE GREAT). Every work will be judged, but God's Word is not a work (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS, ATHANASIUS).

SERMON ADVICE. AMBROSE: Therefore let your sermons be flowing, let them be clear and lucid so that by suitable disputation you may pour sweetness into the ears of the people and by the grace of your words may persuade the crowd to follow willingly where you lead. But if in the people, or in some persons, there is any stubbornness or any fault, let your sermons be such as to goad the listener, to sting the person with a guilty conscience. "The words of the wise are as goads." Even the Lord Jesus goaded Saul when he was a persecutor. Consider how salutary was the goad that made of a persecutor an apostle, saying, "It is hard for you to kick against the goad."¹ LETTER 15, TO CONSTANTIUS.²

12:11 *The Words of the Wise*

¹Acts 9:5 in some manuscripts. See the KJV. ²FC 26:78.

REPROACH SOMETIMES APPROPRIATE. GREGORY THE GREAT: Holy preachers are also accustomed to reprove their hearers with sharp words and to rage with strict severity against their sins. As it is written, “The words of the wise are goads, and as nails fastened deep.” But their words are properly called nails, since they do not know how to handle the sins of offenders gently, but only how to pierce them. Were not the words of John nails when he said, “O generation of vipers, who has shown you to flee from the wrath to come?”³ Were not the words of Stephen nails when he said, “You have always resisted the Holy Spirit?”⁴ Were not the words of Paul nails when he said, “O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you?”⁵ and again when saying to the Corinthians, “For while there is among you envying and strife, are you not carnal, and do you not walk according to man?”⁶ **MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 5.24.41.**⁷

REPROACH MAY APPEAR DISCORDANT. ORIGEN: All the Scriptures are “words of the wise like goads, and as nails firmly fixed which were given by agreement from one shepherd,” and there is nothing superfluous in them. But the Word is the one Shepherd of things rational which may have an appearance of discord to those who have not ears to hear but are truly at perfect concord. **COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 2.**⁸

HARMONY OF THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS. ORIGEN: And likewise it is a pleasant thing to endeavor to understand and exhibit the fact of the concord of the two covenants—of the one before the bodily advent of the Savior and of the new covenant. For among those things in which the two covenants are at concord so that there is no discord between them would be found prayers, to the effect that about anything whatever they shall ask it shall be done to them from the Father in heaven. And if also you desire the third that unites the two, do not hesitate to say that it is the Holy Spirit. For “the words of the wise,” whether they be those before the advent, or at the time of the advent, or after it, “are as goads,

and as nails firmly fixed, which were given by agreement from one shepherd.” **COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 14.4.**⁹

12:12 *Of the Making of Many Books*

AVOID WRITING MANY BOOKS. ORIGEN: I, for my part, am inclined to shrink from toil and to avoid that danger which threatens from God those who give themselves to writing on divinity; thus I would take shelter in Scripture in refraining from making many books. For Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “My son, beware of making many books; there is no end of it, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” For we, except that text have some hidden meaning which we do not yet perceive, have directly transgressed the injunction; we have not guarded ourselves against making many books. **COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 5, PREFACE.**¹⁰

AVOID TOO MANY WORDS. ORIGEN: First of all, we set forth the command from Ecclesiastes: “My son, beware of making many books.” I juxtapose for comparison with this the saying from the Proverbs of the same Solomon, who says, “In a multitude of words you will not escape sins, but you will be wise if you restrain your lips.”¹¹ And I inquire, therefore, if speaking many words, regardless of what they are, is being loquacious, even if the many words are holy and pertain to salvation? For if this is the way things are, and if he who expounds many beneficial things is loquacious, Solomon himself has not escaped the sin. **COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 5.4.**¹²

12:13 *Fear God and Keep His Commandments*

THE FEAR ONE MUST HAVE. SHEPHERD OF HERMAS: “Fear the Lord and keep his commandments,” he said. So, by keeping God’s command-

³Mt 3:7. ⁴Acts 7:51. ⁵Gal 3:1. ⁶1 Cor 3:3. ⁷LF 23:81-82*. ⁸ANF 9:413. ⁹ANF 9:496. ¹⁰ANF 9:346. ¹¹Prov 10:19. ¹²FC 80:162.

ments you will be powerful in every action, and your action will be beyond criticism. Fear the Lord, then, and you will do everything well; this is the fear you must have to be saved. **MANDATE 7.1.**¹³

KNOWLEDGE WILL PASS AWAY. **CHRYSOSTOM:** If fear of God comes from knowledge but knowledge is going to pass away, as Paul says,¹⁴ then we shall be completely destroyed when there is no knowledge. All that we are will be gone, and we shall be in a state no better but much worse than irrational beings. For in knowledge we have the advantage over them, whereas in all other things pertaining to the body they surpass us by far. **AGAINST THE ANOMOEANS, HOMILY 1.9.**¹⁵

GOOD COUNSEL. **AUGUSTINE:** What could be briefer, truer, better for the soul to know? For this is all a person is—a keeper of God’s commandments. Not being such, he is, so to say, nothing at all, because instead of being constantly reshaped to the image of the truth, he remains bogged down in the likeness of shadow. **CITY OF GOD 20.3.**¹⁶

FOR THIS REASON PEOPLE WERE BORN. **JEROME:** Let us indeed “fear God and obey his commandments,” for each person was born for this purpose, that knowing his Creator, he might venerate him with fear, honor and observance of the commandments. When the time of judgment arrives, whatever we have done will stand under judgment and await the double sentence that each person will receive for his work, whether he has done evil or good. We will be held accountable on the day of judgment for what we were able to do, “for every hidden deed, whether good or evil,” as Symmachus and the Septuagint translated it, that is, for every contempt, or at least every negligence, but also for every idle word offered even unknowingly, not willfully. But because fear belongs to slaves and perfect love drives fear away,¹⁷ fear has a double meaning in divine Scripture, for beginners and for the per-

fect. The fear of him who has been perfected in virtue, I believe, is expressed here: “They who fear the Lord lack nothing.”¹⁸ Or at least because he is still a man and has not taken God’s name, he knows his own nature, that he might fear God while placed in the body. For God will bring each creature, that is, each person, to judgment for every decision he or she made contrary to that which God has arranged and said. “Woe” indeed “to those who call evil good and good evil.”¹⁹ **COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES 12.13-14.**²⁰

HUMANITY AS IT TRULY IS. **BEDE:** Of those who are proud and at the same time treacherous it is said, “The foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests.”²¹ And of all people in general it is said, “And man, when he was held in esteem” (that is, made in the image of God), “did not understand; he was like foolish cattle.”²² Solomon, however, shows humanity as it truly is, that is, uncorrupted, when he says, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is all there is to man.” **COMMENTARY ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 10.12.**²³

THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN BEINGS. **BEDE:** They have been appointed to this, that is, to this made human beings by nature, that they may believe God and obey his will, as Solomon attests when he says, “Fear God and obey his commandments, for this is [the duty of] every human being.” That is, every human being has been naturally made for this purpose, that he may fear God and obey his commandments. **COMMENTARY ON I PETER 2.8.**²⁴

SOLOMON’S CONCLUSION. **GREGORY THE GREAT:** Solomon’s book in which these words appear is called Ecclesiastes. Translated, this name means “Preacher.” Now, in preaching one expresses sentiments that tend to quiet a noisy

¹³FC 1:272. ¹⁴1 Cor 13:8. ¹⁵FC 72:54. ¹⁶FC 24:255. ¹⁷1 Jn 4:18. ¹⁸Ps 34:10 (33:11 LXX). ¹⁹Is 5:20. ²⁰CCL 72:360-61. ²¹Mt 8:20. ²²Ps 49:12 (48:13 LXX). ²³CS 117:98*. ²⁴CS 82:86*.

crowd. And when there are many people holding opinions of various kinds, they are brought into harmony by the reasoning of the speaker. This book, then, is called “the Preacher” because in it Solomon makes the feelings of the disorganized people his own in order to search into and give expression to the thoughts that come to their untutored minds perhaps by the way of temptation. For the sentiments he expresses in his search are as varied as the individuals he impersonates. But, like a true preacher, he stretches out his arms at the end of his address and calms the troubled spirits of the assembled people, calling them back to one way of thinking. This we see him do at the close of the book, where he says, “Let us all hear together the conclusion of the discourse. Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” *DIALOGUE 4.4.*²⁵

12:14 *Universal Judgment*

RESURRECTION FOR ALL. *APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS:* Nor is a resurrection declared only for the martyrs, but for all persons, righteous and

unrighteous, godly and ungodly, that everyone may receive according to his desert. For God, says the Scripture, “will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” *CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 5.1.7.*²⁶

GOD’S WORD IS NOT A WORK TO BE JUDGED.

ATHANASIUS: Consider how grave an error it is to call God’s Word a work. Solomon says in one place in Ecclesiastes that “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” If then the Word is a work, do you mean that he as well as others will be brought into judgment? And what room is there for judgment, when the Judge is on trial? Who will give to the just their blessing, who to the unworthy their punishment, the Lord, as you must suppose, standing on trial with the rest? By what law shall he, the Lawgiver, himself be judged? *FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS 2.14.6.*²⁷

²⁵FC 39:193*. ²⁶ANF 7:440. ²⁷NPNF 2 4:351.



THE SONG OF SOLOMON



THE BRIDE AND THE LOVER SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-4

OVERVIEW: This book can be seen as a sublime wedding song, written by Solomon in his infinite wisdom, that portrays the love of bride and bridegroom, and from this perspective it has no corporeal or fleshly meaning (ORIGEN, GREGORY OF NYSSA, JEROME, GREGORY OF ELVIRA). It is spiritual, not factual (THEODORET OF CYR). Spiritually, it is also a story of Christ and the church, or of the individual soul with the Word of God (ORIGEN). The bride is the church and the bridegroom is Christ, and this book brings out the mystical intercourse between them. Its contents are inherited, not plagiarized, and its purpose was for a wedding (THEODORET OF CYR). “The breasts” are symbolic of “love” or the heart (AMBROSE, GREGORY OF NYSSA, HIPPOLYTUS, BEDE). Just as the church’s kiss is a mark of love, so the kiss of God’s Word is spiritual and excels any bodily pleasure (AMBROSE, JEROME, THEODORET OF CYR, CASSIODORUS, GREGORY THE GREAT). Such imagery is, nonetheless, profane (PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS). The oil that is

poured out has sacred meaning and is even related to the name of Christ (AMBROSE, EUSEBIUS, JEROME, GREGORY THE GREAT). We must also be aware of a discrepancy in the text (ORIGEN). In one sense, all this is a tale of rapture veiled in allegory (AUGUSTINE), but in another sense it represents truth known in the flesh because what we desire is not always what we do (GREGORY THE GREAT). It is also a song among the angels, the sweet savor of the heavenly calling (JEROME, AUGUSTINE). It is also a call to the king’s chambers, which represent God’s hidden purpose, Christ’s mind, the church or the realm of heaven (ORIGEN, THEODORET OF CYR, GREGORY THE GREAT, HIPPOLYTUS, GREGORY OF ELVIRA, BEDE).

1:1 *Solomon’s Book*

A WEDDING SONG. ORIGEN: This book seems to me to be an epithalamium, that is, a marriage song, written by Solomon in the style of a drama,

which he sang like a bride who is getting married and burning with a heavenly love toward her husband, which is the Word of God. . . .

Let us come to the things that must be discussed: first, to examine a few things about love itself, which is the main reason for this writing, and next about the order of the books of Solomon, in which this book seems to have been placed in the third place. Then we will examine the title of the book itself, why it is given the superscription "Song of Songs." COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.¹

ANOTHER SOLOMON. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Another Solomon is signified here: one who is also descended from the seed of David according to the flesh, one whose name means peace, the true king of Israel and builder of God's temple. This other Solomon comprehends the knowledge of all things. His wisdom is infinite and his very essence is wisdom, truth, as well as every exalted, divine name and thought. [Christ] used Solomon as an instrument and speaks to us through his voice first in Proverbs and then in Ecclesiastes. After these two books he speaks in the philosophy set forth in the Song of Songs and shows us the ascent to perfection in an orderly fashion. . . .

It is not accidental, I think, that the book is ascribed to Solomon. This serves as an indication to readers to expect something great and divine. . . .

Proverbs teaches in one way and Ecclesiastes in another; the philosophy of the Song of Songs transcends both by its loftier teaching. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.²

SPECIAL PLACE OF THIS BOOK. ORIGEN: And let us first attempt to investigate concerning the reason why it is that, although the churches of God have received three volumes written by Solomon, the book of Proverbs was put first among them, then second the book which is called Ecclesiastes, and the volume of the Song of Songs is reckoned in the third place. . . . We can call these moral, natural, and contemplative. . . . Now the

moral discipline is called that through which the honest morals of living are applied and practices that tend toward virtue are prepared. It is called the natural discipline where the nature of each and every object is discussed so that nothing is done contrary to nature in life, but each thing is considered in its uses for which it was made by its Creator. It is called the contemplative discipline by which we pass over visible things and contemplate something about the divine and heavenly matters and view them with that mind alone, because we are passing over their bodily appearance.

Some wise men of the Greeks taught things that they had taken from Solomon, on the grounds that he had taught them through the Spirit of God in a time and age long before them. . . . Solomon found these things before them and taught them through the wisdom that he received from God, as it is written, "And God gave Solomon understanding and very much wisdom and a breadth of heart like the sand on the shore of the sea. And wisdom multiplied in him above all the ancient sons of men and above all the wise men of Egypt."³ Therefore, since Solomon wished to distinguish and separate those three disciplines (i.e., the moral, the natural and the contemplative), which earlier we said were the general disciplines, he published them in three books, with the individual books connected to the one following, each one in its own order.

Therefore, first in Proverbs he taught the moral topic by writing down the practices of life in succinct and brief adages. But he covered the second topic, which is called "natural," in Ecclesiastes, in which he discusses many things about the world, separates the empty and vain items from the useful and necessary, and admonishes us to leave vanity and pursue the useful and proper things. He handles the contemplative topic in this book, which is now held in our hands, that is, in the Song of Songs, in which he instills into the soul the love of heavenly affairs and the desire for divine matters, all under the guise of a bride

¹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.61.5. ²GNSS 44, 49, 45. ³1 Kings 4:29-30.

and groom, thereby teaching how to arrive at fellowship with God through the paths of charity and love.

This book is located last so that someone would come to it when he has been cleansed in his morals and has learned the knowledge of and distinction between corruptible and incorruptible things. This is so that he may not be offended in any of those figures by which the love of the bride for her heavenly bridegroom (which is really the love of the perfect soul for the Word of God) is described and formulated. For once those things have been dealt with, by which the soul is purified through its acts and morals and is led to the distinguishing of natural matters, one comes competently to dogmatics and to mystical matters and ascends to a contemplation of the Godhead with a sincere and spiritual love. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.⁴

THE BRIDE IS THE CHURCH AND THE BRIDEGROOM IS CHRIST. THEODORET OF CYR: Let us, therefore, understand the church as the bride, and Christ as the bridegroom, and as the young girls attending the bride souls that are pious and youthful, who have not yet attained the virtue of the bride and been accorded perfection—hence their attending on the bride but not being called brides. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PREFACE.⁵

SOLOMON'S LADDER OF THREE STEPS. THEODORET OF CYR: It is also necessary to say by way of introduction that three works belong to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. Proverbs offers those interested moral benefit, while Ecclesiastes comments on the nature of visible realities and thoroughly explains the futility of the present life so that we may learn its transitory character, despise passing realities and long for the future as something lasting. The Song of Songs . . . brings out the mystical intercourse between the bride and the bridegroom, the result being that the whole of Solomon's work constitutes a kind of ladder with three steps—moral,

physical and mystical. That is to say, the person approaching a religious way of life must first purify the mind with good behavior, then strive to discern the futility of impermanent things and the transitory character of what seems pleasant, and then finally take wings and long for the bridegroom, who promises eternal goods. Hence this book is placed third, so the person treading this path comes to perfection. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PREFACE.⁶

TO INHERIT IS NOT TO PLAGIARIZE. THEODORET OF CYR: Let us set about the commentary by making this considerable recommendation to those reading it, not to charge us with plagiarism if they find in our commentary something said by the fathers. We admit, in fact, that we have found in them the basis for clear exposition; far from being plagiarism, however, such material is an inheritance from our forebears. Some things that we include we have taken from them, other things we came up with ourselves and added; some things expressed at length by certain commentators we abbreviated, other things requiring further work we developed. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PREFACE.⁷

MANY SONGS, THE PURPOSE BEING A WEDDING. THEODORET OF CYR: Let us consider why on earth Solomon the sage called it not Song but "Song of Songs"; after all, the fact that nothing that is the result of the divine Spirit's action is said idly and to no purpose is clear to people of a sober and pious mind. This being the case, the question needs to be asked why the work is called "Song of Songs" and not Song. In fact, we find many songs, psalms, hymns and odes, oral and written, both in blessed David and in the biblical authors before him and after him. . . .

Solomon the sage . . . composed a song that was not for triumph in battle or for morning prayer but for a wedding. . . .

The Song of Songs . . . outlines his wedding and

⁴Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.75.2 ⁵ECS 2:31. ⁶ECS 2:32. ⁷ECS 2:32.

depicts his love for the bride. "Bride" is the term he uses of the people who in the above songs have been freed from captivity, have attained their freedom and associated themselves to the king, retaining an indelible memory of his favors, giving evidence of great benevolence and affection for him and constantly attending on him. Then, when the powers on high enquire, "Who is the king of glory?"⁸ they long to be with him, unable to bear being separated even for a short space of time from their savior. This is the reason this book is called the Song of Songs, the phrase suggesting that those other songs were composed with a view to this song, and the others lead to this one. . . .

This is the reason, therefore, that the book is called the Song of Songs, in that it teaches us the major forms of God's goodness and reveals to us the innermost recesses and the holiest of holy mysteries of divine loving-kindness. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PREFACE.⁹

NO CORPOREAL OR FLESHLY MEANING. ORIGEN: Therefore, in this book, which had to be written about the love of the groom and the bride, it is well written so that neither "son of David" nor "king" nor any of those things is used as the groom's name, because it could be understood to pertain to the corporeal realm. Thus, rightly let the bride now made perfect say about him, "Although we knew Christ at some time according to the flesh, now we however no longer know him in this way,"¹⁰ lest someone think that she loved something corporeal or enfleshed and lest some fault be believed to be brought into her love. Therefore, it is only "the Song of Songs of Solomon" and not "of the Son of David" or "the king of Israel" and no other understanding at all of a fleshly name is mixed among them. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.¹¹

WHY NOT THE PLURAL TITLE? ORIGEN: But even here it does not escape notice that some wrote the title of this book as "Songs of Songs," which is not written correctly, for it is not a plural but a singular "Song" that is written here: "Song

of Songs."

They take it to mean that this "Song" is "of the Songs of Solomon," as if he designated this one alone from his rather many songs. But how will we accept an interpretation of this kind, when the church of God has not accepted any songs of Solomon outside the canon that must be read and, when among the Hebrews, from whom the eloquence of God seems to have been brought to us, no other song is held canonical other than these three books of Solomon that are canonical among us? COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.¹²

THE SONG THAT IS THE MOST SUBLIME.

GREGORY OF ELVIRA: For thus is it called the Canticle of Canticles, inasmuch as it is above every canticle that Moses and Mary in Exodus and Isaiah and Habakkuk and others sang. These are better canticles because they give praise to the Lord with joyful mind and soul for the liberation of the people, or for their conversion, or in gratitude for the divine works. Here they are superior also because the voice of the singing church and of God is heard. Because the divine and human are united with one another, therefore, it is called the Canticle of Canticles, that is, the best of the best. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 1.2.¹³

THIS BOOK IS SPIRITUAL, NOT FACTUAL.

THEODORET OF CYR: Some commentators misrepresent the Song of Songs, believe it to be not a spiritual book [and] come up instead with some fanciful stories inferior even to babbling old wives' tales and dare to claim that Solomon the sage wrote it as a factual account of himself and the Pharaoh's daughter. . . . Those of a more serious frame of mind, on the contrary, gave the name "royal" to the material, and saw the people referred to as the bride and the groom. . . .

My view is that when they read this composi-

⁸Ps 24:8, 10 (23:8, 10 LXX). ⁹ECS 2:33-35. ¹⁰2 Cor 5:16. ¹¹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.85.1. ¹²Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.86.27. ¹³CCL 69:170.

tion and noticed in it unguents, kisses, thighs, belly, navel, cheeks, eyes, lilies, apples, nard, ointment, myrrh and the like, in their ignorance of the characteristics of the divine Scripture they were unwilling to get beyond the surface, penetrate the veil of the expression, gain entrance in spirit and behold the glory of the Lord with face unveiled. Rather, they gave the text a corporeal interpretation and were drawn into that awful blasphemy. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PREFACE.**¹⁴

A SWEET MARRIAGE SONG. **JEROME:** Solomon, a lover of peace and of the Lord, corrects morals, teaches nature, unites Christ and the church, and sings a sweet marriage song to celebrate that holy bridal. **LETTER 53.8.**¹⁵

1:2 *The Kisses of Your Mouth*

THE SONG THAT IS THE SONG OF SONGS. **ORIGEN:** But now let us consider first, what are the songs, of which “Songs” this is said to be a “Song.” Therefore, I think that they are those songs, which formerly were being sung through the prophets or through the angels. Indeed, “the law” is said “to have been delivered through angels by the hand of an intermediary.”¹⁶ Therefore all those things which were announced to them were the excellent songs of the groom given through friends; that one song is what now the groom himself had to sing as a marriage song when he was about to receive his bride. In this song the bride does not wish to be sung to through the friends of the groom, but she desires to hear the words of the groom himself when he is then present. Thus she says, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” Thus, it is rightly honored above all songs, for the other songs, which the Law and the Prophets sang, seem to be sung to the bride when she was still a child and had not yet entered the passageway of adulthood, but this song seems to be sung to a woman who is now grown and very strong and who is now capable of manly strength and the perfect mystery. **COM-**

MENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, PROLOGUE.¹⁷

DRAMATIC EXCHANGE WITH AN INNER MEANING. **ORIGEN:** One must remember what we admonished beforehand in the preface, that this book has the appearance of a marriage song and is composed in the style of a drama. But we have said that a drama is where certain characters are introduced who speak—where some arrive suddenly, others withdraw or come near—and thus everything takes place in the interchanges of the characters. Therefore, this will be the appearance of the entire book; in accordance with this, an historical exposition will be applied by us with all our might. But nonetheless, according to what we have indicated in the preface, a spiritual understanding is established underneath the guise of bride and groom; it is either about the church speaking to Christ or about the soul being joined to the Word of God.

Therefore, now let a certain bride be introduced in the guise of an historical account. She will have received from her most noble groom some engagement and dowry gifts most befitting her title. But as her groom makes a delay for a long time, she worries out of a desire for his love and grows weary as she lies at home and does everything, as much as possible, to see her groom sometime and to enjoy his kisses. Because she sees that her love is kept waiting and cannot acquire what it longs for, she turns to prayer and begs God, since she knows that he is the Father of her groom. . . .

These are those matters, composed in the style of a drama, that an historical explanation covers. But let us see if an inner understanding can aptly be applied in this manner. Let it be the church desiring Christ, her husband . . . and thus let this church be as one person who speaks for all. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.I.**¹⁸

BREASTS BETTER THAN WINE. **AMBROSE:** But

¹⁴ECS 2:22, 24. ¹⁵NPNF 2 6:101. ¹⁶Gal 3:19. ¹⁷Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.80.3. ¹⁸Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).prol.1.89.4

why do we doubt? The church has believed in his goodness all these ages and has confessed its faith in the saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your breasts are better than wine," and again, "And your throat is like the goodliest wine." Of his goodness, therefore, he nourishes us with the breasts of the law and grace, soothing our sorrows by telling of heavenly things. And do we then deny his goodness, when he is the manifestation of goodness, expressing in his person the likeness of the eternal bounty, even as we showed above that it was written, that he is the spotless reflection and counterpart of that bounty?¹⁹ *ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH* 2.2.32.²⁰

THE BREASTS ARE THE HEART INDICATING GOD'S SECRET POWER. GREGORY OF NYSSA: "Your breasts are better than wine," signifying by the breasts the heart. Nobody will err if he understands by the heart the hidden, secret power of God. One would rightly suppose that the breasts are the activities of God's power for us by which he nourishes each one's life and bestows appropriate nourishment. *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 1.²¹

SUPERIORITY OF BREASTS. HIPPLYTUS: When it says "your breasts are better than wine," it signifies that the commandments of Christ delight the heart like wine. For, as infants suck upon breasts in order to extract some milk, so also all who suck on the law and the gospel obtain the commandments as eternal food. *TREATISE ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 2.3.²²

BREASTS OF CHRIST ARE BETTER THAN THE WINE OF THE LAW. BEDE: But if the breasts of Christ, that is, the source of the Lord's revelation, are better than the wine of the law, how much more will the wine of Christ, that is, the perfection of evangelical doctrine, surpass all the ceremonies of the law? If the sacraments of his incarnation vivify, how much more will the knowledge and vision of his divinity glorify? *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 1.1.1.²³

THE CHURCH'S KISS IS A MARK OF LOVE.

AMBROSE: "You gave me no kiss, but she, from the moment she entered, has not ceased to kiss my feet."²⁴ A kiss is a mark of love. How, then, can a Jew have a kiss, who has not known peace, who has not received peace from Christ when he said, "My peace I give you, my peace I leave unto you"?²⁵ The synagogue has no kiss, but the church has, for she waited and loved and said, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." She wished with his kiss to quench gradually the burning of the long desire that had grown with longing for the Lord's coming; she wished to satisfy her thirst with this boon. *LETTER 62, TO HIS SISTER.*²⁶

A HOLY KISS. JEROME: I see two attributes that, by coming together, are made one. Justice and peace have kissed. All this becomes one in the mystery of the Lord Savior, the Son of man and of God who is our truth, kindness, peace, justice, in whom the justice of the first people and the mercy of the second people are joined together into one peace. The apostle says, in fact, "He himself is our peace, he it is who has made both one."²⁷ This is the mystery for which the church longs and cries out in the Song of Solomon: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." This is the kiss of which Paul the apostle says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss."²⁸ *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES* 64 (PSALM 84).²⁹

KISSING IS SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS MATERIAL. THEODORET OF CYR: Let no earthbound and materially minded person, however, be abashed at the mention of "kisses." Let them, on the contrary, consider that also at the moment of holy communion we receive the bridegroom's limbs, caress and embrace them, press them to our heart with our eyes, imagine a kind of embrace, believe ourselves to be with him, embrace him, caress him, love driving out fear, in

¹⁹Song 7:9. ²⁰NPNF 2 10:227*. ²¹GNSS 52. ²²CSCO 264:26.

²³CCL 119B:191. ²⁴Lk 7:45. ²⁵Jn 14:27. ²⁶FC 26:390*. ²⁷Eph 2:14.

²⁸Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26. ²⁹FC 57:54.

the words of the divine Scripture. . . .

The Song of Songs introduces the bride saying, “Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth.” Now, by “kiss” we understand not the joining of mouths but the communion of pious soul and divine Word. It is like the bride saying something of this kind, I experienced your words in writing, but I long to hear your very voice as well, I wish to receive the sacred teaching directly from your mouth and to caress it with the lips of my mind. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.³⁰

THE CHURCH DEMANDS MANY KISSES.

AMBROSE: But the church does not cease to kiss Christ’s feet, and she demands not one but many kisses in the Song of Solomon, since like blessed Mary she listens to his every saying, she receives his every word, when the gospel or prophets are read, and she keeps all these words in her heart.³¹ LETTER 62, TO HIS SISTER.³²

THE DIFFERENCE MADE BY THE REDEEMER.

GREGORY THE GREAT: Holy church, sighing for the coming of the mediator between God and humanity, for the coming of her Redeemer, prays to the Father that he would send the Son and illuminate him with his presence, that he would speak to the church no longer through the mouths of prophets but by his own mouth. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 12.³³

THE CHURCH DESERVES CHRIST’S KISS. CASSIODORUS: You deserve, in fact, to kiss Christ and to maintain forever that beauty which is your virginity, for these words are spoken to you: “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, fragrant with the best ointments” and the other passages which that divine book includes in its mystical proclamation. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS, PREFACE.³⁴

KISSING THE REDEEMER’S FEET. GREGORY THE GREAT: The Gentiles who were called did not cease kissing their Redeemer’s feet, because they longed for him with uninterrupted love. Hence

the bride in the Song of Songs said of this same Redeemer: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” It is fitting that she desires her Creator’s kiss, as she makes herself ready through her love to obey him. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 33.³⁵

THE KISS OF GOD’S WORD EXCELS ANY

BODILY PLEASURE. AMBROSE: Therefore such a soul also desires many kisses of the Word, so that she may be enlightened with the light of the knowledge of God. For this is the kiss of the Word, I mean the light of holy knowledge. God the Word kisses us, when he enlightens our heart and governing faculty with the spirit of the knowledge of God. The soul that has received this gift exults and rejoices in the pledge of wedded love and says, “I opened my mouth and panted.”³⁶ For it is with the kiss that lovers cleave to each other and gain possession of the sweetness of grace that is within, so to speak. Through such a kiss the soul cleaves to God the Word, and through the kiss the spirit of him who kisses is poured into the soul, just as those who kiss are not satisfied to touch lightly with their lips but appear to be pouring their spirit into each other. Showing that she loves not only the appearance of the Word and his face, as it were, but all his inner parts, she adds to the favor of the kisses: “Your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments is above all perfumes.” She sought the kiss, God the Word poured himself into her wholly and laid bare his breasts to her, that is, his teachings and the laws of the wisdom that is within, and was fragrant with the sweet fragrance of his ointments. Captive to these, the soul is saying that the enjoyment of the knowledge of God is richer than the joy of any bodily pleasure. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 3.8-9.³⁷

THE SOUL’S HIGHEST DESIRE. AMBROSE: Having embraced the Word of God, [the soul] desires

³⁰ECS 2:37-39. ³¹Cf. Lk 2:51. ³²FC 26:392*. ³³SC 314:88.

³⁴Cetedoc 0900, 97.praef.17.50. ³⁵CS 123:274. ³⁶Ps 119:131 (118:131 LXX). ³⁷FC 65:16-17**.

him above every beauty; she loves him above every joy; she is delighted with him above every perfume; she wishes often to see, often to gaze, often to be drawn to him that she may follow. "Your name," she says, "is as oil poured out," and that is why we maidens love you and vie with one another but cannot attain to you. Draw us that we may run after you, that from the odor of ointments we may receive the power to follow you. LETTER 79, TO LAYMEN.³⁸

BUT THE IMAGERY IS PROFANE. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS: And in the Songs there are those passionate longings fit only for prostitutes. There are too those other sacred pictures boldly used to represent God, so that what is hidden may be brought out into the open and multiplied, what is unique and undivided may be divided up, and multiple shapes and forms be given to what has neither shape nor form. All this is to enable the one capable of seeing the beauty hidden within these images to find that they are truly mysterious, appropriate to God, and filled with a great theological light. LETTER 9.³⁹

1:3 Oil Poured Out

OIL OF CHRISMATION. AMBROSE: After this, you went up to the priest. Consider what followed. Was it not that of which David speaks: "Like the ointment upon the head, which went down to the beard, even Aaron's beard"?⁴⁰ This is the ointment of which Solomon, too, says, "Your name is ointment poured out, therefore have the maidens loved you and drawn you." How many souls regenerated this day have loved you, Lord Jesus, and have said, "Draw us after you, we are running after the odor of your garments," that they might drink in the odor of your resurrection.

Consider now why this is done, for "the eyes of a wise man are in his head."⁴¹ Therefore the ointment flows down to the beard, that is to say, to the beauty of youth; and therefore, Aaron's beard, that we, too, may become a chosen race, priestly and precious, for we are all anointed with spiritual

grace for a share in the kingdom of God and in the priesthood. ON THE MYSTERIES 6.29-30.⁴²

CHRIST'S NAME INDICATES OINTMENT

POURED FORTH. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: And as we are examining his name, the seal of all we have said may be found in the oracle of Solomon the wisest of the wise, where he says in the Song of Songs: "Your name is as ointment poured forth." Solomon, being supplied with divine wisdom, and thought worthy of more mystical revelations about Christ and his church, and speaking of him as heavenly bridegroom and her as bride, speaks as if to [Christ] and says, "Your name, O Bridegroom, is ointment," and not simply ointment, but "ointment poured forth." And what name could be more suggestive of ointment poured forth than the name of Christ? For there could be no Christ, and no name of Christ, unless ointment had been poured forth. And in what has gone before I have shown of what nature the ointment was with which Christ was anointed.

PROOF OF THE GOSPEL 4.16.⁴³

OIL IS ESSENTIAL TO ANOINTING. JEROME: "It is as when the precious ointment upon the head runs down over the beard, the beard of Aaron."⁴⁴ Oh, if only there were time to explore together each verse; even a day would not suffice! We have read in Exodus⁴⁵ the account of how oil is prepared for the anointing of the priest; we have read, too, of the different kind of balm used to anoint kings. There was still another unguent for prophets. What more is there to say? All these oils of unction were different, each with its own spiritual symbolism. . . . Nothing is ever made sacred except by anointing. It is with this in view that young maidens say in the Song of Solomon, "Your name is a spreading perfume: we will run after you in the odor of your ointments." HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 45 (PSALM 132).⁴⁶

³⁸FC 26:441-42*. ³⁹PDCW 282-83. ⁴⁰Ps 133:2 (132:2 LXX). ⁴¹Eccles 2:14. ⁴²NPNF 2 10:321*. ⁴³POG 1:216*. ⁴⁴Ps 133:2 (132:2 LXX).

⁴⁵See Ex 29:7. ⁴⁶FC 48:334*.

ANointed WITH THIS OIL WHEN HE BECAME MAN. GREGORY THE GREAT: [Jesus] was anointed with this oil⁴⁷ when he became incarnate. For it was not that the man existed first, then received the Holy Spirit afterwards. Rather, because he became incarnate by the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the man was anointed with this oil at the moment of his creation. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 14.⁴⁸

DISCREPANCY IN THE TEXT. ORIGEN: Let it not escape our notice that in some manuscripts we find written “because your discourses are better than wine” instead of what we read: “because your breasts are better than wine.” Although it evidently seems to have meant those things which we have discussed in our spiritual interpretation, nonetheless we preserve in all matters the things written by the seventy translators, because we are certain that the Holy Spirit wanted the outlines of the mysteries to be concealed in the divine Scriptures and not to be revealed and out in the open. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.3.⁴⁹

1:4 *Let Us Make Haste*

RAPTURE VEILED IN ALLEGORY. AUGUSTINE: The Canticle of Canticles sings a sort of spiritual rapture experienced by holy souls contemplating the nuptial relationship between Christ the King and his queen-city, the church. But it is a rapture veiled in allegory to make us yearn for it more ardently and rejoice in the unveiling as the bridegroom comes into view—the bridegroom to whom the canticle sings, “The righteous love you,” and the hearkening bride replies, “There is love in your delights.”⁵⁰ CITY OF GOD 17.20.⁵¹

TRUTH KNOWN IN THE FLESH. GREGORY THE GREAT: You see how Truth, having made himself known in the flesh, gave some leaps for us to make us run after him. “He exulted like a giant to run his course,”⁵² so that we might tell to him from our hearts, “Draw me after you; let us run in the fragrance of your ointments.”

FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 29.⁵³

WHAT WE DESIRE IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT WE DO. GREGORY THE GREAT: The one who says “draw me” has something in mind that he wants but does not have the ability to obtain it. Human nature wants to follow God, but, overcome by habitual infirmity, as it deserves, it cannot follow. He sees therefore that there is something in himself whereby he yearns, but something else whereby he fails to attain. Rightly, then, does he say “draw me.” COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 24.⁵⁴

SWEET SAVOR OF THE HEAVENLY CALLING.

AUGUSTINE: Some great thing it is we are to see, since all our reward is seeing; and our Lord Jesus Christ is that very great sight. He who appeared humble, will himself appear great and will rejoice us, as he is even now seen of his angels. . . . Let us love and imitate him; let us run after his ointments, as is said in the Song of Solomon: “Because of the sweet smell of your good ointments, we will run after you.” For he came and gave forth a sweet smell that filled the world. Whence was that fragrance? From heaven. Follow then toward heaven, if you do not answer falsely when it is said, “Lift up your hearts.” Lift up your thoughts, your love, your hope, that it may not rot upon the earth. . . . “For wherever your treasure is, there will be your heart also.”⁵⁵ EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 91.20.⁵⁶

A SONG AMONG THE ANGELS. JEROME: There also—the Lord himself is my witness—when I had shed copious tears and had strained my eyes toward heaven, I sometimes felt myself among angelic hosts and for joy and gladness sang, “Because of the sweet smell of your good ointments, we will run after you.” LETTER 22.7.⁵⁷

⁴⁷Cf. Ps 45:7 (44:8 LXX). ⁴⁸SC 314:90. ⁴⁹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).1.100.29. ⁵⁰Song 7:6. ⁵¹FC 24:77*. ⁵²Ps 19:5 (18:6 LXX, Vg). ⁵³CS 123:234. ⁵⁴SC 314:104. ⁵⁵Mt 6:21. ⁵⁶NPNF 1 8:452*. ⁵⁷NPNF 2 6:25*.

DEEPER MEANING OF THE KING'S CHAMBERS. ORIGEN: But because this item is referring either to the church coming to Christ or the soul clinging to the Word of God, what else must we believe the bedroom of Christ and storehouse of the Word of God to be, in which he leads either his church or the soul clinging to him, except the hidden and concealed mind of Christ itself? COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.5.⁵⁸

THE INNER CHAMBER IS GOD'S HIDDEN PURPOSE. THEODORET OF CYR: She is admitted to the inner chamber, the quarters and rooms of the bridegroom, and boastfully says to her own retinue, "The king introduced me into his chamber," that is, he revealed to me his hidden purposes, the plan concealed from ages and generations he made known to me,⁵⁹ the treasures obscure, hidden, and unseen he opened to me, in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah.⁶⁰ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.⁶¹

KING'S CHAMBER IS THE CHURCH. GREGORY THE GREAT: The church of God is like the house of a certain king. It has a gate, it has a staircase, it has a dining room, and it has a bedroom. Everyone within the church has faith and has already entered the gate to the house, for, just as the gate opens the way to the rest of the house, so does faith provide entrance to the rest of the virtues. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 26.⁶²

CHRIST IS THE KING. HIPPLYTUS: "The king introduced me to his treasures." Who is this king, if not Christ himself? And what are these treasures, if not his chambers? This is the people who say, "We will rejoice and delight in you," for he calls everyone. First, it tells us about the past, then it reveals a time of penance in the future: "We will rejoice and delight in you." "I loved your breasts more than wine," not the wine that was mixed by Christ, surely, but the wine whereby

Noah previously languished in drunkenness, the wine that deceived Lot. "We loved your founts of milk more than this wine" because breasts were the commandments given by Christ; they delight but certainly do not inebriate. For this reason, indeed, the apostle said, "Do not drink so much wine that you become drunk."⁶³ Therefore the beloved now says, "I loved your breasts more than wine; righteousness loves you," because those who follow the way of righteousness are those who love you, whereas unbelievers hate you and deserve retribution from the judge. TREATISE ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.1.4.⁶⁴

HIDDEN IN THE REALM OF HEAVEN. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: "The king introduced me to his chambers." This is the church speaking, who confesses Christ the Son of God to be King. But what is the chamber to which Christ the King introduced his queen, the church, if not the mystery of the heavenly kingdom? For who does not know that Christ introduced his church, that is, his own flesh, to that place from which he had descended without flesh, that is, the gates of heaven? We learn that the church is the flesh of Christ from the authority of the apostle, who said "the flesh of Christ, which is the church."⁶⁵ EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 1.20.⁶⁶

CHAMBERS OF THE ETERNAL KING. BEDE: The chambers of the eternal King are the interior joys of the heavenly homeland to which the holy church is now introduced by faith, as it awaits a fuller, future introduction to the reality itself. The young maidens of which it speaks are the faithful souls of the church of Christ who were only recently reborn as members of Christ. COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 1.1.3.⁶⁷

⁵⁸Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).1.108.21. ⁵⁹See Eph 3:9. ⁶⁰See Is 45:3. ⁶¹ECS 2:41. ⁶²SC 314:108. ⁶³Eph 5:18. ⁶⁴CSCO 264:30-31. ⁶⁵Col 1:24. ⁶⁶CCL 69:176. ⁶⁷CCL 119B:194.

BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL SONG OF SOLOMON 1:5-6

OVERVIEW: There is a superficial meaning and also a mystical exposition for this story. “Dark and comely” can also mean dark and beautiful, black and beautiful, black by lowly origin but beautiful by faith (ORIGEN). Or it can mean black by human frailty and comely by sacramental faith (AMBROSE), black physically and beautiful in merit (CASSIODORUS), dark by nature and beautiful by grace (CAESARIUS OF ARLES, GREGORY THE GREAT), dark through sin but beautiful through love (GREGORY OF ELVIRA, GREGORY OF NYSSA), black from worship of creation rather than Creator, black from the stench of wild beasts but beautiful from expectation of the Lord (THEODORET OF CYR), beautiful but sinful (HIPPOLYTUS), or black by adversity but beautiful by virtue (BEDE). Spiritually, we do all begin in darkness (ORIGEN), as did the church (AMBROSE, JEROME). It is also possible to be black and ugly (ORIGEN). Nonetheless, from a different viewpoint, the literal meaning of Scripture, and thus of this passage, is all there is (THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA). Reversed is the case, however, with blackness of the soul. Spiritual sunlight is contrasted to visible sunlight (ORIGEN). Although in one sense Christ is the sun (GREGORY OF ELVIRA), it is also he, the true Light, who made the sun (ORIGEN).

1:5 Dark but Comely

BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL. ORIGEN: “I am dark and lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the coverings of Solomon.” In other manuscripts we read, “I am black and lovely.” Again in this passage the character of the

bride is introduced as the one speaking, but she is not speaking to those young women who are accustomed to run with her, but “to the daughters of Jerusalem.” Although they have derided her for her hideousness, she seems to answer them and say “I am indeed dark” or “black” as far as the color is concerned, “O daughters of Jerusalem,” but I am “beautiful, if someone should examine the internal liniments of the limbs.” For he also says “tents of Kedar,” which is a great nation. They are “black” and the very name of the people “Kedar” means blackness or darkness. But also the “coverings of Solomon” are black and nonetheless the blackness of the coverings did not seem unsightly to the king in all his glory.¹ . . .

This covers the historical drama and the quasi-story that has been set forth. But let us return to the mystical interpretation. This bride who speaks represents the church gathered from the Gentiles; but the “daughters of Jerusalem,” with whom she hold this discourse . . . are the daughters of this earthly Jerusalem, who see the church from the Gentiles, although they see her as lowborn because she cannot ascribe to herself the noble quality of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. . . .

Responding to these things, she says, “Indeed I am black, O daughters of Jerusalem,” inasmuch as I am not a descendant from the stock of famous men and I did not receive the illumination of the law of Moses, but I have my beauty with me. For also in me there is that first quality, namely that I

¹See Mt 6:29.

was created in the image of God;² and now that I have drawn near to the Word of God, I have received my beauty.

... I am indeed “black” because of the baseness of my ancestry, but I am “beautiful” because of my repentance and faith. For I received the Son of God in me, I received the Word made flesh. I drew near to him, who is the image of God, the firstborn of all creation³ and who is the splendor of the glory and the image of the substance of God,⁴ and I was made beautiful. . . .

But this can be said about each and every soul that is converted to repentance after very many sins: it was “black” owing to its sins, but “beautiful” because of its repentance and the fruits of repentance. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.1.⁵

SPIRITUALLY WE ALL BEGIN IN DARKNESS.

ORIGEN: Thus some such process also happens to us who are in generation. We are dark at the beginning in believing—hence in the beginning of the Canticle of Canticles it is said, “I am very dark and beautiful,” and we look like the soul of an Ethiopian at the beginning—then we are cleansed so that we may be more bright according to the passage, “Who is she who comes up whitened?”⁶ HOMILIES ON JEREMIAH 11.6.3.⁷

CHURCH ALSO BEGAN IN DARKNESS.

AMBROSE: It is written, “Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God.”⁸ In this is signified the appearance of holy church, who says in the Song of Solomon, “I am black and comely, O daughters of Jerusalem”: black through sin, comely through grace; black by natural condition, comely through redemption, or certainly, black with the dust of her labors. So it is black while fighting but comely when it is crowned with the ornaments of victory. ON THE HOLY SPIRIT 2.10.112.⁹

MIRACULOUS CHANGE OF COMPLEXION.

JEROME: Born, in the first instance, of such par-

entage we are naturally black. Even when we have repented, so long as we have not scaled the heights of virtue, we may still say, “I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem.” . . . “For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be” not as is there said, “of one flesh”¹⁰ but “of one spirit.” Your bridegroom is not haughty or disdainful; he has “married an Ethiopian woman.”¹¹ When once you desire the wisdom of the true Solomon and come to him, he will avow all his knowledge to you; he will lead you into his chamber with his royal hand.¹² He will miraculously change your complexion so that it shall be said of you, “Who is this that goes up and has been made white?”¹³ LETTER 22.1.¹⁴

HUMAN FRAILTY AND SACRAMENTAL FAITH.

AMBROSE: The church, having put on these garments through the laver of regeneration,¹⁵ says in the Song of Songs, “I am black and comely, O daughters of Jerusalem.” Black through the frailty of its human condition, comely through the sacrament of faith. And the daughters of Jerusalem beholding these garments say in amazement, “Who is this that comes up made white?”¹⁶ She was black; how is she now suddenly made white? ON THE MYSTERIES 7.35.¹⁷

BLACK PHYSICALLY AND BEAUTIFUL IN MERIT.

CASSIODORUS: Concerning the church which bears the image of the Lord Savior, one reads the following passages in Song of Songs: “I am black and beautiful,” that is, black with regard to the physical body, but beautiful because of heavenly merits. Then he shows why he used the term beautiful: as Christ says, the world was reconciled to God by grace.¹⁸ EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 44.3.¹⁹

²Gen 1:26-27. ³Col 1:15. ⁴Heb 1:3. ⁵Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.113.10.

⁶Song 8:5 LXX. ⁷FC 97:109. ⁸Ps 68:31 (67:32 LXX). ⁹NPNF 2 10:129*.

¹⁰Eph 5:31. ¹¹Num 12:1. ¹²See Song 1:4. ¹³Song 8:5 LXX.

¹⁴NPNF 2 6:22-23*. ¹⁵The white robes worn by catechumens after baptism. ¹⁶Song 8:5 LXX. ¹⁷NPNF 2 10:321-22*. ¹⁸2 Cor 5:19.

¹⁹Cetedoc 0900, 97.44.90.

DARK BY NATURE, BEAUTIFUL BY GRACE.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES: It is said concerning the church of the Gentiles, "I am dark and beautiful, O daughter of Jerusalem." Why is the church dark and beautiful? She is dark by nature, beautiful by grace. Why dark? "Indeed, in guilt was I born, and in sin my mother conceived me."²⁰ Why beautiful? "Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."²¹ SERMON 124.1.²²

IF THE ONE, THEN HOW THE OTHER? GREGORY OF ELVIRA: It adds, "I was dark and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem." I have to confess that I am astonished at how the church is here called dark and beautiful, since it is not possible for what is dark to be beautiful. How can something dark be so beautiful, or something beautiful be so dark? But pay attention to the mystery of the Word and see how elevated is the sense with which the Holy Spirit speaks. The church called herself dark on account of those from the Gentiles who would become believers, all of whom were seen to be blackened with the filthy smoke of idolatry and sepulcher of sacrifices. But they were made beautiful through faith in Christ and the holiness of the Spirit, whom they received. Hence she said, "I was dark" because she had not yet seen herself as the sun. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 1.23-24.²³

DARK THROUGH SIN BUT BEAUTIFUL

THROUGH LOVE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The bride further speaks to her pupils of an amazing fact about herself in order that we might learn of the bridegroom's immense love for humankind who added beauty to the beloved [bride] through such love. "Do not marvel," she says, "that righteousness has loved me." Although I have become dark through sin and have dwelt in gloom by my deeds, the bridegroom made me beautiful through his love, having exchanged his very own beauty for my disgrace. After taking the filth of my sins upon himself, he allowed me to share his own purity, and filled me with his beauty. He

who first made me lovely from my own repulsiveness has showed his love for me. . . .

The bride says, although the beauty given to me by being loved by righteousness now shines forth, I still realize that in the beginning I was not radiant but black. My former life has created this dark, shadowy appearance. Although I am black, I am now this beautiful form, for the image of darkness has been transformed into beauty. . . .

Then the text adds further words for strengthening the minds of its pupils. The cause of darkness is not ascribed to the Creator, but its origin is attributed to the free will of each person.

HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.²⁴

BLACK FROM WORSHIP OF CREATION RATHER THAN OF CREATOR.

THEODORET OF CYR: The bride is saying this no longer to the young girls but to those taking pride in the law, glorying and boasting, and reproaching her not only for her foreign origins but also for her former superstition and the black color coming from it. Hence she says to them, "I am not only black but also beautiful: though once blind, I gained my sight, and though once clad in rags, I am now clothed in a vesture of gold, of a rich variety, enjoying the king's regard. I attend on the king, displacing you for raging against the king, delivering him to death, and defiling the bridal chamber with a series of adulteries. So do not reproach me for my black color, nor bring my former vices to the fore: I am black, I admit, but beautiful and pleasing to the bridegroom. . . . I too am Ethiopian, then, but the bride of the great lawgiver, daughter of a Midianite priest, an idolatrous man. I forgot my people and my father's house—hence the king desired my beauty."

"So do not gaze on me for my being black, because the sun looked at me; you will see me, black though I now am, made white, and you will cry out, 'Who is this who emerges in her whiteness?' I shall tell you also the reason for this blackness: I became black through worshiping

²⁰Ps 51:5 (50:7 Vg). ²¹Ps 51:7 (50:9 Vg). ²²FC 47:209. ²³CCL 69:176-77*. ²⁴GNSS 60-62*.

creation instead of the Creator, and adoring this visible sun instead of the sun of righteousness. But I saw the difference between the one and the other, and forsook the creature to worship the Creator. So do not gaze on me for being blackened because the sun looked at me—or, as Symmachus says, fastened upon me.²⁵ In fact, ‘I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem’: black as a result of the former impiety, beautiful as a result of repentance; black as a result of unbelief, beautiful as a result of belief. I was as black ‘as the tents of Kedar,’ which means darkness; I became beautiful ‘like Solomon’s curtains.’”
COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.²⁶

BLACK FROM STENCH BUT BEAUTIFUL FROM EXPECTATION OF THE LORD. THEODORET OF CYR: In the Song of Songs the bride cries aloud, “I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem”—“black” in the sense of deceived, besmirched by the stench of wild beasts, and “beautiful” in the sense of awaiting for your arrival from heaven as Lord for the sake of my salvation. He suggested at the same time both the gloom of impiety and the charm given by divine grace. COMMENTARY ON PSALM 87:3.²⁷

A BEAUTIFUL SINNER. HIPPOLYTUS: “I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.” I am a sinner, but even more, I am beautiful, because Christ loved me. “I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.” All nations, come and gather and look at me, the beloved. “Do not marvel at my countenance because I am darkened or because the sun’s glance has made me swarthy.” . . . Nor is it because Christ has despised me, since [Scripture] calls him the true sun, for it says, “And the sun of righteousness will appear to you who fear my name.”²⁸ TREATISE ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.1-2.²⁹

DARK IN YOUR JUDGMENT BUT BEAUTIFUL BY GRACE. GREGORY THE GREAT: For we know that in the first days of the church, when the grace of our Redeemer had been preached, some of the

Jews believed and others did not. Those who believed were despised by the unbelievers and suffered persecution as though they had been found guilty of taking the way of the Gentiles. Hence the church in their name cries out against those who had not converted: “I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.” COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 32.³⁰

BLACK BY ADVERSITY BUT BEAUTIFUL BY VIRTUE. BEDE: Black, of course, with the adversity of hardships but beautiful with the adornment of virtue, indeed as much more beautiful in the sight of interior judgment as the vexations of the foolish are greater. It is as though she were befouled with afflictions. The daughters of Jerusalem to whom this speaks are souls imbued with celestial sacraments, yearning for the dwelling of their heavenly homeland. For, consoling them in their tribulations, holy mother said, “I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem,” as if she had said more clearly: I appear most vile indeed to the eyes of my persecutors, but I shine with the glorious profession of truth before God. Hence you who recognize that you are citizens of a homeland above must at least be sorrowful in the labors of this exile while you hasten through adversities to the vision of everlasting peace.
COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 1.1.4.³¹

BUT THE LITERAL MEANING IS ALL THERE IS. THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA: [Solomon] took Pharaoh’s daughter as his wife. But . . . she was dark, as all the Egyptian and Ethiopian women are. . . . The Hebrews and their beautiful wives, and the other princesses as well, ridiculed her on account of her unseemliness, her small height and her dark complexion. To avoid any irritation on her part and so that no hostility would result between him and the Pharaoh, Solomon exclu-

²⁵Symmachus is associated with an ancient alternative translation of the Hebrew that would have been available to Theodoret in a copy of the Hexapla. ²⁶ECS 2:44-45*. ²⁷FC 102:79*. ²⁸Mal 4:2. ²⁹CSCO 264:31. ³⁰SC 314:118. ³¹CCL 119B:195.

sively built for her a house of valuable stones [and decorated it] with gold and silver. During the meals he chanted [the Song of Songs] in her presence in order to honor her, and he made known with it that she was dark yet beautiful and loved by him. PARAPHRASE OF THE COMMENTARY OF THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA.³²

1:6 *The Rays of the Sun*

BLACKNESS OF THE SOUL. ORIGEN: “Do not look at me because I have become dark, because the sun looked down upon me.” . . .

And so people have existed in this way in all that nation of the Ethiopians, to whom a certain natural blackness resides owing to the succession of fleshly seed, because in those places the sun burns with harsher rays and, once the bodies have been burned and blackened, they remain so as the innate flaw is passed down, generation to generation. But the blackness of the soul belongs to a contrary arrangement; for the soul is burned not by the sun looking at it but by the sun’s looking down upon it; it is obtained not by birth but by neglect; and thus, just as it is acquired by ignorance, so it is driven out and repulsed by diligence. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.2.³³

SPIRITUAL SUNLIGHT CONTRASTED TO VISIBLE SUNLIGHT. ORIGEN: Therefore, that visible sun does indeed blacken and burn those bodies upon which it settles at noon, but it preserves in its brightness those bodies that are placed far off and far away from its overhead position. It does not at all burn them, but gives light to them. But, in contrast, the true spiritual sun, which is the sun of righteousness in whose wings healing is said to be,³⁴ illumines them and surrounds them with every brightness because he has found them of an upright heart and at the zenith of his radiance, but he does not look “askance” as much as “look down upon” those who “approach him askance,” since their own fickleness and instability causes this trouble for them.

For the world was made not through that visible light, because it too is part of this world, but through that true light, by which light we are said to be despised, if we approach it in a crooked way. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.2.³⁵

THE SUN ALSO IS CHRIST. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: “Do not look at me,” it says, “because the sun has not regarded me.” The prophet Ezekiel proved that the sun is Christ when he said, “upon you who fear the Lord, the sun of righteousness will rise,”³⁶ who is Christ. For, as I have often said, before the advent of the Son of God, the church of the Gentiles was dark because it had not yet believed in him. But when it was illuminated by Christ the true sun, it was made extremely lovely and decorous, such that the Holy Spirit would say to it through David: “the king desired your beauty.”³⁷ EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 1.25.³⁸

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO BE BLACK AND UGLY. ORIGEN: We understand how the bride is both black and beautiful. But if you too do not repent, beware lest your soul be called black and foul and you be made foul by a double ugliness: black because of your past sins and ugly because you persevere in your vices. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.6.³⁹

FAILURE TO WATCH OVER ONE’S AFFAIRS. GREGORY THE GREAT: The church says of its weak members, “They have put me as a guard in the vineyards; my own vineyard I have not guarded.” Our vineyards are our deeds, and we cultivate them by our daily labor. We are put as guards in the vineyards, but we do not cultivate our own. When we are involved with external affairs, we neglect to watch over our own activities. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 19 (17).⁴⁰

³²TMB 50**. ³³Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.125.12. ³⁴Mal 4:2. ³⁵Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.127.9. ³⁶Mal 4:2. ³⁷Ps 45:11 (44:12 LXX). ³⁸CCL 69:177. ³⁹PL 23:1125. ⁴⁰CS 123:145.

QUESTIONS IN A
DIALOGUE OF LOVE
SONG OF SOLOMON 1:7-8

OVERVIEW: As the bride seeks the bridegroom, so the spouse seeks the shepherd and the church seeks Christ (AUGUSTINE), and they meet at midday. But a noonday meeting and the flocks of companions also portend dangers (JEROME, AUGUSTINE). There are pastors who mislead the faithful (GREGORY THE GREAT), in fact false shepherds (THEODORET OF CYR). Association with multiple shepherds can easily lead to error and confusion (ORIGEN, AUGUSTINE).

1:7 Conversation of Bride and Bridegroom

THE BRIDE SEEKS THE BRIDEGROOM. AUGUSTINE: "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you feed your flock, where you lie down?" Neither we nor they have any doubt that the bride is speaking to the bridegroom, the church to Christ. But listen to all the words of the bride. Why do you want to attribute to the bridegroom a word that is still in the bride's part? Let the bride say everything she says, and then the bridegroom will reply. . . .

Midday is coming, you see, when the shepherds take refuge in the shade; and perhaps where you are feeding your flock and lying down will escape me; and I want you to tell me, lest perchance I go as one veiled, that is, as one concealed and not recognized. I am in fact plain to see, but lest as one veiled, as one hidden, I stumble on the flocks of your companions. SERMON 46.36.¹

BEWARE THE FLOCKS OF COMPANIONS.

AUGUSTINE: Why do I want you to tell me where you graze, where you lie down in the noonday? "Lest I should happen, like a veiled woman, on the flocks of your companions." That is the reason, she says, why I want you to tell me where you graze your flock, where you lie down in the noonday. When I come to you I won't lose my way, lest like a veiled woman I should come upon the flocks of your companions, that is to say, I should stumble on flocks that are not yours but belong to your companions. SERMON 147A.3.²

AS SPOUSE TO SHEPHERD, SO CHURCH TO CHRIST. AUGUSTINE: With good reason then to this shepherd of shepherds, does his beloved, his spouse, his fair one, but by him made fair, before by sin deformed, beautiful afterward through pardon and grace, speak in her love and ardor after him, and say to him, "Where do you feed?" And observe how, by what transport this spiritual love is here animated. And far better are they by this transport delighted who have tasted of the sweetness of this love. They bear this properly who love Christ. For in them, and of them, does the church sing this in the Song of Songs. SERMON 88.6.³

IN THE MIDDAY SUN. JEROME: I linger long in

¹WSA 3 2:286-87*. ²WSA 3 4:453. ³NPNF 1 6:524*.

the land of the midday sun, for it was there and then that the spouse found her bridegroom at rest. LETTER 108.12.⁴

NOONDAY PROMISE OF HERETICS IS NOT THE LIGHT OF CHRIST. JEROME: You see that it is not in the third hour that the spouse dines or reclines but at midday. Where do you dine, where do you rest, where shall I find you, where do you enjoy delights, where can I find you, O my spouse? Do you want to find me? At noon, in perfect knowledge, in good works, in the bright light. Because we have the noonday, that is why the devil disguises himself as an angel of light⁵ and pretends that he has the light, that he has the noonday. When heretics promise any pseudo-mysteries, when they promise the kingdom of heaven, when they promise continence, fasts, sanctity, the renunciation of the world, they promise the noonday. But since their midday is not the light of Christ, it is not the noonday but the noonday demon. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 20 (PSALM 90).⁶

PASTORS WHO MISLEAD THE FAITHFUL.

GREGORY THE GREAT: That which we said about heretical teachers we can also say about catholics who do not behave properly. For many of the faithful poor within the church seek to live rightly, desire to maintain a just life, and consider the example of the priests who were set over them. Thus, as long as the priests themselves do not live righteous lives, as long as they who preside do not act properly, they who follow also slip into error. This is why the church says, as though in the name of the poor and faithful, “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you pasture, where do you rest at noon?” COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 43.⁷

FALSE SHEPHERDS. THEODORET OF CYR: It is logical for the bride to enquire at the time of midday where the bridegroom takes his rest because when the light of knowledge became stronger, heresies developed which, while bearing the name of Christians, were nevertheless devoid of truth.

This is the reason she is exercised and anxious to learn the spot where the bridegroom rests the sheep, the risk of falling in with the flocks of so-called companions. It should be understood that just as there were the prophets and the false prophets opposed to them, and likewise apostles and false apostles of an opposite mind, so too false Christs are referred to in the divine Scripture. Hence the Lord also says, “Many false prophets will rise up and will lead many people astray.”⁸ And blessed Paul was in the habit of speaking not only of false brethren but also of false apostles—hence his remark, “For such people are false apostles.”⁹ The bride begs not to fall in with these people since they give the appearance of shepherds and likewise seem to have flocks and herds. Of such kind are the people who hold the views of Arius, Eunomius, Marcion, Valentinus, Mani and Montanus. While invested with a Christian appearance and name, building churches, reading divine Scriptures to sheep led astray, wrongly tending their followers and thought to be companions of the bridegroom, they are instead pernicious schemers, providing the sheep with poison instead of nourishing draughts. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.¹⁰

1:8 The Tents of Other Shepherds

LOVE THAT WAVERS. AUGUSTINE: “If you do not know yourself, go out, you, in the tracks of the flocks, and graze your goats in the tents of the shepherds.” Go out in the tracks, not of the flock but of the flocks, and graze, not like Peter my sheep but your goats; in the tabernacles, not of the shepherd but of the shepherds; not of unity but of division, not established in the place where there is one flock and one shepherd.

By this answer she has been stiffened, built up, made stronger as the beloved wife, ready to die for her husband and live with her husband. SERMON 138.8.¹¹

⁴NPNF 2 6:200. ⁵2 Cor 11:14. ⁶FC 48:160. ⁷SC 314:132*. ⁸Mt 24:1. ⁹2 Cor 11:13. ¹⁰ECS 2:47. ¹¹WSA 3 4:390*.

ASSOCIATION CAN LEAD TO ERROR. ORIGEN: Therefore, this is what the present passage teaches the soul under the guise of a woman, so that she may know herself. . . .

And for this reason, where she has neglected knowledge, it is now necessary that she “be borne about by every wind of doctrine to be deceived by errors,”¹² so that now she pitches her tent now by that shepherd, that is, a teacher of the word, and now by another shepherd. And in this way she is borne about as she shepherds not

sheep, which is a simple animal, but goats, namely lascivious and restless feelings that lead to sin, while she has sought out various teachers and cultivated them for this very purpose. And this will be the punishment of the guilt of that soul, which was not eager to know itself and to follow that shepherd alone, who “lay down his life for his sheep.”¹³ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.5.¹⁴

¹²Eph 4:14. ¹³Jn 10:11. ¹⁴Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.144.19.



SOME DETAILS OF THE FIRST MEETING SONG OF SOLOMON 1:9-17

OVERVIEW: Pharaoh and his chariots stand against God’s people (ORIGEN, GREGORY OF ELVIRA, GREGORY THE GREAT), for Pharaoh represents the enemy common to us all (THEODORET OF CYR). A string of jewels for the neck can betoken modesty of disposition (NILUS OF ANCYRA). It can also be deceiving in appearance (JULIAN OF ECLANUM), although certain externals can have

deeper meaning when the shadows are eclipsed by reality (AUGUSTINE, JEROME, BEDE). So also it is with law and gospel (CAESARIUS), with nard and myrrh (NILUS OF ANCYRA), and with the heart’s location between the breasts (GREGORY OF NYSSA, THEODORET OF CYR). Indeed, the outcome of the grape harvest was no more certain than that of the crucifixion (NILUS OF ANCYRA). There are

many examples to be learned from a dove (ORIGEN, GREGORY OF NYSSA, JEROME, BEDE), whose eyes are particularly reflective of deeper spiritual reality (ORIGEN). Likewise there is deeper meaning in beams of cedar and rafters of pine (AMBROSE, GREGORY OF ELVIRA).

1:9 *Pharaoh's Chariots*

FOR THE PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

ORIGEN: But let us now see whether he is saying in the mystical interpretation that "the chariots of Pharaoh and his four-horse chariots" which he himself leads and drives to persecute God's people and to oppress Israel are the souls that have been placed under that spiritual "Pharaoh" and under spiritual wickedness. For it is certain that the temptations and tribulations that the demons stir up against the saints they stir up through some souls that have been made fit and convenient for this purpose. By mounting these "chariots" they irritate and assault either the church of God or some individuals among the faithful. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.6.¹

IN THE POWER OF THE DEVIL. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: "My horses are with Pharaoh's chariots," it says. The horses of the Lord, that is, the people of the Gentiles, were formerly with Pharaoh's chariots, that is, in the power of the devil, since they had not yet believed in Christ. He forewarns them, therefore, not to submit themselves again to that yoke through contempt of the faith. For, as I have already said, the people of the Gentiles who required horses were held under the Pharaoh's yoke, that is, with the chariots of the devil, before the Lord's advent, even though the Lord already foreknew them to be his own. But there is no doubt that the Pharaoh is the devil, for the devil tyrannizes the world like the Pharaoh did Egypt. Moreover, just as the Pharaoh persecuted the sons of Israel, so does the devil persecute the saints in this world. . . . Yet, now liberated by the grace of Christ from the yoke of tyrannical servitude, having been made sons of God through

faith, and destined for celestial glory with a pure heart and true devotion in all holiness and righteousness, let us hold firmly to the same faith through which we live and are saved. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 2.24-27.²

SERVING PHARAOH OR GOD? GREGORY THE GREAT: All who are servants of hedonism, pride, avarice, envy and falsehood are still under Pharaoh's chariot, being like horses under [the control of] Pharaoh's chariot, that is, under the devil's rule. But all who strive for humility, chastity, doctrine and charity have been made horses of our Creator, having been placed in the chariot of God, with God as their driver. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 45.³

PHARAOH REPRESENTS THE ENEMY COMMON TO US ALL. THEODORET OF CYR: Here in figurative fashion he referred by "Pharaoh" to the implacable foe of our nature, the noxious enemy common to us all whom he drowned in the holy waters of baptism like Pharaoh. My mare, then, which I used when I overwhelmed Pharaoh's chariots, I judge you to resemble since you are close to me and have love for me. . . . So from the apostolic words we understand the mystical words of the Song, and hear the bridegroom saying, I declare that you, being close to me, and hence called an intimate, getting the name from the fact, are like my mare, which I used when drowning the spiritual Pharaoh with his chariots, and I granted you freedom. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.⁴

1:10 *A Neck with Strings of Jewels*

THE CHURCH IS TO CHRIST LIKE A TURTLEDOVE. THEODORET OF CYR: "How beautifully made your cheeks, like those of a turtledove." Zoologists claim that the turtledove not only likes solitude but is also not promiscuous, the

¹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.151.3. ²CCL 69:187-88. ³SC 314:136. ⁴ECS 2:48.

male mating with one female, and the female associating with one male, and at the death of its mate it refrains from mating with another bird. Appropriately, then, he says the church in its relationship to Christ is like her, shunning relations with others, and reluctant after his death to abandon him, awaiting instead the resurrection and looking forward to his second coming. He also says her neck is like a necklace; this is a choker, a kind of ornament beautifying the neck. He is commending her for nicely carrying the yoke of religion, of which the bridegroom says in the Gospels, "Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."⁵ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.⁶

THE STRINGS OF JEWELS CAN BETOKEN MODESTY OF DISPOSITION. NILUS OF ANCYRA:

Wishing to inspire a spirit of humility in her actions, the Word says this: "Your neck is as if circled with jewels." For just as he describes "the stiff neck" of the proud as "a sinew of iron"⁷ because of its stiffness, so too he describes the neck of a modest person as a necklace [with strings of jewels]. He thus designates the form of the virtue by its shape. For modest persons (even if such people stand tall) are bent down in the manner of a necklace when they think humbly of themselves and restrain the vanity of pride that accompanies virtue, which is a fact of the weakness of human nature. For the memory of earth and the ancient parentage of clay⁸ is sufficient to destroy such vainglory even if the honor of the image and the excellence of the actions may cause an inflation of pride.

And the Word does not call the neck of the humble simply a "necklace," for there are indeed those who by affectation take the appearance of humility while they pursue human glory. To them the Word says, "If you bend your neck like a ring."⁹ Wishing to show the difference between them and a perfect soul, he has compared their behavior to the ring of iron which those who are condemned wear in punishment, for virtue contrived for the sake of deception ends by assuming the aspect of punishment. But the virtue of the

bride he has compared to a necklace of gold, letting her [inner] condition be intimated through her appearance while the substance [of that virtue] is thus proven.¹⁰ . . .

If then the necklace indicates humility, such a neck, compared with a necklace that is praiseworthy, also reveals the abundance of virtues and the lowliness pertaining to each of them. For just as the necklace, forged at right angles, is eventually curved to its own given use, so too persons who are perfect in virtue are humbled by submission. Although being upright in their manner of life, they take on a curvature in the disposition of their minds. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 26.¹¹

AN EVALUATION OF EXTERNAL APPEARANCES.

JULIAN OF ECLANUM: When the naturally beautiful neck is endowed with the adornment of jewels, such industry undoubtedly increases happiness and, as though they were worthy, the honor of necklaces and the loveliness of necks as well. This is also true with you, therefore, whose generosity is constituted by doctrine, so that discipline would perfect the virtues which nature began. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, FRAGMENT 9.¹²

1:11-12 Ornaments of Gold

GOLDEN BUT NOT GOLD. THEODORET OF CYR: Logically they said "golden ornaments" and not gold itself, since the bridegroom's presents are greater, and his servants' do not have equal splendor. Hence we show the divine Gospels greater respect, though we also respect the law and the prophets and the writings of the holy apostles. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS I.¹³

A LIFE HIDDEN WITH CHRIST. AUGUSTINE: We may appropriately understand of them, what

⁵See Mt 11:29-30. ⁶ECS 2:49. ⁷Is 48:4. ⁸See Job 10:9. ⁹See Is 58:5. ¹⁰See 2 Cor 10:18. ¹¹SC 403:190-94. ¹²CCL 88:400. ¹³ECS 2:49.

was said to the bride in the Canticle of Canticles: “We shall make you likenesses of gold inlaid with silver while the king is reclining at his table,” that is, while Christ is in his secret place, because “your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life shall appear, then you too will appear with him in glory.”¹⁴ ON THE TRINITY 1.8.16.¹⁵

FROM SHADOW TO REALITY. JEROME: Let us hear what the bride says before that the bridegroom comes to earth, suffers, descends to the lower world, and rises again. “We will make for you likenesses of gold with ornaments of silver while the king sits at his table.” Before the Lord rose again and the gospel shone, the bride had not gold but likenesses of gold. As for the silver, however, which she professes to have at the marriage, she not only had silver ornaments, but she had them in variety—in widows, in the continent and in the married. Then the bridegroom makes answer to the bride and teaches her that the shadow of the old law has passed away and the truth of the gospel has come. AGAINST JOVINIANUS I.30.¹⁶

MARY’S SPIKENARD WAS A TYPE. BEDE: There comes about in our case too what follows: “And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.”¹⁷ In accord with our capacity will the world be filled with the renown of our devotion, by which we prove that we venerate and love God and our neighbors with a simple and pure heart. There is accomplished what the bride glories of in the canticle of love, “While the king was resting [on his couch], my spikenard gave forth its fragrance.” Here it is clearly shown that what Mary did as a type, the entire church and every perfect soul should do always. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 2.4.¹⁸

1:13-14 Prefigurations of the Savior

LAW AND GOSPEL. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: For this reason it ought to be clear to your minds that the fig tree was an image of the law, just as it is cer-

tain that the cluster of grapes prefigured the Savior, as the church declares in the Canticle of Canticles: “My brother is for me a cluster of henna.” Christ, indeed, cannot exist without the law or the law without Christ, for we have said that the law is evidence of the gospel, and the gospel is the fulfillment of the law. SERMON 106.4.¹⁹

BOTH NARD AND MYRRH. NILUS OF ANCYRA: She calls him “nard” because of his working of miracles and service of kindness extended to all, and “bag of myrrh” because of his suffering, death and the infamy represented by his cross, when he concentrated the inactive power of his divinity into his body as if in a little bag. For it is not the same to believe in one who works miracles and is glorified as to trust in one who is crucified, buried and taken for dead. The common response of humanity is to recognize his divinity [only] when they enjoy his benefits and are convinced by numerous signs, for the action of the miracle does not so much relieve the judgment as its plausibility. On the contrary, to see him suffer, exposed to banter²⁰ and enduring the injuries of malefactors²¹—without doubt or perplexity but rather keeping in every circumstance the same judgment: this is the deed of a very small number or perhaps of only one perfect soul. . . .

That he dwells between the breasts of the bride is a sign that he has humbled himself from infancy and has assumed the human sufferings of hunger, thirst, slumber and physical fatigue. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 29.²²

THE HEART BETWEEN THE BREASTS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The location of the heart is said by experts to lie between the two breasts. Here is where the bride says that she has the sachet in which her treasure is kept. Also, the heart is said to be a source of warmth from which the body’s heat is distributed through the arteries. The body’s members are thereby heated, ani-

¹⁴Col 3:3-4. ¹⁵FC 45:23. ¹⁶NPNE 2 6:368*. ¹⁷Jn 12:3. ¹⁸CS 111:38. ¹⁹FC 47:129. ²⁰See Lk 23:36. ²¹See Lk 23:39. ²²SC 403:204-6.

mated and nourished by the heart's fire. Therefore the bride has received the good odor of Christ in the governing part of the soul and has made her own heart a kind of sachet for such incense. And so she makes all her actions, like parts of the body, seethe with the breath from her heart so that no iniquity can cool her love for God in any member of her body. **HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.**²³

THE HEART IS LOCATED BETWEEN THE BREASTS. THEODORET OF CYR: "It will lodge between my breasts," that is, in the governing part of my soul, which is located in the heart lying between the breasts. This indicates the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken by God, "I shall dwell and walk about among them, and I shall be their God and they shall be my people, says the Lord almighty."²⁴ The bridegroom in person also makes the promise, "We shall come, my Father and I, and shall make our abode with him."²⁵ **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 1.**²⁶

OUTCOME OF THE GRAPE HARVEST WAS NO MORE CERTAIN THAN THAT OF THE CRUCIFIXION. NILUS OF ANCYRA: The cluster of grapes in bloom, suspended from the branch, is not desired by everyone, because it fails to possess an immediate pleasure. Rare indeed are those who rejoice at postponing pleasures, for people attach themselves naturally to the preference of present enjoyment, just as those pleasures whose utility is not immediate but resides in future hope are reckoned not to have the same usefulness. Now it pertains to the science of agriculture to recognize future utility in the present condition of fruit that has not yet reached maturity, and in the unripe grape to discern whether there is any future and assured maturity.

In the same way also, the Lord hanging upon the cross,²⁷ as if to say in a public examination before the eyes of all, evoked a great despair in those who saw him. For who therefore would not be perplexed, understandably, seeing the liberator

of the human race undergoing the ultimate punishment, seeing the one who accomplished so many miracles and delivered Lazarus from the bonds of death,²⁸ nailed to the cross and his life passing over into death? Thus the condemnation inflicted at that time upon the good name which everyone attributed to him induced doubt among those who saw it when compared with the opinion regarding him that everyone entertained then. This was because every eye, filled in an untimely way with the evidence of the suffering by which he was tested and forgetting the miracles, took sides with the suffering it could see. For not only the Jews but also the disciples themselves fell into doubt²⁹ such that even after learning that "he had been raised from the dead,"³⁰ they did not believe³¹ in his resurrection. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 31.**³²

1:15 *The Eyes of a Dove*

CHEEKS AND TURTLEDOVES. ORIGEN: But this beauty of the "cheeks," that is of modesty and chastity, is compared to "turtledoves." They say that the nature of turtledoves is of such a sort that neither the male woos more than one female nor the female puts up with more than one male, so that if it should happen that one is cut off and the other survives, marital love would be snuffed out along with the spouse.³³ Therefore most aptly the image of a turtledove is applied to the church, because it does not know any husband after Christ, or because a multitude marked by continence and modesty much like turtledoves flit about in her. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.7.**³⁴

PERCEPTIVE POWER OF THE EYES OF A DOVE. ORIGEN: Our eyes [are not] such as the eyes of Christ's beautiful bride must be, of which eyes

²³GNSS 86. ²⁴Lev 26:12. ²⁵Jn 14:23. ²⁶ECS 2:51. ²⁷See Acts 10:39. ²⁸Jn 11:41-44. ²⁹See Mt 28:17. ³⁰Rom 6:9. ³¹See Lk 24:11. ³²SC 403:210-12. ³³Commonly believed in the ancient world. ³⁴Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).2.155.15.

the bridegroom says, “Your eyes are doves.” He is hinting, perhaps, at the perceptive power of spiritual people, because the Holy Spirit came upon the Lord as a dove,³⁵ and the Lord is in each one. Nevertheless, even in our condition, we will not hesitate to examine the words of life that have been spoken, and to attempt to grasp their power which streams forth into him who has apprehended them with faith. COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 10.173.³⁶

THE DOVE’S IMAGE IN THE PUPILS OF THE BRIDE’S EYES. GREGORY OF NYSSA: When her own beauty is manifest, the loveliness of her eyes is extolled. The bridegroom says that her eyes are those of a dove that seem to convey this meaning: when the pupils of the eye are clear, the faces of those gazing at them are clearly reflected. Persons skilled in studying natural phenomena say that the eye sees by receiving the impression of images emanating from visible objects. For this reason the beauty of the bride’s eyes is praised since the image of a dove appears in her pupils. Whenever a person gazes upon an object he receives in himself the image of that object. He who no longer attends to flesh and blood looks toward the life of the Spirit. As the apostle says, such a person lives in the Spirit, conforms to the Spirit, and by the Spirit puts to death the deeds of the body.³⁷ This person has become wholly spiritual, neither natural nor carnal. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.³⁸

BEAUTY SEEKS BEAUTY. JEROME: “Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, ah, you are beautiful: your eyes are doves!” You who are beautiful and strong, because you resemble him of whom it is sung, “In your beauty and your splendor,”³⁹ will hear from your spouse, “Forget your people and your father’s house. So shall the king desire your beauty.”⁴⁰ HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 61 (PSALM 15).⁴¹

SOME EXAMPLES TO BE LEARNED FROM A DOVE. BEDE: Since the image of a dove is placed

before us by God so that we may learn the simplicity favored, let us look diligently at its nature, so that from each one of its examples of innocence we may take the principles of a more correct life. [The dove] is a stranger to malice. May all bitterness, anger and indignation be taken away from us, together with all malice. It injures nothing with its mouth or talons, nor does it nourish itself or its young on tiny mice or grubs, which almost all smaller birds [do]. Let us see that our teeth are not weapons and arrows, lest gnawing and consuming one another we be consumed by one another. Let us keep our hands from plundering. “He who has now been stealing, let him steal no more; let him labor by working with his hands, which is a good thing, so that he may have something he can bestow upon one who is suffering need.”⁴² It is also reported that the dove often supplies nourishment to strangers as though they were her own young. She feeds them with the fruits and seeds of the earth. HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS 1.12.⁴³

1:17 *Beams of Cedar and Rafters of Pine*

THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH.

AMBROSE: These words point to the beautiful adornment of its pedimental structure, which, as beams do, uphold by their excellent qualities the superstructure of the church and give charm to its façade. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 3.13.53.⁴⁴

THE MEANING OF KEDAR. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: Kedar, from the Hebrew, is translated by the Latin word for dark (accordingly, Kedar among the city of the Gentiles at that time seethed with idolatry), for nothing is more forbidding than serving demons. Thus the Lord scolded the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah for abandoning the Lord and for worshiping idols

³⁵Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:32. ³⁶FC 80:294*. ³⁷Gal 5:25.

³⁸GNSS 93. ³⁹Ps 45:3 (44:4 LXX, Vg). ⁴⁰Ps 45:10-11 (44:11-12 LXX, Vg). ⁴¹FC 57:26. ⁴²Eph 4:28. ⁴³CS 110:120-21*. ⁴⁴FC 42:108.

made by Gentiles. . . . And Christ spoke in a prophetic way from the voice of the church that was to be gathered from the Gentiles, saying, "I am dark like the tents of Kedar,"⁴⁵ that is, like the

gathering of Gentiles. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 1.28.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Cf. Song 1:5. ⁴⁶CCL 69:178.



THE ROSE OF SHARON,
THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS
SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7

OVERVIEW: Christ is likened to a flower of simplicity and lowliness (AMBROSE), for all people (HIPOLYTUS), who gives life (AMBROSE), and can be consumed (JEROME), a solitary lily that causes other things to grow (NILUS OF ANCYRA), a lily of the valleys that proclaims life over death (THEODORET OF CYR). A lily can also represent the church (GREGORY THE GREAT, BRAULIO OF SARAGOSA), or virtue among thorns (AMBROSE), such as Christ's mother did (THE PASSING OF MARY). Likewise an apple tree can represent shade for the infirm or shade for the church (AMBROSE). The bride's prescient faith in the grape cluster betokened, indeed, an extraordinary foreknowledge of Deity (NILUS OF ANCYRA). So there is a right order to love (AUGUSTINE, JOHN CASSIAN, BEDE), but

one can also be sick from God's love (BASIL) or wounded by it (AUGUSTINE, AMBROSE, APONIUS, CASSIODORUS). Indeed, the words of preachers are the arrows of God's love (GREGORY THE GREAT). The right hand can represent length of life and the left hand riches and glory (ORIGEN), or the right hand honor and good fortune and the left earthly convenience (AUGUSTINE). One can also interpret the left hand as the old law and the right the gospel (GREGORY OF ELVIRA), or the present on the left and the future on the right (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). One can consider the left hand guidance and the right hand protection (JOHN CASSIAN), or the left this present life and the right eternity (GREGORY THE GREAT). Yet another interpretation is to see the left as honor and

glory and the right as length of life (LEANDER OF SEVILLE), or the left earthly pleasures and the right eternal blessings (BEDE). Or the two together can be a figure of wedlock (JEROME). Whatever, the symbolism is profound (THEODORET OF CYR), and some verses provide great difficulty even for a seasoned interpreter (NILUS OF ANCYRA). Finally, an oath is taken to lead the less advanced to a life of virtue (GREGORY OF NYSSA), but love must be continually rekindled (THEODORET OF CYR).

2:1 Christ's Beauty as a Flower in a Field

A FLOWER OF SIMPLICITY AND LOWLINESS.

AMBROSE: He says himself, "I am a flower of the field, a lily of the valleys, as a lily among brambles." Consider, then, another place in which the Lord likes to reside, and not only one place but many. He says, "I am a flower of the field," because he often visits the open simplicity of a pure mind; "and the lily of the valleys," for Christ is the bloom of lowliness, not of luxury, voluptuousness, of lasciviousness, but the flower of simplicity and lowliness. "A lily among brambles" as the flower of a good odor is sure to grow in the midst of hard labors and heartfelt sorrow (since God is pleased with a contrite heart). ON VIRGINITY 9.51.¹

A FLOWER FOR ALL PEOPLE. HIPPOLYTUS: The justified here begins to praise herself and says, "I am the flower of the field" because she was not spread abroad throughout the earth. For, behold, I am a flower to all men through faith in you. TREATISE ON THE SONG OF SONGS 17.1.²

A FLOWER THAT GIVES LIFE. AMBROSE: He himself said, "I am the flower of the plain, a lily of the valley." The flower, when cut, keeps its odor, and when bruised increases it, nor if torn off does it lose it. So, too, the Lord Jesus, on the gibbet of the cross, neither failed when bruised nor fainted when torn. And when he was cut by that piercing of the spear, being made more beautiful by the color of the outpoured blood, he, as it were, grew

comely again, not able in himself to die, and breathing forth upon the dead the gift of eternal life. ON THE HOLY SPIRIT 2.38-39.³

A SOLITARY LILY THAT CAUSES OTHER THINGS TO GROW.

NILUS OF ANCYRA: It is necessary to understand that the valleys where the bride is a lily, as she is called, are comparable to these ravines. For in distinguishing herself in the midst of that which is called "hollow" by reason of actions or thoughts that are base, she who is adorned magnificently stands resplendent among them as a lily. It is also because at the age to come she is going to pass judgment on such souls by comparison with the perfection of her own deeds even though by nature she holds no advantage over them, just as the inhabitants of Nineveh and the Queen of the South pass judgment upon a generation that is faithless.⁴ Besides the fact that she became as a lily in the valleys where nothing was possible before, these valleys may have begun to bear fruit out of envy for the beauty of her flower, receiving seeds from the sower who went out to sow,⁵ . . . like a land rich and good that causes the seed to multiply.⁶ . . .

If the valleys, because they are low, fallow and many in number, designate the Gentiles who have come to knowledge⁷ after being in the depths of impiety, then the field may designate Israel made level⁸ by the teachings of the prophets and the law in order to be ready for cultivation. . . . For the plow of the cross has not yet opened up the earth: that plow to which the Savior has yoked the apostles like oxen in sending them out to cultivate⁹ two-by-two. Nor has the land yet been moistened by the blood of the Savior, being sterile and infertile. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 39-40.¹⁰

A LILY OF THE VALLEYS PROCLAIMS LIFE OVER DEATH.

THEODORET OF CYR: I was "a

¹AOV 26. ²CSCO 264:38. ³NPNF 2 10:119. ⁴See Mt 12:41-42.

⁵See Mt 13:3-8. ⁶See Mt 13:19-23. ⁷See Acts 15:17-18; 2 Tim 2:15.

⁸See Is 40:3-4. ⁹See Lk 10:1. ¹⁰SC 403:234-38.

flower of the countryside,” that is, I assumed an earthly body and sprang from the earth, being eternal and exalted or, rather, immeasurable. I became “a lily” not of mountains or hills, or simply of the countryside, but of “valleys”: I brought not only the good news of salvation to the living but also resurrection to the dead, descending to the lower parts of the earth to fill everything.¹¹ This is the reason he calls himself “a flower of the countryside, a lily of the valleys,” that is, the dead: to them he both promised and brought into effect a return to life. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.¹²

A FLOWER TO BE CONSUMED. JEROME: This flower has become fruit that we might eat it, that we might consume its flesh. Would you like to know what this fruit is? A Virgin from a virgin, the Lord from the handmaid, God from man, Son from mother, fruit from earth. Listen to what the fruit itself says: “Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it cannot bring forth much fruit.”¹³ HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 6 (PSALM 66).¹⁴

CHRIST AS ROSE AND LILY. JEROME: [Christ] himself says in the Song of Songs, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley.” Our rose is the destruction of death, and [that rose] died that death itself might die in his dying. LETTER 75.1.¹⁵

2:2 *The Lily Among Brambles*

MARY’S SOUL AMONG THE THORNS. ANONYMOUS: And when the Lord’s day came, at the third hour, just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in a cloud, so Christ descended with a multitude of angels, and received the soul of his beloved mother. For there was such splendor and perfume of sweetness, and angels singing the songs of songs, where the Lord says, “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters,” that all who were there present fell on their faces, as the apostles fell when Christ transfigured himself before them on Mount Tabor, and

for a whole hour and a half no one was able to rise. But when the light went away, and at the same time with the light itself, the soul of the blessed virgin Mary was taken up into heaven with psalms, and hymns, and songs of songs. And as the cloud went up the whole earth shook, and in one moment all the inhabitants of Jerusalem openly saw the departure of St. Mary. THE PASSING OF MARY I.¹⁶

VIRTUE AMONG THORNS. AMBROSE: “I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys, as a lily among thorns.” This is a plain declaration that virtues are surrounded by the thorns of spiritual wickedness, so that no one can gather the fruit who does not approach with caution. CONCERNING VIRGINS I.8.43.¹⁷

THORNS ARE ALSO DAUGHTERS. AUGUSTINE: But would you like to know what is said to this lady somewhere else, in the Song of Songs? “Like a lily in the midst of thorns, so is my darling in the midst of the daughters.” An extraordinary saying—he called the same people both thorns and daughters. And do those thorns do mightily? They do indeed. Can’t you see how these heresies too pray, fast, give alms, praise Christ? SERMON 37.27.¹⁸

CONTRAST OF LILY AND THORNS. AUGUSTINE: So also strange daughters: daughters, because of the form of godliness; strange, because of their loss of virtue. Be the lily there; let it receive the mercy of God: hold fast the root of a good flower, be not ungrateful for soft rain coming from heaven. Be thorns ungrateful, let them grow by the showers: for the fire they grow, not for the garner. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 48.8.¹⁹

THE LILY IS THE CHURCH. GREGORY THE GREAT: Solomon, in the voice of the bridegroom,

¹¹See Eph 1:23. ¹²ECS 2:55. ¹³Jn 12:24. ¹⁴FC 48:47. ¹⁵NPNF 2 6:155*. ¹⁶ANF 8:593. ¹⁷NPNF 2 10:370*. ¹⁸WSA 3 2:199.

¹⁹NPNF 1 8:167.

said of the church, "As a lily among briars, so is my love among the maidens." FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 38.²⁰

THE CHURCH IS THE LILY. BRAULIO OF SARGOSA: It is written of the church: "As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women." LETTER 42.²¹

2:3 *An Apple Tree in the Wood*

SHADE FOR THE INFIRM. AMBROSE: To this verdure of grace ever-flourishing in Christ the church refers in saying, "I sat down under his shadow whom I desired." The apostles received this privileged gift of verdure, whose leaves could never fall, so as to provide shade for the healing of the sick. Their fidelity of heart and the superabundance of their merits provided shade for bodily infirmities. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 3.17.71.²²

SHADE FOR THE CHURCH. AMBROSE: "As an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among young men." And seeing this, the church is glad and rejoices, saying with great delight, "I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." ON VIRGINITY 9.52.²³

2:4 *Order in Love*

EXTRAORDINARY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF DEITY. NILUS OF ANCYRA: Naturally the bride now demands entry into the house of wine. For she alone had believed beforehand in the grape cluster hanging upon the cross, the grape cluster that was counted for nothing by everyone because while still in flower it had not exhibited to everyone the properties of wine. At that time she alone had believed in advance in this grape cluster, although its identity would become clearly manifest only at a later time. She had established in advance an idea so high, even before the wine season itself, which permitted her to anticipate a mental notion of the wine

even in the flowering vine. Besides this, it permitted her to bear witness to Deity from on high present within the one who hung upon the cross, and thus to conceive of impassibility within suffering, of resurrection within death. She alone had firmly grasped, as though it had already been spoken, the message of the vine upon the cross that would soon be pressed out. And thus she experienced before the outcome of events that which the majority experienced only after their outcome had been realized. Hence she requests, as an exceptional privilege of such discernment, entry into the house of wine. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 45.²⁴

LOVING IN RIGHT ORDER. AUGUSTINE: He didn't abolish love of parents, wife, children, but put them in their right order. He didn't say, "Whoever loves" but "whoever loves above me."²⁵ That's what the church is saying in the Song of Songs: "He put charity in order for me." Love your father, but not above your Lord; love the one who begot you, but not above the one who created you. SERMON 344.2.²⁶

PROPERLY ORDERED LOVE. JOHN CASSIAN: This is true ordered love set in order, which, while it hates no one, still loves some more by reason of their deserving it. While it loves everyone in general, it singles out for itself some whom it may embrace with a special affection. CONFERENCE 16.14.3.²⁷

LOVE'S PROPER DEGREES. AUGUSTINE: What is, "Set in order love in me"? Make the proper degrees, and render to each what is his due. Do not put what should come before, below that which should come after it. Love your parents but prefer God to them. SERMON 50(100).2.²⁸

THE RIGHT MEASURE OF LOVE. BEDE: We

²⁰CS 123:345. ²¹FC 63:89. ²²FC 42:121. ²³AOV 26. ²⁴SC 403:254-56. ²⁵Mc 10:37. ²⁶WSA 3 10:49-50. ²⁷NPNF 2 11:454-55*.

²⁸NPNF 1 6:421.

ought to love God in the first place, enemies in the last; and the measure of love that ought to be weighed out to our neighbors will vary according to the diversity of their merits. We know that the patriarch Jacob, although he loved all his sons, nevertheless loved Joseph more than the rest because of his singular innocence, as Scripture bears witness.²⁹ Hence the church says pleasingly of Christ in the Song of Songs: “He brought me into the wine chamber, he set charity in order in me.” ON THE TABERNACLE I.6.³⁰

2:5 Sick with Love

FROM GOD’S LOVE. BASIL THE GREAT: What reflection is sweeter than the thought of the magnificence of God? What desire of the soul is so poignant and so intolerably keen as that desire implanted by God in a soul purified from all vice and affirming with sincerity, “I languish with love.” Totally ineffable and indescribable are the lightning flashes of divine Beauty. THE LONG RULES 2.³¹

THE WOUND OF LOVE. AUGUSTINE: In the Song of Songs it is said, “I am wounded with love”; that is, of being in love, of being inflamed with passion, of sighing for the bridegroom, from whom she received the arrow of the Word. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 45.14.³²

A WOUND WITHOUT A SORE. AMBROSE: The Word of God inflicts a wound, but it does not produce a sore. There is a wound of righteous love, there are wounds of charity, as she has said, “I am wounded with love.” The one who is perfect is wounded with love. Therefore the wounds of the Word are good, and good are the wounds of the lover. ON VIRGINITY 14.91.³³

A WOUND THAT GIVES HEALTH. AUGUSTINE: The wound of love is health-giving. The bride of Christ sings in the Song of Songs, “I am wounded with charity.” When is this wound healed? When our desire is sated with good

things. It’s called a wound as long as we desire and don’t yet have. Love, you see, in that case, is the same as if it were a pain. When we get there, when we have what we desire, the pain disappears, the love doesn’t cease. SERMON 298.2.³⁴

A WOUND THAT LEADS TO GREATER THINGS.

APONIUS: The love of eternal life sprouts from the love of knowledge, as does the ability to endure persecution from the love of eternal life, and the virtue of fortitude from persecution, and the perfected glory of martyrdom from fortitude. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 3.44.³⁵

DYING AND LIVING. CASSIODORUS: The church proclaims in the Song of Songs, “I am wounded by love.” So the holy people pray to be pierced by the fear of the Lord, so that by dying they may live, whereas earlier by living they were dying. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 119.120.³⁶

WORDS OF PREACHERS ARE THE ARROWS OF GOD’S LOVE.

GREGORY THE GREAT: What do we understand by “arrows” but the words of preachers? For when they are drawn forth by the voice of those leading holy lives, they transfix the hearts of the hearers. With these arrows holy church had been struck, saying “I am wounded with love.” MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB 34.21.³⁷

2:6 God’s Embrace

THE LEFT HAND AND THE RIGHT. ORIGEN: But turn yourself quickly toward the life-giving Spirit and, while avoiding physical terms, look keenly at what is the “left hand” of the Word of God and what is the “right hand” and also what is the “head” of his bride, namely of the perfect soul or of the church, and let not the carnal and changeable sense of the word take hold of you.

For this here is the “right hand” and “left hand”

²⁹Gen 37:3. ³⁰TTH 18:22. ³¹FC 9:234. ³²NPNF 1 8:149. ³³AOV 41*. ³⁴WSA 3 8:225. ³⁵CCL 19:87. ³⁶ACW 53:230. ³⁷LF 31:633*.

of the groom, that is said concerning Wisdom in Proverbs, where she says, “Long life is in her right hand, but in her left hand are riches and glory.”³⁸ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.9.³⁹

THE HANDS OF GOD. AUGUSTINE: As for the right hand of the Father, it isn’t meant in the manner of the structure of the human body, as though he is on the Son’s left, if the Son in terms of bodily positions and relationships is placed on his right. But the right hand of God means the inexpressible peak of honor and good fortune, as we read it said about wisdom: “His left hand under my head, and his right hand embraces me.” If earthly convenience has been lying underneath, then eternal felicity is embracing from above. SERMON 214.8.⁴⁰

LEFT HAND INDICATES THE OLD LAW AND THE RIGHT THE GOSPEL. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: These two hands are the two covenants of the old law and the gospel. When it refers to his left hand, it indicates the old covenant, but the right hand is the preaching of the gospel. The old covenant is inferior because it is placed beneath the head of the church, who is Christ, whereas the right hand embraced the church, meaning that old sins were covered by the sacraments of the gospel. Whoever goes forth in faith, therefore, and serves Christ with devotion, leaves the old person beneath himself and embraces anew the body of Christ, which is the church. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 3.29.⁴¹

THE PRESENT LIFE ON THE LEFT, THE FUTURE ON THE RIGHT. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The law is said to be in his left hand, the gospel in his right. Or, the left hand is to be understood as the present life and the right hand as the future life, which will indeed embrace me after it is said to those on the right: “Come, blessed of my Father.”⁴² We also read elsewhere: “A long life is in wisdom’s right hand and riches and glory in its left hand.”⁴³ Thus, his right hand is the knowledge⁴⁴ of divine realities, from which comes eter-

nal life, but his left hand is the knowledge⁴⁵ of human realities, from which come riches and glory. He is saying, therefore, My mind exceeds human realities and divine knowledge covers me. For, it is said again: “Honor her that she will embrace you.”⁴⁶ . . . Rightly, then, is it said that the right hand embraces and the left hand offers support to the head, for the goods of the present life, however much they are thought to be visible, must be subject to the head of the perfect soul and used only out of necessity, as though they were a pillow for the head. But the goods of the future age, because they exceed human nature, being divine, signify the supernatural through this embrace. Perhaps also, since the hands are symbols of acts, the left hand indicates corporeal deeds, whereas the right hand signifies spiritual work. Because the right hand is more powerful, then, it embraces corporeal necessities. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.6.⁴⁷

GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION. JOHN CASSIAN: Solomon speaks in the person of the bride of this right and left hand in the Song of Songs: “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.” And while this passage shows that both are useful, yet it puts the left hand under the head, because misfortunes ought to be subject to the control of the heart. Misfortunes are only useful for this—namely, to train us for a time and discipline us for our salvation and make us perfect in the matter of patience. But the right hand she hopes will always cling to her to cherish her and hold her fast in the blessed embrace of the Bridegroom, uniting her to him indissolubly. CONFERENCE 6.10.⁴⁸

MARRIAGE IS SIGNIFIED. JEROME: The hands are here a figure of wedlock. LETTER 22.19.⁴⁹

³⁸Prov 3:16. ³⁹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).3.195.23. ⁴⁰WSA 3 6:155. ⁴¹CCL 69:198-99. ⁴²Mt 25:34. ⁴³Prov 3:16. ⁴⁴Gk *epistēmē*. ⁴⁵Gk *gnōsis*. ⁴⁶Prov 4:8. ⁴⁷PG 69:1282-83. ⁴⁸NPNF 2 11:357*. ⁴⁹NPNF 2 6:29.

THE PRESENT AND THE ETERNAL. GREGORY THE GREAT: What indeed does the left side mean except this present life, and what does the right side mean except eternal life? FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 21.⁵⁰

HONOR AND GLORY AND LENGTH OF LIFE. LEANDER OF SEVILLE: He who has joined you to his company will not sadden you. With his left hand, in which is honor and glory, under your head, with his right arm, in which is length of life, he will embrace you. THE TRAINING OF NUNS, PREFACE.⁵¹

SEPARATION FROM EARTHLY PLEASURES. BEDE: Surely the left hand of the bridegroom is placed under the head of the bride because the Lord raises up the minds of the faithful with temporal benefits, separating them from earthly pleasures and longings so that they may desire and hope for eternal blessings. And he shall embrace her with his right hand because by revealing the vision of his majesty he glorifies her without end. ON THE TABERNACLE 1.8.⁵²

SYMBOLISM OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT HANDS. THEODORET OF CYR: "His left hand under my head, and his right hand will embrace me." Let us be careful once more, however, not to get involved in corporeal ideas on hearing "left hand" and "right hand." Solomon, in fact, speaks of wisdom, which is a habit and not substance: "Length of life and years of existence are in her right hand, and in her left wealth and glory." Likewise regarding the "embrace" you can find in the Proverbs the saying, "Love her, and she will keep you safe; ring her about with a rampart, and she will exalt you; honor her, and she will embrace you."⁵³ Let us take occasion from this, then, to understand the references spiritually, believing the so-called embrace to be a communion between the divine Word and the pious soul, and the "right and left hands" should be understood in the way taken by us. So as not to leave its deeper meaning undiscerned, however, let us interpret it this way: God is in the habit of

bestowing both beneficence and punishment, distributing both to those who deserve them. Let us accordingly understand beneficent grace in the case of the right hand, and punishment in the case of the left, and thus listen to the bride saying, "His left hand under my head," that is, "I am beyond punishments, I am not subject to them, on account of my closeness to the bridegroom and my attention to his service"; and "His right hand will embrace me," that is, "He will regale me with his beneficence and fill me with it as though enfolding and embracing me, and satisfying my desire." COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.⁵⁴

2:7 Solemn Adjuration

THE SKILLS OF ARCHERY APPLIED TO SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION. NILUS OF ANCYRA: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field, that you arouse and waken love as far as it pleases." This verse is of great difficulty. However, it is often necessary to let the understanding run towards the point of the text, in imitation of those who in the practice of archery release many arrows at the target but can hardly reach it even one time. Indeed, there is a resemblance to archers on the part of those who apply their craft to the divine Scripture as if aiming an arrow directly at the point of a passage. It is not easy to say to which of the characters should be applied the expression "to awaken love." To express this in a better way, the act of wakening love is clearly assigned to the "daughters of Jerusalem," but in whom is love to be awakened? In themselves, in the bridegroom, or in the one who is speaking? This is uncertain. For this reason it is necessary to try to fit the meaning of the passage to each example and whatever one finds in the way of a target that has been hit, whether close to "love" or to "truth," that must be accepted as a successful explanation. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 49.⁵⁵

⁵⁰CS 123:158. ⁵¹FC 62:189. ⁵²TTH 18:37. ⁵³Prov 3:16. ⁵⁴ECS 2:57-58. ⁵⁵SC 403:264.

AN OATH FOR ETERNAL SALVATION. GREGORY OF NYSSA: An oath works in two ways. In the present text, the soul is progressing toward great heights, as we have seen. At the same time she is instructing less advanced souls in the way of perfection. She uses the oath not to assure them of the progress she herself has made but to lead them through their oath to a life of virtue. She adjures them to keep their love alert and watchful until his good will come to fulfillment, that is, until all are saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.⁵⁶ HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.⁵⁷

LOVE MUST BE CONTINUALLY REKINDLED. THEODORET OF CYR: “I adjure you, daughters of

Jerusalem, by the powers and forces of the field to stir up and awaken love for as long as he wishes,” that is, “Do not allow love for God in us to slumber: stir it up and inflame it, and pour the memory of kindnesses like oil on it lest it be said of us also, ‘They fell into a deep sleep, and found nothing.’”⁵⁸ In other words, if you do not proclaim day in day out his salvation and recall the marvels he worked, and instead you forget his kindnesses, love will be extinguished and die, as it were. We must, on the contrary, continually rekindle it, stir it up and lift the flame itself on high. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.⁵⁹

⁵⁶1 Tim 2:4. ⁵⁷GNSS 104-5. ⁵⁸Ps 76:5 (75:6 LXX). ⁵⁹ECS 2:58*.



SONGS AT THE BREAK OF SPRING

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8-17

OVERVIEW: The Word of God came leaping over the mountains and bounding over the hills, present already but not yet (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, AMBROSE, JEROME), over everyone and everything (GREGORY OF ELVIRA) and over every rebellious power (GREGORY OF NYSSA), down from heaven and back up again (GREGORY THE GREAT). We too can see him leaping if we wish (ORIGEN). The Word comes as a gazelle or young stag, and we must be attentive if we would follow or seek him resting at noonday (AMBROSE, GREGORY THE GREAT). He can destroy enmity between soul and body (AMBROSE). The winter is now past (ORIGEN, GREGORY OF ELVIRA). This is signified by the approach of the stag and the voice of the dove (AMBROSE, THEODORET OF CYR), signified also by the advent of the gospel (JEROME) and the coming of Christ (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). It is signaled by the fig tree (JEROME) and the confounding of heretics (ORIGEN). But we should beware the little foxes in the vineyard who plot against the church (APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS, GREGORY OF ELVIRA, BEDE), and we must refute them as heretics (THEODORET OF CYR, AUGUSTINE). Such is the nature and blessing of love in the heavenly city (AMBROSE, THEODORET OF CYR). The shadows have receded (AMBROSE), the Lord has risen (APONIUS), useless antiquity is terminated, spiritual meaning has been revealed (AUGUSTINE), heavenly heights are accessible (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), and we face the world that is to come (BEDE). We are indeed passing from shadows to reality (NILUS OF ANCYRA).

2:8 *The Leaping Lord*

ALREADY PRESENT BUT NOT YET. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: "Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains and jumping across the hills." . . . Some things imply that the bridegroom is already

present, whereas other things suggest that the bridegroom is being sought by the bride. For we too investigate some problems for which we do not know the solution and some problems, when the bridegroom and Word enlightens our hearts, which we find already solved. Then, in other matters, we doubt again and it is revealed to us anew. This will happen often until we possess the bridegroom fully, when he not only comes to us but also remains within us. . . . "He comes leaping upon the mountains." He also comes trampling upon the nets cast by the evil demon, breaking them that we too might trample on them contemptuously. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.9.¹

NOT ABSENT FOR LONG. AMBROSE: As they were speaking with one another, she rested in his shadow,² and suddenly the Word departed from her in the middle of their conversation. Yet he was not absent for long, for as she sought him, he came leaping over the mountains and bounding over the hills. Soon after, like a gazelle or hart, while he was speaking to his beloved, he leapt up and left her. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 6.50.³

SPRINGING ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS. JEROME: Let us follow Christ in the mountains since our brother like a gazelle or a young stag came leaping over the hills, springing across the mountains. In truth, Christ after the resurrection did not ascend into heaven from the valley but from the mountain. Unless we are mountains of virtue, we cannot ascend into heaven. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 45 (PSALM 132).⁴

OVER EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING. GREGORY

¹PG 69:1283-86. ²Cf. Song 2:3. ³FC 65:40. ⁴FC 48:339.

OF ELVIRA: The mountains are patriarchs, vast with holiness, robust in faith, founded upon a mass of charity, but the hills are prophets, established for seeing. He is said therefore to be raised higher than every mountain, or patriarch, and to leap over every hill, or prophet, because he is Lord over all, with all things being put under his feet. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 4.4.⁵

OVER EVERY REBELLIOUS POWER. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The voice of the bridegroom was heard when God spoke through the prophets. After the voice the Word came leaping over the mountains that stood in his way, and by bounding over the hills, he made every rebellious power subject to himself, both the inferior powers and those that are greater. The distinction between mountains and hills signifies that both the superior adversary and the inferior one are trampled and destroyed by the same power and authority. The lion and the dragon, superior beasts, are trampled; so too are the serpent and the scorpion, which are inferior. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 5.⁶

DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND BACK AGAIN. GREGORY THE GREAT: The church speaks through Solomon: "See how he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills!". . . If I can put it this way, by coming for our redemption the Lord leaped! My friends, do you want to become acquainted with these leaps of his? From heaven he came to the womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the sepulcher, and from the sepulcher he returned to heaven. You see how Truth, having made himself known in the flesh, leaped for us to make us run after him. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 29.⁷

WE TOO CAN SEE THE WORD OF GOD LEAPING. ORIGEN: But first understand that before he appeared to the eyes of the bride, the groom had been recognized by her by his voice alone, but afterwards he appeared to her sight, leaping on top

of certain mountains near that place in which the bride tarried, and passing over the hills and mountains not so much in steps as much as in some big leaps like a stag or a roe and coming with all haste to his bride.

But when he came to the house where his bride stayed, note that he stood behind the house for a little while so that he would indeed be perceived to be present but nonetheless not yet willing to enter the house openly and plainly, but first wished to look at the bride through the windows in the guise of love, as it were.

But note that certain nets and traps had been placed near the bride's home so as to capture her or another of her companions from the daughters of Jerusalem, if by chance they should have ever left. The groom came to those nets, confident that he would not be captured by them, but having been made stronger than them, he tore those nets asunder, and once he had torn them, he walked on top of them and even looked through them; and after he had done this task, he said to the bride, "Arise, come, my neighbor, my bride, my dove."

But he says this to show to her by that very act how she, with faith in him, ought to despise now the nets that her enemy had stretched out against her, and not to fear the snare, that she now sees have been torn asunder by her groom. Furthermore, in order that he may call the bride forth to hasten to him, he says to her that now all the time that seemed dire has passed away and the winter, which seemed to have arisen as her excuse, has departed and the useless rains have gone away and now the time of flowers has come. . . .

Therefore, if we also wish to see the Word of God and the groom of the soul as he leaps over mountains and jumps over hills, let us first hear his voice and, when we have heard him in all matters, then we will be able to see him according to those things which the bride is said to have seen in this present passage. For although she herself also saw him earlier, she nonetheless did not see him as now, leaping over the mountains and jumping over the hills, nor even leaning through

her windows or looking through the nets, but rather it seems that she had seen him earlier in the time of winter. . . .

For if you were to consider how in a the space of a brief amount of time the Word of God has run throughout the world that had been seized by false superstitions and called the world back to knowledge of the true faith, you will understand how “he leaps over the mountains”—namely, he overpowered all the great kingdoms by his leaps and he inclined them to accept knowledge of divine religion—and how “he jumps over the hills”—since he quickly subdues lesser kingdoms and leads them to the piety of true worship. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.II.⁸

2:9 A Gazelle or Young Stag

FOLLOW THE ONE WHO COMES LEAPING.

AMBROSE: Be a follower of him “who comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills, looking through the windows,” beyond the reach of snares. The bonds of pleasure, which give delight to the eye, charm to the ear, but pollution to the mind, are evil. What pleasure offers is often spurious. CAIN AND ABEL 1.5.15.⁹

BE ALWAYS ATTENTIVE. AMBROSE: Because we ought always to be anxious, always attentive, and because the Word of God leaps forth like the gazelle or the hart, let the soul who searches after him and longs to possess him always be on watch and maintain her defenses. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 5.38.¹⁰

SEEK THE STAG RESTING AT NOONDAY. GREGORY THE GREAT: Holy church says to the one she is seeking under the figure of a young stag, “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie down at noon.”¹¹ The Lord is referred to as a young stag, an offspring of deer, because of the flesh he assumed as a son of the ancient fathers. Heat increases at noon, and the young stag seeks a shady place not affected by the heat. The Lord rests in hearts not on fire

with love of the present age, which are not burnt up by unspiritual desires, and which, if they are on fire, are not dried up by their anxious desires in this world. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 33.¹²

THE STAG DESTROYS ENMITY BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY.

AMBROSE: He came then, and at first he is behind the wall, so that he may destroy the enmity between soul and body by removing the wall, which seemed to offer an obstacle to harmony. Then he looks through the windows. Hear the prophet as he tells what the windows are: “The windows are opened from heaven.”¹³ Thus he means the prophets, through whom the Lord had regard for the race of humankind, before he should come down on earth himself. Today also, if any soul seeks after him much, it will merit much mercy, because very much is owed to the person who seeks much. Therefore if any soul searches for him with greater zeal, it hears his voice from afar and, although it inquires of others, it hears his voice before those from whom it is asking. It sees that he is running, bounding, that is, hastening and running and leaping over those who cannot receive his strength from weakness of heart. Then, by reading the prophets and remembering their words, the soul sees him looking through their riddles,¹⁴ looking, but as if through a window, not yet as if present. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 4.32-33.¹⁵

2:10-14 The Winter Is Past

APPROACH OF THE STAG SIGNIFIES THE END OF WINTER. AMBROSE: Good is the stag whose mountain is the house of God. He ran to it with such speed that he anticipated the wishes and longings of the bride. Indeed, where she had seen him coming from afar, she suddenly recognized that he was in her presence, and in consequence

⁸Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).3.199.12. ⁹FC 42:373-74. ¹⁰FC 65:32. ¹¹Song 1:7. ¹²CS 123:275. ¹³Is 24:18. ¹⁴See Num 12:8. ¹⁵FC 65:29.

she also says, "Behold, he is behind our wall, gazing through the windows, standing out through the netting. My cousin answered and said to me, 'Arise, come, my near one, my beautiful one, my dove, for behold! The winter is past, the rain is over, is gone; the flowers have appeared on the earth.'" The winter is the synagogue; the rain, the people of the Jews, which could not look upon the sun; the flowers are the apostles. *THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID* 4.1.3.¹⁶

THE BRIDE OR DOVE OR SPIRIT LOCATED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TWO TESTAMENTS. *THEODORET OF CYR*: It makes sense, therefore, for the bridegroom to call the bride, mature in virtue as she is, "dove," that is, spiritual and filled with the Holy Spirit. . . .

The bridegroom encourages and consoles his church in its struggle with trials, "peeps through the windows and looks in through the netting," and urges her to stand fast and to fly to him. . . .

He is saying, if you rest in the middle of the two Testaments and draw benefit from both, you will find there the manifold gifts of the Spirit. The bride, accordingly, by accepting the spiritual exhortation and lying between the lots, found the wings coated in silver through which she was bidden fly up to the bridegroom. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 2.¹⁷

WINTER FIRST HAD TO BE ENDURED. *ORIGEN*: Each one of the blessed will first be obliged to travel the narrow and hard way in winter¹⁸ to show what knowledge he has acquired for guiding his life, so that afterwards there may take place what is said in the Song of Songs to the bride when she has safely passed through the winter. For she says, "My beloved answers and says to me, 'Arise and come away, my love, my fair one, my dove; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.'" And you must keep in mind that you cannot hear "the winter is past" any other way than by entering the contest of this present winter with all your strength and might and main. And after the winter is past and the rain is over

and gone, the flowers will appear that are planted in the house of the Lord and flourish in the courts of our God.¹⁹ *EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM* 31.²⁰

NOW THAT WINTER IS PAST, THE DOVE'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD. *AMBROSE*: "Arise, come, my dearest one," that is, arise from the pleasures of the world, arise from earthly things and come to me, you who still labor and are burdened,²¹ because you are anxious about worldly things. Come over the world, come to me, because I have overcome the world. Come near, for now you are fair with the beauty of everlasting life, now you are a dove, that is, you are gentle and mild, now you are filled entirely with spiritual grace. . . .

"Winter is now past"; that is, the Pasch has come, pardon has come, the forgiveness of sins has arrived, temptation has ceased, the rain is gone, the storm is gone, and the affliction. Before the coming of Christ it is winter. After his coming there are flowers. On this account he says, "The flowers appear on the earth." Where before there were thorns, now flowers are there. "The time of pruning has come." Where before there was desert, the harvest is there. "The voice of the dove is heard in our land." *ISAAC, OR THE SOUL* 4.34-35.²²

SIGNIFICANCE OF WINTER AND ITS PASSING.

GREGORY OF ELVIRA: There is thus no doubt that winter has a double meaning, either that harshness and severity belong to it, or that it is a time for sowing with the coming of the rain. When it says winter, therefore, it refers to the present world, where the Word of God is sowed in this age like a seed of righteousness by prophets and apostles, or priests, and is fertilized by assiduous preaching, as though by rains from heaven. . . .

But with the passing of winter, that is, the

¹⁶FC 65:391. ¹⁷ECS 2:63. ¹⁸See Mt 7:14. ¹⁹Ps 92:13 (91:14 LXX, Vg). ²⁰OSW 62. ²¹Mt 11:28. ²²FC 65:29-30.

tribulations of this world, and the cessation of the rains, that is, the preaching of the Word of God, and the subsequent arrival of the joy of Spring (which designates the coming of Christ's vernal kingdom in great peace), then the bodies of the saints everywhere will emerge from the graves of the earth like flowers—lilies or roses—pure white with holiness and red with passion. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 4.13, 15.²³

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL HAS COME.

JEROME: Then the bridegroom makes answer to the bride and teaches her that the shadow of the old law has passed away and the truth of the gospel has come. "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." . . . "The voice of the turtle [dove] is heard in our land." The turtle [dove], the most chaste of birds, always dwelling in lofty places, is a type of the Savior. AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.30.²⁴

APPROACH OF THE TURTLEDOVE SIGNIFIES THE COMING OF CHRIST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Such did the Savior of all become toward us, showing the most perfect gentleness, and like a turtle [dove], moreover, soothing the world and filling his own vineyard, even us who believe in him, with the sweet sound of his voice. For it is written in the Song of Songs, "The voice of the turtle[dove] has been heard in our land." For Christ has spoken to us the divine message of the gospel, which is for the salvation of the whole world. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 3.²⁵

THE TIME OF THE PRUNING. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Also in the Song of Songs we find Christ calling to the bride there described, and who represents the person of the church, in these words: "Arise, come, my neighbor, my beautiful dove. For lo! the winter is past, and the rain is gone; it has passed away. The flowers appear on the ground. The time of the pruning is come." . . . A certain spring-like calm was about to arise for

those who believe in him. COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILY 95.²⁶

THE ROCK IS CHRIST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The rock is Christ. He is a wall and a shelter to us who believe and a perfect guardian, which is denoted by the wall. When you arrive, he says, you will be protected with every defense. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.14.²⁷

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FIG TREE AND OF THE CLEFT IN THE ROCK. JEROME: Immediately the turtle says to its fellow, "The fig tree has put forth its green figs," that is, the commandments of the old law have fallen, and the blossoming vines of the gospel give forth their fragrance. . . . While you covered your countenance like Moses and the veil of the law remained, I neither saw your face, nor did I condescend to hear your voice. I said, "Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear."²⁸ But now, with unveiled face behold my glory, and shelter yourself in the cleft and steep places of the solid rock. AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.30.²⁹

SWEET VOICE OF THE DOVE IS A CONTRAST TO HERETICS. ORIGEN: "Because your voice is sweet." And who would not profess that voice of the catholic church confessing the true faith is sweet, but the voice of the heretics is rough and unpleasant, which does not speak the teachings of truth but blasphemies against God and iniquity against the Most High? Thus also the appearance of the church is comely, but that of the heretics is ugly and foul—that is, if there is someone who knows how to test the beauty of the face, that is, if there is some spiritual person who knows how to examine all things. For among the unskilled and unregenerate people the sophistries of the lie seem more beautiful than the teachings of the truth.³⁰ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.15.³¹

²³CCL 69:202-3. ²⁴NPNF 2 6:368. ²⁵CGSL 58. ²⁶CGSL 381-82*.

²⁷PG 69:1286. ²⁸Is 1:15. ²⁹NPNF 2 6:368-69*. ³⁰See 1 Cor 2:14.

³¹Cetedoc 0198, 2(A).4.234.23.

2:15 Foxes in the Vineyard

WALK WITH THE WISE. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: [Those] who spoil the church of God, as the “little foxes do the vineyard,” we exhort you to avoid, lest you lay traps for your own souls. “For he that walks with wise men shall be wise, but he that walks with the foolish shall be known.”³² CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES 6.3.18.³³

FOXES PLOT AGAINST THE CHURCH. BEDE: This animal, which is very shrewd with respect to deceit and craftiness, represents the Jews, Gentiles and heretics, who are always plotting against the church of God, and, as it were, continuously making a racket with their babbling voices. Concerning them the command is given to the guardians of the church: “Catch for us the tiny foxes which are wrecking the vineyards.” COMMENTARY ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 19.14.³⁴

FOXES ARE HERETICS WHO HARM THE CHURCHES. THEODORET OF CYR: “Catch us little foxes that demolish vineyards.” Some commentators actually applied “little” to the “vineyards”; but the sense is no different in either case. By “foxes” he refers to those with a deceitful attitude who harm the Lord’s churches that are just beginning to flourish—hence his saying “our vines blossom.” By “foxes” he is hinting at the heretics warring against people in the church and endeavoring furtively and deceitfully to steal away those not yet made firm in the faith. By persuasiveness in word and by the snares and intricacies of argumentation they lead astray those of simpler disposition and damage the vines. For this reason he bids those exercising the teaching role to hunt them down and ensnare them with the arguments of the truth and rid the blossoming vines of this damage. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.³⁵

SCHISMATICS AND HERETICS. BEDE: The foxes who destroy the vineyards are heretics and schismatics who devour with their crooked teeth the blossoming vineyard of the doctrine of Christ,

that is, the green minds of the faithful. Would that we not know [such destruction]! COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 2.2.15.³⁶

NO BETTER BECAUSE THEY ARE LITTLE.

GREGORY OF ELVIRA: It calls these foxes “little” because there are also greater ones. Indeed, the ruling powers of the world are greater at raging than the fallacies of the heretics are at seducing. They are both equally evil, but their respective powers to punish are unequal, for the heretic coaxes to destroy, but the Gentile rages to conquer, the former being peacefully deceptive and the latter being cruel in persecution. But the Lord commands that both receive appropriate dispositions from the keepers of the vineyards, that is, from the leaders of the churches. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 4.25.³⁷

THE MEANING OF “CATCH.” AUGUSTINE: What does “catch” mean? [This means to] come to grips with them, convince, refute them, so that the vineyards of the church may not be spoiled. What else is catching foxes, but overcoming heretics with the authority of the divine law, and so to say binding and tying them up with the cords provided by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures? [Samson] catches foxes, ties their tails together and attaches firebrands.³⁸ What’s the meaning of the foxes’ tails tied together? What can the foxes’ tails be but the backsides of the heretics, whose fronts are smooth and deceptive, their backsides bound, that is condemned, and dragging fire behind them, to consume the crops and works of those who yield to their seductions? SERMON 364.4.³⁹

2:16 The Lover and the Beloved

LOVE IN THE HEAVENLY CITY. AMBROSE: Joining the daughters of the heavenly city, she seeks

³²Prov 13:20 LXX. ³³ANF 7:457-58*. ³⁴CS 117:155. ³⁵ECS 2:65-66. ³⁶CCL 119B:226. ³⁷CCL 69:205. ³⁸Judg 15:4-5. ³⁹WSA 3 10:278-79*; cf. Caesarius of Arles Sermon 118.4 (FC 47:186, and cf. FC 31:xxiv-xxv).

after the Word; by her search she arouses his love for her, and she knows where to search for him. For she has come to know that he delays among the prayers of his saints and remains close to them, and she understands that he feeds the church and the souls of his just ones among the lilies. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 6.56.⁴⁰

GOD'S BLESSINGS. THEODORET OF CYR: They who are blessed by the boons of God and have learned to know these passages and others like them, kindled with warm love for their bountiful Master, constantly carry on their lips this his dearest name and cry in the words of the Song of Songs, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." LETTER 146.⁴¹

2:17 *The Passing of the Shadows at the Break of Day*

THE SHADOWS RECEDE AT THE WORD'S APPROACH. AMBROSE: In the first stage, that of formation, the soul still sees shadows not yet parted by the revelation of the Word's approach, and therefore hitherto the daylight of the gospel did not shine upon it. In the second, it enjoys sweet fragrances without the confusion of the shadows.⁴² ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 8.68.⁴³

A FORETELLING OF THE LORD'S RESURRECTION. APONIUS: In this verse, the Lord's resurrection is taught and foretold. Just as the apostles were afraid without him, terrorized by the treachery of the Jews, so also is the soul, which, in a certain sense, is naked and unarmed without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, terrorized by the treachery of demons. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 5.4.⁴⁴

USELESS ANTIQUITY TERMINATED AND SPIRITUAL MEANING REVEALED. AUGUSTINE: Since, then, there are in the Old Testament precepts that we who belong to the New Testament are not compelled to observe, why do not the Jews realize that they have remained stationary in use-

less antiquity rather than hurl charges against us who hold fast to the new promises, because we do not observe the old? Just as it is written in the Canticle of Canticles: "The day has broken, let the shadows retire," the spiritual meaning has already dawned, the natural action has already ceased. "The God of Gods, the Lord has spoken: and he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof."⁴⁵ IN ANSWER TO THE JEWS 6.8.⁴⁶

THE HEAVENLY HEIGHTS. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: With the barren synagogue abandoned, she asks the bridegroom to come to those downtrodden and humiliated and formerly idolatrous souls who will be raised with him to heavenly heights. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 2.17.⁴⁷

FROM SHADOWS TO REALITY. NILUS OF ANCYRA: He pastures his flocks among the lilies, therefore, although he does so only until the coming day emerges and the shadows begin to move on. Since the majority of people think that the events which are passing and not stable are fixed and will remain, because their faculty of discernment is obscured by the darkness of ignorance, they have need of the daylight in order to see that the shadows of the things of this world dissipate and have no permanence. For all present realities are shadows,⁴⁸ drawing their origin from the good things of the heavens yet subsisting like shadows, only resembling the truth of the things there above. But once the night has passed and the dawn has arisen, the nature of things from on high is clearly seen, as if in sunlight. Then people realize: "Our life on the earth is a shadow."⁴⁹ Then they say, "My days, as the shadow, are in decline,"⁵⁰ indicating how feeble and quick to vanish is temporal success. The one who says, "If there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is only one God

⁴⁰FC 65:45-46. ⁴¹NPNF 2 3:320. ⁴²See Song 1:12-13. ⁴³FC 65:56. ⁴⁴CCL 19:115. ⁴⁵Ps 50:1 (49:1 LXX, Vg). ⁴⁶FC 27:400-401. ⁴⁷PG 69:1286. ⁴⁸See Wis 5:9. ⁴⁹Job 8:9. ⁵⁰Ps 101:12 (102:12 LXX).

the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things come and through whom we exist,"⁵¹ can also say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," for the meaning is identical in each text. For anyone who renounces both gods and lords lays claim to the one God and Lord, from whom he exists and to whom he returns. "For," it says, "for us there is one God from whom all things come and for whom we exist," thus declaring clearly that "he is mine, and I am his." . . .

Regarding the expression "the shadows move on," it is necessary to consider . . . that it refers to the abrogation of the works of the law. That is the shadow frequently cited by Paul as "the law having the shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the realities,"⁵² and again "These are only a shadow of the things to come, but the substance is of Christ,"⁵³ and again, "They provide a copy and a shadow of the heavenly realities,"⁵⁴ meaning the priests that functioned according to the law. Thus it is indicated for certain that, the shadow of the law having

moved on, the truth of grace now governs, established upon the rock against which "the gates of hell shall never prevail."⁵⁵ . . . It should also be remarked that it is everywhere necessary for the Word to rest upon the mountains, or at least upon the hills. And if the Word is ever found in the valleys or chasms, he is found there by reason of his great condescension and with the intention to restore those who are down there to the higher realities, on account of his love for humankind. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 64-66.⁵⁶

A REMINDER OF ESCHATOLOGY. BEDE: "Until the day breathes and the shadows lengthen," that is, until the eternal light of the coming age appears and the shadows of the present life, that is, the ignorance or error whereby even many of us faithful who have the use of the lamp of God's word are temporarily darkened, lengthen and disappear. COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 2.2.17.⁵⁷

⁵¹1 Cor 8:5-6. ⁵²Heb 10:1. ⁵³Col 2:17. ⁵⁴Heb 8:5. ⁵⁵Mt 16:18. ⁵⁶SC 403:314-18, 324. ⁵⁷CCL 119B:228.



SEEKING AND NOT FINDING
SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-5

OVERVIEW: Christ can be sought by night (AMBROSE, GREGORY THE GREAT) or by day (AMBROSE) inside the secret chamber of the heart (JEROME), which represents the Lord's tomb (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), where wisdom resides (GREGORY OF ELVIRA) and God dwells (GREGORY OF NYSSA). When the beloved is found in his divinity (GREGORY THE GREAT), it means bypassing all created beings to reach the angelic nature (THEODORET OF CYR). This is related to "mother church" and the heavenly Jerusalem (GREGORY OF ELVIRA), because the heavenly mysteries are represented allegorically on earth through the gospel (AMBROSE). "My Mother's house," in fact, is the Jerusalem on high (THEODORET OF CYR).

3:1-4 Seeking the One We Love

SEEKING BY NIGHT. AMBROSE: "In my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loved," as if he had stolen in upon her. Let one who seeks carefully seek while in his bed; let him seek at night. Let there be neither nights nor holiday, let no time be free from pious service, and if one does not find him at first, let him persevere in searching after him. . . .

And because we see the heavenly mysteries represented allegorically on earth through the gospel, let us come to Mary Magdalene and to the other Mary.¹ Let us meditate upon how they sought Christ at night in the bed of his body, in which he lay dead, when the angel said to them, "You seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen. Why then do you seek the living one among the dead?"² Why do you seek in the tomb him who is now in heaven? Why do you seek in the bonds of the tomb him who frees all men of their bonds? The tomb is not his dwelling, but heaven is. And so one of them says, "I sought him and I did not find him." ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 5:38, 42.³

THE CHAMBER IS THE LORD'S TOMB. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: "In my chamber by night I sought him." This refers to the women who came at the beginning of the morning on the sabbath to the

tomb of Jesus and did not find him.⁴ He is in the chamber, therefore, or away from the chamber. Or perhaps they call their chamber the Lord's tomb because we are buried together with him.⁵ But when they did not find him, they heard at once: "He is not here, for he has been raised."⁶ And they discovered guardian angels, whom they asked, "Where have you laid the Lord?"⁷ Then, when they had left the angels whom they were questioning, the Lord met them and said, "Rejoice."⁸ For this reason, it says, "When I had passed by them for a little while, I found him whom I will not let go." She grasped his feet and heard, "Don't hold me."⁹ Finally, he called the gathering of the apostles the house of the mother, to whom he announced the resurrection of Christ. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3:1.¹⁰

CHAMBER OF THE HEART WHERE WISDOM RESIDES. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: To what does this bed refer, upon which the church seeks the one whom its soul loves, if not to the bed of its heart in which wisdom rests, where it seeks our Lord and Savior through continuous meditation? If the bed is the secrecy of the heart, then what is the night in which the church sought the Lord but was unable to find him? Surely it means that the God of light was not easily found in darkness. EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 5:2.¹¹

WHERE GOD DWELLS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The chamber is indeed the heart that becomes an acceptable dwelling of God when it returns to that state which it had in the beginning made by "her who conceived me." We would be correct by understanding "mother" as the first cause of our being. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.¹²

FOLLOWING BY DAY. AMBROSE: Let us follow him by day, the present day of the church, which

¹See Mt 28:1; Lk 24:3, 10. ²Mt 28:5-6; Lk 24:5. ³FC 65:32-34. ⁴See Lk 24:1ff. ⁵See Rom 6:4. ⁶Lk 24:6. ⁷Jn 20:15. ⁸See Mt 28:9. ⁹Jn 20:17. ¹⁰PG 69:1286. ¹¹CCL 69:207. ¹²GNSS 131.

Abraham saw and was glad.¹³ This is why we follow Christ during the day; for he will not be found by night. "Upon my bed," Scripture says, "by night I sought him whom my soul loves. I called him, but he gave no answer." ON VIRGINITY 8.45.¹⁴

SEARCH EXTENDS INTO THE CITY AND THE BELOVED IS FOUND. GREGORY THE GREAT: We seek the one we love upon our beds when we sigh with longing for our Redeemer during our short period of rest during the present life. We seek him during the night, because even though our hearts are already watchful for him, our eyes are still darkened. But it remains for the person who does not find the one he loves to rise and go about the city, that is, he must travel about the holy church of the elect with an inquiring heart. He must seek her through its streets and squares, making his way, that is, through narrow and broad places, on the watch to make inquiries if any traces of her can be found in them, because there are some, even of those leading worldly lives, who have something worth imitating of virtue in their actions. The watchmen who guard the city find us as we search, because the holy fathers who guard the church's orthodoxy come to meet our good efforts, to teach us, by their words of their writings. Scarcely have we passed them by when we find him whom we love. Although in his humility our Redeemer was a human being in the midst of human beings, in his divinity he was above human beings. Therefore once the watchmen have been passed by, the beloved is found. FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 25.¹⁵

BYPASSING ALL BEINGS TO REACH THE ANGELIC NATURE. THEODORET OF CYR: Since the bridegroom is incomprehensible in his being even to the holy angels, and hence they did not give me an answer to my question, teaching me by their silence that he is incomprehensible even to them, the uncreated to created beings, I left them as well, still searching for my beloved.

"It was not long after passing them that I

found him whom my soul loved. I laid hold of him." I had scarcely bypassed the creature to reach the angelic nature itself in an effort to find my uncreated beloved, my benefactor as he is, when by faith alone I came upon him, bypassing all beings and with the confirmation from experience itself that the one responsible for everything is above all beings and in his being is seen by no nature, of the senses or the intellect, being superior to them in substance. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.¹⁶

I WOULD NOT LET HIM GO FROM MY HEART. JEROME: Happy the person in whose heart Jesus sets his feet every day! If only he would set his feet in my heart! If only his footsteps would cling to my heart forever! If only I may say with the spouse, "I took hold of him and would not let him go." HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 26 (PSALM 98).¹⁷

AN INTERIOR, SECRET PLACE. AMBROSE: What is signified by the house of your mother and her chamber except the interior, secret place of your nature? Keep this house, and cleanse its inmost parts so that, once it is an immaculate house unstained by any sordidness of an adulterous conscience, a spiritual house held together by the cornerstone may rise into a holy priesthood, and the Holy Spirit may dwell in it. One who thus seeks Christ, who entertains him, is not abandoned by him. Rather, that one is frequently visited, for he is with us until the end of the world. ON VIRGINITY 13.78.¹⁸

MOTHER CHURCH AND THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM. GREGORY OF ELVIRA: "In my mother's house and in the chamber where she conceived me." This is the voice of the church speaking. If the church is a mother to all, we must ask for the identity of the mother of the church, in whose house and in whose chamber she is said

¹³Jn 8:56. ¹⁴AOV 23. ¹⁵CS 123:189. ¹⁶ECS 2:70. ¹⁷FC 48:209. ¹⁸AOV 36.

to have been conceived. I have already shown above what is the church, namely, the body of Christ that consists of his gathering members. The mother of the church, therefore, is the holy heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁹ EXPLANATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS 5.12.²⁰

MOTHER'S HOUSE IS THE JERUSALEM ON HIGH. THEODORET OF CYR: She says she found him and did not let him go before bringing him into her mother's house and the inner chamber of the one who conceived her. By "city" she refers to the house of God, which we call church, by "marketplaces" and "streets" the divine Scriptures, by the city's "watchmen" the holy prophets and the sacred apostles, from whom the pious soul learns

in its longing for the divine Word. After these she finds the bridegroom attended by guards and attendants, she lays hold of him, clings to him and is reluctant to leave him before she brings him into her mother's house and the inner chamber of the one who conceived her. Now, we recognize the mother of the pious as the Jerusalem on high, of whom blessed Paul says, "The Jerusalem on high is free in being mother of us all."²¹ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.²²

3:5 Solemn Adjuration

See commentary on Song of Solomon 2:7.

¹⁹Gal 4:26. ²⁰CCL 69:209. ²¹Gal 4:6. ²²ECS 2:71.



THE GROOM AND HIS PARTY SONG OF SOLOMON 3:6-11

OVERVIEW: The true Solomon on his litter is an image of Christ the king of peace (AMBROSE, HIP-

POLYTUS, THEODORET OF CYR, APONIOUS, BEDE), and those who attend him guard against carnal de-

sires (GREGORY OF NYSSA). The myrrh is for burial, but the frankincense indicates divinity (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA) as well as the absence of spot or wrinkle (ORIGEN). His bed is the divine Scriptures (THEODORET OF CYR), his crown of thorns a crown of mystery (AMBROSE, RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), his wedding day also the day of his passion (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). But the “crown” could come from either “mother” or “father” because there is neither male nor female in God, and all such terms are therefore inadequate (GREGORY OF NYSSA).

3:6-7 *Coming from the Wilderness*

MYRRH FOR BURIAL, FRANKINCENSE FOR DIVINITY. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The myrrh that was mixed with frankincense was used for burying him, but frankincense because whoever rises with Christ shares his divinity. And the ecclesiastical soul is imbued not only with these fragrances but also with various principles of knowledge. For whoever discerns accurately and searches all the way to the highest peak will be said to crush everything and reduce to dust the doctrines of good fragrance, like some perfume with which the bride is now said to be fragrant. Perhaps also the one who does not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, whose heart has not been hardened, generating and preserving various sweet smells, renders a good odor from all the herbs which are now called perfumes. Likewise, some will say that the holy and ecclesiastical soul, a daughter formerly destitute of God, ascends from the assembly of the Gentiles, that is, from the desert of those who are remiss in dogmas, words and deeds, having abandoned God, and rises to the things that are of God. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.6.¹

FRANKINCENSE IS TRANSLATED AS WHITENING. ORIGEN: They also bring “frankincense,” translated as “whitening,” since they reject every dark condition, so that the words are fitting for them: “Who is she who comes up all white?” For

in this way they will be able to bring praise to the house of the Lord, not having a spot or a wrinkle or any such thing which brings dirt on the church of Christ. FRAGMENTS ON JEREMIAH II.²

APPROACH OF SOLOMON’S LITTER. AMBROSE: For Solomon made himself a bed of wood from Lebanon. Its pillars were of silver, its bottom of gold, its back strewn with gems. CONCERNING VIRGINS 3.5.21.³

SPLendor OF SOLOMON’S LITTER COMPARED WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST. AMBROSE: Do you, therefore, grind your faith so that you may be like the soul that excites in itself the love of Christ, that the powers of heaven admire as it mounts up, that it may rise easily and soar above this world with joy and gladness. Like the vine, put forth branches, and like smoke, rise on high, shedding the odor of a holy resurrection and the sweetness of faith, as you have it written: “Who is she that goes up by the desert like a branch of the vine burning with smoke, fragrant with myrrh and frankincense, and with all the powders of the perfumer?” LETTER 77, TO LAYMEN.⁴

SOLOMON ON HIS LITTER IS NONE OTHER THAN CHRIST. HIPPLYTUS: “Behold the litter of Solomon surrounded by sixty mighty men from the powerful of Israel, each one equipped with a sword and trained for battle.” O blessed sight! O litter of sabbath rest! For Solomon’s litter reveals nothing other than Christ himself. TREATISE ON THE SONG OF SONGS 27.1.⁵

SOLOMON THE PEACEABLE IS JESUS THE CHRIST. THEODORET OF CYR: We must enquire why on earth they call the bridegroom Solomon. Solomon means “peaceable,” as you can find in the Chronicles. God said to David, when he wanted to build the new temple, “Lo, a son is born to you; he will be a man of repose, and I shall give him peace

¹PG 69:1286-87. ²FC 97:284. ³NPNF 2 10:384*. ⁴FC 26:433.

⁵CSCO 264:50.

from all his enemies round about, because his name is Solomon, and I shall give peace and tranquility to Israel in his days. He will build a house for my name, and he will be a son to me, and I shall be a father to him, and I shall assure the throne of his kingdom in Israel forever."⁶ . . .

It was not Solomon who had dominion to the ends of the world but he who sprang from Solomon in his humanity, Jesus Christ, and was called Solomon on account of his peaceable and gentle nature and his being the cause of peace.

COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.⁷

SOLOMON'S BED IS HOLY SCRIPTURE. THEODORET OF CYR: "Lo, it is Solomon's bed." Let us understand the bridegroom's bed to be the divine Scriptures. When the bride reclines on them, as it were, along with the bridegroom, and receives the seeds of teaching, she conceives, bears, is in labor and gives birth to spiritual benefit. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.⁸

THE TRUE SOLOMON IS CHRIST THE KING. APONIUS: Thus he was crowned by the blessed mother who begot him according to the flesh, Christ the King, the true Solomon. This was the day of his wedding and the day of gladness of heart, when the immaculate was joined to the stained. Our Lord Jesus Christ made the church immaculate by the touch of his body and blood and rendered it most beautiful, cleansed from every stain of sin by the most holy washing of baptism, with every wrinkle of heretical inclination wiped away by the salve of doctrine. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 5.48.⁹

SIXTY ARMED MEN. GREGORY OF NYSSA: What then is their meaning? Perhaps the loveliness of the divine beauty has something fearful about it as characterized by elements contrary to corporeal beauty. What attracts our desire is pleasant to the sight, soft to the touch, and not associated with anything fearful or terrifying. But that incorruptible beauty is fearful, terrifying and not easily frightened. Since our desire for carnal things in the

body's members is subject to passion and defilement, like a band of robbers it ambushes the mind, captivates it and carries away the will. Therefore it becomes God's enemy; as the apostle says, the wisdom of the flesh arises from what is inimical to God.¹⁰ It follows that the love of God arises from what is opposed to carnal desire. If carnal desire consists of weakness, laxity and laziness, the love of God is made up of a fearful, terrifying fortitude. An unrelenting anger scares and puts to flight the ambush resulting from pleasure, thus revealing the soul's beauty as pure and no longer sullied by a desire for carnal pleasure. The king's nuptial bed is therefore surrounded by armed men expert in battle. The sword at the thigh terrorizes and causes fear against dark, nocturnal thoughts and against those who lie in ambush to shoot arrows in the darkness at the upright of heart.¹¹ The weapons of those standing guard around the bed destroy impure desires. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.¹²

THE KING OF PEACE AT THE END OF TIME. BEDE: Solomon's litter, therefore, is the glory of heavenly beatitude in which the King of peace himself rests with his saints, a rest toward which the King's beloved, that is, the church, strains daily through the desert of this world and already partly enjoys, insofar as he gives his faithful a foretaste of their future reward. But they will receive it fully only when, at the end of the age, the founder and king of the heavenly city gathers the elect from the four winds and, as was said elsewhere, "girds himself and makes them recline at table and serves them."¹³ COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 2.3.7.¹⁴

3:10-11 A Crown for a Wedding

SIGNIFICANCE OF GOLD AND PURPLE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: We should think that the use of

⁶1 Chron 22:9-10. ⁷ECS 2:73. ⁸ECS 2:73*. ⁹CCL 19:138. ¹⁰Rom 8:7. ¹¹Ps 11:2 (10:2 LXX). ¹²GNSS 135. ¹³See Lk 12:37. ¹⁴CCL 119B:237-38.

gold denotes spiritual union, which is precious and divine. For, to demonstrate the union of God and humankind, the ark in the desert was also covered within and without by gold.¹⁵ The purple signifies that number of persons who are called to the kingdom. And when someone believes, at that moment Christ is received in the heart, who is a precious pearl. For it says that he made a litter for himself from the daughters of Jerusalem on account of love alone: “For God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, that all who believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.”¹⁶ FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.10.¹⁷

THE WEDDING DAY IS THE DAY OF CHRIST’S PASSION. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The church forged from the Gentiles says this: “Go forth and see.” But what it calls the day of his wedding is the day of his passion, when he married the church by his blood.¹⁸ FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 3.II.¹⁹

THE NUPTIAL SONG. AMBROSE: Then when the bride has been led to the resting place of her bridegroom, they sing the nuptial song and express love from the daughters of Jerusalem: “Come forth and look upon King Solomon in the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his marriage.” They sing the epithalamium and call upon the other heavenly powers or souls to see the love that Christ has toward the daughters of Jerusalem. On this account he deserved to be crowned by his mother, as a loving son, as Paul shows, saying that “God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his loving son.”²⁰ ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 5.46.²¹

A CROWN OF THORNS. RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA: It is written that there was put on him a crown of thorns. Of this hear in the Canticles the voice of God the Father marveling at the iniquity of Jerusalem in the insult done to his Son: “Go forth

and see, you daughters of Jerusalem, the crown with which his mother has crowned him.” COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLES’ CREED 22.²²

ALSO A CROWN OF MYSTERY. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Every king is proclaimed by soldiers. It was fitting that Jesus also, in figure, be crowned by soldiers. For this reason Scripture says in the Canticles: “Daughters of Jerusalem, come forth and look upon King Solomon in the crown with which his mother has crowned him.” But the crown was also a mystery, for it was a remission of sins and release from the sentence of condemnation. CATECHETICAL LECTURES 13.17.²³

ALL TERMS FOR “GOD” ARE INADEQUATE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, “mother” is mentioned in the Song in place of “father.” Both terms mean the same, because there is neither male nor female in God. For how can anything transitory like this be attributed to God? But when we are one in Christ, we are divested of the signs of this difference along with the old person. Therefore every name equally indicates God’s ineffable nature; neither can “male” nor “female” defile God’s pure nature. Because of this, the father mentioned in the gospel parable prepares a wedding.²⁴ The prophet says of God, “You have placed on his head a crown of precious stones.”²⁵ Hence the Song says that a crown is placed upon the bridegroom by his mother. Since the nuptials and bride are one, one mother places the crown upon the bridegroom’s head. Neither does it make much difference whether one calls the Son of God the only begotten God, or the Son of his love. According to Paul, each name has the capacity to be a bridal escort that leads the bridegroom to dwell in us. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 7.²⁶

¹⁵See Ex 25:11. ¹⁶Jn 3:16. ¹⁷PG 69:1287. ¹⁸See Eph 5:27. ¹⁹PG 69:1287. ²⁰Col 1:13. ²¹FC 65:36-37. ²²NPNF 2 3:552. ²³FC 64:16. ²⁴Mt 22:2. ²⁵Ps 20:3 LXX. ²⁶GNSS 145-46*.



THE BRIDEGROOM'S
PROPOSAL
SONG OF SOLOMON 4:1-8

OVERVIEW: The bride comes not from the law but from idols, from Lebanon (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The church is the bride (AMBROSE) but beauty is in its soul (APONIUS). The bride's eyes are those of a dove (AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE, CASSIODORUS), and her hair like a flock of goats (BEDE). Her teeth are like a flock of ewes (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), because she is shorn of her sins, as the church is washed in baptism, or shorn of secular burdens, their twins being God and neighbor, law and prophets (AUGUSTINE). However, such teeth may instead indicate an ability to chew the thick dense bread of spiritual food into more delectable pieces (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Thus the bride in her various parts represents either the soul or the church (ORIGEN, GREGORY THE GREAT). Therefore the bridegroom invites her to pass through things temporal and seek true

beauty, assisted by the Holy Spirit (AMBROSE, JEROME).

4:1 *The Eyes and Hair*

THE CHURCH AS BRIDE. AMBROSE: [The church] mourns in its eyes, that is in its faithful, because it is written, "Your eyes are as doves apart from your reticence," because they see spiritually and know how to keep silent about the mysteries which they have seen. CONSOLATION ON THE DEATH OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN 7.¹

FIRST IS THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL. APONIUS: Having been cleansed from every habit of the vices of the flesh and converted to the one true

¹FC 22:268.

God from the worship of a multitude of shameful gods, Christ the Lord praises the twin beauty of the church of the Gentiles, both body and soul. For the first beauty of the soul is that it would know its Creator, second that it would know itself, the kind of thing it is or the reason for which it was created. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 6.1.²

BEAUTIFUL EYES OF A DOVE. AMBROSE: But Christ, beholding his church, for whom he himself, as you find in the book of the prophet Zechariah, had put on filthy garments,³ now clothed in white raiment, seeing, that is, a soul pure and washed in the laver of regeneration, says, "Behold, you are fair, my love, behold you are fair, your eyes are like a dove's," in the likeness of which the Holy Spirit descended from heaven. The eyes are beautiful like those of a dove, because in the likeness of a dove the Holy Spirit descended from heaven. ON THE MYSTERIES 7.37.⁴

TO SEE WITH THE EYES OF A DOVE. AUGUSTINE: We are not to administer rebukes until we have removed from our eye the beam of envy or malice or pretense, so that we may have clear vision to cast out the speck from a brother's eye. For we shall then see that speck with the eyes of the dove, the kind of eyes that are commended [as belonging to] the spouse of Christ, the glorious church which God has chosen for himself, the church which has neither spot nor wrinkle,⁵ that is, the church which is pure without guile. SERMON ON THE MOUNT 2.19.66.⁶

EYES THAT HAVE FAINTED. CASSIODORUS: So they say that these eyes have fainted after the Lord's salvation, because of the holy coming of the incarnation, which they bore with such longing that it could allow them no rest. So they were right to faint, because they had no period of leisure. EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS 119.123.⁷

HAIR LIKE A FLOCK OF GOATS. BEDE: For if goats and the hair or skins of goats always signi-

fied the foulness of sinners and never the humility of penitents, that animal would by no means have been reckoned among the clean [animals], nor would it have been said in praise of the bride: "Your hair is like a flock of goats." ON THE TABERNACLE 2.3.⁸

4:2 *The Teeth*

LIKE A FLOCK OF EWES. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: "Your teeth are like a flock of ewes to be shorn." A sincere confession is a spiritual shearing! And further: "all of them big with twins," signifying the twofold grace, either that perfected by water and the Spirit, or that announced in the Old and in the New Testament. CATECHETICAL LECTURES 3.16.⁹

THE TEETH OF THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: The teeth of the church¹⁰ are those through whom she speaks. Of what sort are your teeth? "Like a flock of sheep that are shorn." Why "that are shorn"? Because they have laid aside the burdens of the world. Were not those sheep, of which I was a little before speaking, shorn, whom the bidding of God had shorn when he said, "Go and sell what you have, and give to the poor; and you shall find treasure in heaven: and come and follow me"?¹¹ They performed this bidding: shorn they came. And because those who believe in Christ are baptized, what is there said "which come up from the washing" means they have come up from cleansing. "Whereof every one bears twins." What twins? Those two commandments, whereupon hang all the law and the prophets.¹² EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 95.9.¹³

THAT WHICH IS SHORN IS THE SUPERFLUITY OF SINS. AMBROSE: [There is a] pleasing comparison to those that are shorn; for we know that goats both feed in high places without risk and

²CCL 19:139. ³Zech 3:3. ⁴NPNF 2 10:322*. ⁵Eph 5:27. ⁶FC 11:176*. ⁷ACW 53:232. ⁸TTH 18:56. ⁹FC 61:118*. ¹⁰Cf. Song 6:6. ¹¹Mt 19:21. ¹²Mt 22:40. ¹³NPNF 1 8:469*.

securely find their food in rugged places, and then when shorn are freed from what is superfluous. The church is likened to a flock of these, having in itself the many virtues of those souls which through the laver lay aside the superfluity of sins and offer to Christ the mystic faith and the grace of good living, which speak of the cross of the Lord Jesus. *ON THE MYSTERIES* 7.38.¹⁴

SHORN OF SECULAR BURDENS. AUGUSTINE: “Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes.” What do shorn ewes mean? Those who lay aside secular burdens. What does shorn mean? Those who lay aside their fleeces, like the load of secular burdens. Those persons were your teeth, about whom it is written in the Acts of the Apostles that “they sold all their possessions and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles, so that distribution might be made to each, as there was need.”¹⁵ You have received the fleeces of your shorn ewes. That flock has come up from the washing of holy baptism. All have given birth, because they have fulfilled the two commandments. *SERMON* 313B.3.¹⁶

GOD AND NEIGHBOR, LAW AND PROPHETS. AUGUSTINE: He says to the church, his spouse, “Your teeth are like a flock of sheep that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them.” By this twin offspring the twofold object of love is meant, namely, God and the neighbor: “On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”¹⁷ *LETTER* 149.¹⁸

MAKING SPIRITUAL FOOD MORE EASILY ACCEPTABLE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Now is the time to examine the beauty attributed to the teeth of shorn sheep. . . . If we look at the literal meaning of this verse, I do not see how teeth can be compared with prolific sheep. . . . What then can we gather from these words? Persons reducing the divine mysteries into small fragments for a clearer interpretation of the text make spiritual food more easily acceptable for the body of

the church. They perform the function of teeth by receiving the thick, dense bread of the text into their mouths. By a more subtle contemplation, they make the food delectable. *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 7.¹⁹

4:5 *Two Fawns That Feed Among the Lilies*

FIGURATIVE INTERPRETATION. ORIGEN: And in the song of the bride, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, the neck, and breasts, are praised by the bridegroom. The bride is either the soul of man, which enters into marriage with Christ, or the church. The parts of the body are interpreted figuratively: if they are said of the soul, then they apply to its powers. *FRAGMENTS ON LUKE* 186.²⁰

THE SAINTS FEED AMONG THE LILIES. GREGORY THE GREAT: In order to [gain knowledge of heavenly things], we study the examples of the saints who have gone before. They are said to feed among the lilies. For what is meant by lilies but the conduct of those who say with all truth, “We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ.”²¹ *MORALS ON THE BOOK OF JOB* 24.17.²²

4:7-8 *An Invitation*

RENOUNCING THE WORLD. AMBROSE: God the Word says to [the church], “You are all fair, my love, and there is no blemish in you,” for guilt has been washed away. “Come here from Lebanon, my spouse, come here from Lebanon, from the beginning of faith²³ you will pass through and pass on,” because, renouncing the world, she passed through things temporal and passed on to Christ. *ON THE MYSTERIES* 7.39.²⁴

NOT FROM THE LAW BUT FROM LEBANON. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: This teaches us the bride’s place of origin, that she comes from the

¹⁴NPNF 2 10:322*. ¹⁵Acts 4:34-35. ¹⁶WSA 3 9:98. ¹⁷Mt 22:40.

¹⁸FC 20:242*. ¹⁹150-51*. ²⁰FC 94:200. ²¹2 Cor 2:15. ²²LF 23:61*.

²³“From the beginning of faith” LXX. ²⁴NPNF 2 10:322*.

worship of idols. For Mount Lebanon is full of idols, whence you come, it says, hastening past through the law. Without knowing the law, you were taught the mystery of Christ. *FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.8.*²⁵

TRUE BEAUTY. AMBROSE: This is indeed true beauty, to which nothing is wanting, which alone is worthy to hear the Lord saying, “You are all fair, my love, and no blemish is in you. Come hither from Lebanon, my spouse, come hither from Lebanon. You shall pass and pass through from the beginning of faith, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of the leopards.” By which references is set forth the perfect and irreproachable beauty of a virgin soul, consecrated to the altars of God, not moved by perishable things amidst the haunts and dens of spiritual wild beasts but intent, by the mysteries of God, on being found worthy of the beloved, whose breasts are full of joy. *CONCERNING VIRGINS 1.7.38.*²⁶

ASK FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMBROSE: You pass through and penetrate from the beginning of faith. That is, you will pass through to fight the world and you will penetrate to Christ to triumph over the world. You have heard that he removes you from the incursions of lions and leopards, that is, of spiritual evils. You have heard that the beauty of your virtues pleases him; you have heard that he prefers the fragrance of your garments, that is, the sweet perfume of integrity, to all other perfumes. You have heard that you are an enclosed garden, full of the products of delightful fruit trees. Ask, therefore, for the Holy Spirit to breathe on you on your couch and to gather the fragrances of a holy mind and spiritual gifts. *ON VIRGINITY 12.69.*²⁷

THE VEIL OF THE SCRIPTURES REVEALED.
THEODORET OF CYR: We require prayer, in fact—

attentive and earnest prayer—for our eyes to become like doves with the gift of spiritual sight, getting beyond the veil of the letter and distinguishing clearly the hidden mysteries.²⁸ It is not possible by any other way, you see, to come to know the meaning of the divine Scripture, especially the Song of Songs, than having the very one who inspired those composers illuminate our vision by sending rays of grace and give a glimpse of the hidden sense. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.*²⁹

A MYSTIC SONG. AMBROSE: “Come hither from Lebanon. You shall pass and pass through.” This verse must be often repeated by us, that at least being called by the words of the Lord, she may follow if there be any who will not trust the words of man. We have not formed this power for ourselves, but have received it; this is the heavenly teaching of the mystic song. *CONCERNING VIRGINS 2.6.42.*³⁰

AN INVITATION RENEWED. JEROME: “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon. You shall come and pass on from the beginning of faith, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards.” Lebanon is, being interpreted, “whiteness.” Come then, fairest bride, concerning whom it is elsewhere said, “Who is she that comes up, all in white?”³¹ Pass on by way of this world, from the beginning of faith, and from Senir, which is by interpretation, “God of light,” as we read in the psalm: “Your word is a lantern unto my feet, and light unto my path,”³² and “from Hermon,” that is, “consecration,” and “flee from the lions’ dens, and the mountains of the leopards who cannot change their spots.” *AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.30.*³³

²⁵PG 69:1287. ²⁶NPNF 2 10:369*. ²⁷AOV 32. ²⁸See 2 Cor 3:6. ²⁹ECS 2:80-81. ³⁰NPNF 2 10:380. ³¹Song 8:5 LXX. ³²Ps 119:105 (118:105 LXX, Vg). ³³NPNF 2 6:369*.



THE ENCLOSED GARDEN
SONG OF SOLOMON 4:9 — 5:1

OVERVIEW: There is a “right eye of virginity” that is not related to carnal love and bodily marriage (JEROME). For it, for the bride of Christ, for the church, there is a sealed and enclosed garden with a fountain of pure water in which Scripture has power (AMBROSE, PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, CYPRIAN) and where we are sealed by the Holy Spirit after baptism (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). Here the Scriptures are distilled in honeycombs by teachers for our benefit, for the letter of Scripture resembles the honeycomb while the sense hidden inside resembles the honey (THEODORET OF CYR). This enclosed garden, which represents virginity (AMBROSE), is protected from evil thoughts

(GREGORY OF NYSSA), and from it the pleasure of intercourse is excluded (AMBROSE). The womb of the blessed Virgin typifies it (PETER CHRYSOLOGUS). It smells of the violet, is scented with the olive and is resplendent with the rose (AMBROSE). Its scent of myrrh and aloes recalls also the garden in which Christ was buried (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM), just as the myrrh and aloes indicate Christ’s redemption of the saints who preceded him (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The roots of its trees are dipped in sacred water (AMBROSE), and within it the north and south winds have deeper meanings (APONIUS). This garden symbolizes the church, even though some within it are not part of it and

others do not belong that seem to be within it (AUGUSTINE), but here Christ may be sought and found (AMBROSE). The garden is an image of paradise, permeated with frankincense, which indicates divinity (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Especially symbolic of Christ is the association of the bride's clothing with frankincense (THEODORET OF CYR). Thus, this garden is the well of mystical wisdom (AMBROSE), the living water and fountain of life, within this garden is none other than Christ (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). Likewise, the sealed fountain within the locked garden indicates the sacraments, which are available only to the initiated (THEODORET OF CYR). The garden is therefore closed to outsiders (CYPRIAN, CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), undefiled by the filth of heresy (PACIAN OF BARCELONA), and it can be likened to the pomegranate, whose protective covering is tough and bitter but whose inner fruit and juice are sweet (GREGORY OF NYSSA) and representative of love (THEODORET OF CYR). To eat and drink in this garden produces not intoxication but inebriation (JEROME, AMBROSE). This is the living water that irrigates the church (THEODORET OF CYR).

4:9 *With the Glance of an Eye*

YOU CREATED A HEART FOR US. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Truly you inflamed us with desire for you by one word of confession, which you rightly possessed, seeing with your interior eyes. For you made a confession by your necklace. These things were said to the bride by friends of the bridegroom, that is, by angelic powers. For, since the power of the visual faculty is twofold, one sees the truth and another wanders astray after vanity. Because the pure eye of the bride is opened only toward the nature of the good but the other is idle, therefore the friends give praise only to one eye, calling her "sister" on account of their kinship with respect to freedom from passion but calling her "bride" on account of her marriage to the Word. Because he says that your eye is one, therefore, insofar as it beholds one thing, likewise is your soul one, insofar as it is not

divided into many dispositions. And your necklace is perfect, given that you imposed the divine yoke upon yourself, for this necklace is surely the yoke of the Lord. For this reason, we confess that you created a heart for us by your wondrous dowry, which is to say that our souls and minds were brought to the contemplation of the light through you. For in you we contemplate the sun of justice as though in a mirror. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.9.¹

THE RIGHT EYE OF VIRGINITY. JEROME: Flee, he says, from the lions' dens, flee from the pride of devils, that when you have been consecrated to me, I may be able to say unto you, "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck." What he says is something like this—I do not reject marriage: you have a second eye, the left, which I have given to you on account of the weakness of those who cannot see the right. But I am pleased with the right eye of virginity, and if it is blinded, the whole body is in darkness. And that we might not think he had in view carnal love and bodily marriage, he at once excludes this meaning by saying, "You have ravished my heart, my bride, my sister." The name *sister* excludes all suspicion of unhallowed love. "How fair are your breasts with wine," those breasts concerning which he had said above, my beloved is mine, and I am his: "between my breasts shall he lie," that is, in the princely portion of the heart where the Word of God has its lodging. AGAINST JOVINIANUS 1.30.²

DO NOT GRIEVE THE LOSS OF BODILY EYES. JEROME: You should not grieve that you are destitute of those bodily eyes which ants, flies and creeping things have as well as do people. Rather you should rejoice that you possess that eye of which it is said in the Song of Songs, "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes." This is

¹PG 69:1287-90. ²NPNF 2 6:369*.

the eye with which God is seen and to which Moses refers when he says, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight.”³ LETTER 76.2.⁴

4:10-12 *Love Better Than Wine*

A GARDEN CLOSED AND A FOUNTAIN SEALED.

AMBROSE: Christ, then, feeds his church with these sacraments, by means of which the substance of the soul is strengthened, and seeing the continual progress of her grace, he rightly says to her, “How comely are your breasts, my sister, my spouse, how comely they are made by wine, and the smell of your garments is above all spices. A dropping honeycomb are your lips, my spouse, honey and milk are under your tongue, and the smell of your garments is as the smell of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed.” By which he signifies that the mystery ought to remain sealed up with you, that it be not violated by the deeds of an evil life, and pollution of chastity, that it be not made known to you, for whom it is not fitting, nor by garrulous talkativeness it be spread abroad among unbelievers. Your guardianship of the faith ought therefore to be good, that integrity of life and silence may endure unblemished. ON THE MYSTERIES 9.55.⁵

THE SEALED FOUNTAIN INDICATES THE SACRAMENTS. THEODORET OF CYR: He calls her “a garden,” not as though bearing a single fruit of piety and virtue, but as one producing many and varied fruits; and “locked” as though sealed off and proof against intrigue. . . . She is also “a fountain sealed.” She is not available to everyone but to those thought worthy of these streams; the Lord in the sacred Gospels also says of this fountain, “Whoever drinks of the water I shall give will not thirst forever, and instead there will be in them a spring of living water gushing up to life eternal.”⁶ Properly, then, he refers to her as “a fountain sealed” for not being available to everyone but to those thought worthy. The divine sacraments, after all, are available not to the

uninitiated but to the initiated, not to those wallowing in iniquity after initiation but to those living an exact life or purified through repentance. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.⁷

ANOINTED AFTER BAPTISM. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: [This garden] is closed to the world but opened to the heavenly bridegroom. And the fountain where we are anointed after baptism was sealed by the Holy Spirit. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.12.⁸

THE POWER OF THE SCRIPTURES. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS: The divine and conceptual Scriptures are compared with dew, with water,⁹ with milk,¹⁰ with wine,¹¹ and with honey,¹² for they have the power like water to produce life, like milk to give growth, like wine to revive, like honey both to purify and preserve. LETTER 9.4.¹³

TEACHERS DISTILL THE SCRIPTURES IN HONEYCOMBS. THEODORET OF CYR: “Your lips distill a honeycomb, bride; honey and milk are under your tongue.” Here it refers to the teachers of the church, offering religious teaching and, as it were, carrying honeycomb of bees on its lips, and distilling drops of honey, containing not only honey but also milk, and providing to each the appropriate nourishment, both suited to the infants and adapted to the mature.¹⁴ Now, honeycombs borne on the lips of the teachers are the divine Scriptures, which contain bees that make honeycombs and produce honey, the sacred prophets and apostles. These latter fly about the meadows of the Holy Spirit, as it were constructing the honeycombs of the divine Scriptures, filling them with the honey of doctrine and dispatching them to us for our benefit. The letter resembles the honeycomb, while the sense hidden in it resembles the honey; the lips

³Ex 3:3. ⁴NPNF 2 6:157*. ⁵NPNF 2 10:325*. ⁶Jn 4:14. ⁷ECS 2:84*. ⁸PG 69:1290. ⁹Deut 32:2. ¹⁰1 Cor 3:2; 1 Pet 2:2; Heb 5:12-13. ¹¹Prov 9:5; Rev 14:10, 16:19, 19:15. ¹²Ps 19:10 (18:11 LXX); 119:103 (118:103 LXX); Rev 1:9-10. ¹³PDCW 286-87*. ¹⁴See 1 Cor 3:2.

of pious teachers release the drops of this honey. Also, milk flowing from their tongue reaches those in need of milk. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.¹⁵

BRIDE’S CLOTHING OF FRANKINCENSE IS

SYMBOLIC OF CHRIST. THEODORET OF CYR:

“Fragrance of your garments like the fragrance of frankincense.” We said before that the bridegroom himself became her garment, and blessed Paul confirms it in the words, “All of you who were baptized into Christ put on Christ.”¹⁶ Now, the bridegroom is both God eternal and was born a man from the holy Virgin in the last days.

While remaining what he was, he took as well what is ours, and clothed the bride who was formerly left naked—hence his saying to her, “fragrance of your garments like the fragrance of frankincense.” She is clothed with Christ, who is both God and man. Now, “frankincense” is a symbol of the true doctrine of God, since under the norms of the old law it was offered to God.¹⁷ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.¹⁸

THE ENCLOSED GARDEN AND THE SEALED FOUNTAIN. CYPRIAN: If then this spouse of Christ—which is the church—is a garden enclosed, what is closed cannot be open to the stranger and profane. If the church is a sealed fountain, one who is outside, without access to the fountain, cannot drink from it or be sealed there. If there is but one well of living water—that which is within—then one who is without can have no life or grace from the water which only those within are allowed to use and drink.¹⁹

LETTER 69.2.²⁰

AN ENCLOSED FOUNTAIN. PACIAN OF BARCELONA: We know, too, that since it is “the well of living water”²¹ and “a fountain enclosed,” it is defiled with no filth from a heretical abyss; that it is also a garden and filled with herbs great and small alike, some of little value, some precious; and that it is also the eight souls from the ark.²²

LETTER 3.21.2.²³

ENCLOSED GARDEN REPRESENTS VIRGINITY.

AMBROSE: “A garden enclosed” [is virginity] because it is shut in on all sides by the wall of chastity. “A fountain sealed up” is virginity, for it is the fount and wellspring of modesty that keeps the seal of purity inviolate, in whose source there may shine the image of God, since the pureness of simplicity coincides with the chastity of the body. LETTER 59, TO PRIESTS.²⁴

SEALED AND PROTECTED FROM EVIL

THOUGHTS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Because a seal protects the inviolability of whatever it guards, it scares off thieves; everything not stolen remains unharmed for the master. Praise of the bride in the Song would then testify to her excellence in virtue because her mind remains safe from enemies and is guarded for her Lord in purity and tranquility. Purity seals this fountain while the radiance and transparency of the bride’s heart is unclouded by no mire of evil thoughts. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 9.²⁵

PLEASURE OF INTERCOURSE EXCLUDED.

AMBROSE: Watch out that the firmness of your mind not be bent and softened by the bodily pleasure of intercourse and thus dissolve into all her embraces and open up her fountain, that ought to have been shut and closed in by zealous intent and reasoned consideration. “You are an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed.” For once the firmness of the mind is dissolved, thoughts of bodily pleasure pour forth; they are very harmful and flare up into an unrestrained longing for grave danger. But if careful attention had been devoted to guarding the lively mind, it would have checked them. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 2.2.²⁶

FOUNTAIN OF PURE WATER REFLECTS THE IMAGE OF GOD. AMBROSE: In gardens of this

¹⁵ECS 2:83. ¹⁶Gal. 3:27. ¹⁷Lev 2:1-2, 15-16. ¹⁸ECS 2:83-84. ¹⁹Cf. Song 6:9. ²⁰LCC 5:151. ²¹See Jn 4:10-15; 7:37-39. ²²See Gen 6:18; 7:7, 13; 1 Pet 3:20. ²³FC 99:63. ²⁴FC 26:334. ²⁵177. ²⁶FC 65:12.

kind the water of the pure fountain shines, reflecting the features of the image of God, lest its streams mingled with mud from the wallowing places of spiritual wild beasts should be polluted. For this reason, too, that modesty of virgins fenced in by the wall of the Spirit is enclosed lest it should lie open to be plundered. And so as a garden inaccessible from without smells of the violet, is scented with the olive and is resplendent with the rose, that religion may increase in the vine, peace in the olive and the modesty of consecrated virginity in the rose. **CONCERNING VIRGINS** 1.9.45.²⁷

AN ALLEGORY OF THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: This account can be even better read as an allegory of the church, prophetic of what was to happen in the future. Thus the garden is the church itself, as we can see from the Canticle of Canticles; the four rivers are the four Gospels; the fruit-bearing trees are the saints, as the fruits are their works; and the tree of life is, of course, the Saint of saints, Christ. **CITY OF GOD** 13.21.²⁸

VIRGINAL CONCEPTION. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS: He so departed from the abode of the womb that the virginal door did not open, and what is sung in the Canticle of Canticles was fulfilled: “My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.” **SERMON** 145.²⁹

SOME WITHIN THE CHURCH ARE NOT PART OF IT. AUGUSTINE: Taking all these things, therefore, into consideration, I think that I am not rash in saying that there are some in the house of God after such a fashion as not to be themselves the very house of God, which is said to be built upon a rock.³⁰ [The church] is called the one dove,³¹ which is styled the beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle,³² and a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed, a well of living water, an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits. [This] house also received the keys, and the power of binding and loosing.³³ **ON BAPTISM** 7.51.99.³⁴

SOME DO NOT BELONG. AUGUSTINE: I think that we have sufficiently shown, both from the canon of Scripture and from the letters of Cyprian himself. [Thus] bad people, while by no means converted to a better mind, can have, and confer, and receive baptism, of whom it is most clear that they do not belong to the holy church of God, though they seem to be within it. [But] they are covetous, robbers, usurers, envious, evil thinkers, and the like; while [the church] is one dove,³⁵ modest and chaste, a bride without spot or wrinkle,³⁶ a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed, an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, with all similar properties that are attributed to her. **ON BAPTISM** 6.3.5.³⁷

4:13-15 *Images of the Church*

FRANKINCENSE INDICATES DIVINITY AND PARADISE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: When the Word raises his bride to such a point through her ascents, he leads her even further, saying that her garments have the scent of frankincense. Scripture testifies that Christ is clothed with this frankincense.³⁸ The end of a virtuous life is participation in God, for frankincense manifests the divinity. The soul is not always led by the Word to what is higher by means of honey and milk, but after having been compared with the scent of frankincense, the garden becomes an image of paradise. It is not loosely guarded as with our first parents, but protected from every side by recollection of the bridegroom’s command. **HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS** 9.³⁹

PROTECTED BY THE RIND OF THE POMEGRANATE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: In order that we may know the plants that the Word cultivates in believers, the Song calls the trees he planted “pomegranates.” These issue from the bride’s mouth. The

²⁷NPNF 2 10:370. ²⁸FC 14:331. ²⁹FC 17:234-35. ³⁰Mt 16:18. ³¹Cf. Song 6:9. ³²Eph 5:27. ³³Mt 16:19. ³⁴NPNF 1 4:511. ³⁵Song 6:9. ³⁶Eph 5:27. ³⁷NPNF 1 4:480*. ³⁸See Gal 3:27; Rom 13:14. ³⁹GNSS 178-79*.

pomegranate is difficult for a thief to grasp because of its thorny branches, and its fruit is surrounded and protected by a rind bitter and harsh to the taste. Once the pomegranate ripens in its own good time, and once the rind is peeled off and the inside revealed, it is sweet and appealing to the sight much like honey to the taste; its juice tastes like wine and affords much pleasure to the palate. I think that the issues from the bride's mouth [are] a "garden of pomegranates" present in the souls of those listening to her. We must heed her words and not become soft by indulgence and enjoyment of this present life. Rather we should choose a life that has become toughened by continence. Thus virtue's fruit is inaccessible to thieves and is protected by the bitter covering of self-control. Surrounded by a solemn, austere way of life, it wards off as though by spiny thorns those who approach the fruit with evil intent. *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 9.⁴⁰

LOVE IS INDICATED BY THE SEEDS AND LAYERS OF THE POMEGRANATE. THEODORET OF CYR: "Pomegranate" is to be taken figuratively as love, since countless seeds are contained together within the one skin, pressed together without squeezing or ruining one another, remaining fresh unless one of the seeds in the middle goes bad. You can also gain a different insight from the sections in the middle: we see many ranks also among the saved, one of virgins, one of ascetics, one of those drawing the yoke of marriage, and of the affluent, one of those living a life of poverty, one of slaves in love with godliness, one of masters exercising lordship lawfully. The pomegranate, too, then, has walled off compartments, as it were, separating its seeds into certain divisions. This is the reason he compares the presents of the bride to "an orchard of pomegranates." *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 4.⁴¹

THE LIVING WATER IRRIGATES THE CHURCH. THEODORET OF CYR: [This garden] also contains "a spring" and "a well of water alive and babbling from Lebanon." It contains not only the

gospel teaching that flows openly but also the "well" of the law, which is "a well of water alive" that also holds hidden streams that babble, emit a sound and flow from Lebanon. The way of life according to the law blossomed in Jerusalem, which is figuratively called Lebanon, but this well changed direction toward the Lord's bride, the church, and though hidden, it flows with a babble and irrigates the orchard of the church. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 4.⁴²

CLOSED TO OUTSIDERS. CYPRIAN: If the garden enclosed is the spouse of Christ, which is the church, a thing enclosed cannot lie open to outsiders and profane people. And if the fountain is sealed, there is no access to the fountain to anyone placed outside either to drink or to be sealed therewith. The well of living water, also, if it is one, is the same which is within; one who is situated outside cannot be vivified and sanctified by that water of which it is granted only to those who are within to have all use and drink. *LETTER* 69.2.⁴³

MYRRH AND ALOES. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: The place of his burial was a garden. . . . What is he going to say who was buried in the garden? "I gather my myrrh, and my spices";⁴⁴ and again, "Myrrh and aloes with all the finest spices." These were the tokens of his burial, and in the Gospels it is said, "The women came to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared,"⁴⁵ and "there also came Nicodemus, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes."⁴⁶ *CATECHETICAL LECTURES* 14.II.⁴⁷

MYRRH AND ALOES INDICATE REDEMPTION OF THE SAINTS WHO PRECEDED CHRIST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Virtues are signified by the perfumes and the trees of Lebanon are the prophets. Myrrh and aloes, finally, demonstrate that the buried Christ communed with the saints who preceded him, for, descending to hades, he

⁴⁰GNSS 179-80*. ⁴¹ECS 2:84-85. ⁴²ECS 2:85-86*. ⁴³FC 51:245.

⁴⁴Song 5:1. ⁴⁵Lk 24:1. ⁴⁶Jn 19:39. ⁴⁷FC 64:38-39.

led them out. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 4.15.⁴⁸

THE WELL OF MYSTICAL WISDOM. AMBROSE: We find the well in the mystical sense in the Canticle of Canticles, where the Scripture says, “the fountain of gardens, the well of living water which runs with a strong stream from Lebanon.” Indeed if you pursue the depth of the mysteries, the well appears to you to be mystical wisdom set in the deep, as it were. But if you wish to drink the abundance of love, which is greater and richer than faith and hope, then you have your fountain. For love abounds, so that you can drink it in close at hand and water your garden with its abundance, so that the latter overflows with spiritual fruits. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 4.26.⁴⁹

CHRIST IS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Now who is the “fountain sealed,” or who is signified by the “wellspring of living water”? It is the Savior himself, of whom it is written: “For with you is the fountain of life.”⁵⁰ CATECHETICAL LECTURES 14.5.⁵¹

4:16 *A Garden Pleasing to Christ*

TREES WHOSE ROOTS ARE DIPPED IN SACRED WATER. AMBROSE: For this reason, too, the church, guarding the depth of the heavenly mysteries, repels the furious storms of wind, and calls to it the sweetness of the grace of spring, and knowing that its garden cannot displease Christ, invites the bridegroom, saying, “Arise, O north wind, and come, you south; blow upon my garden, and let my ointments flow down. Let my brother come down to his garden and eat the fruit of his trees.” For it has good trees and fruitful, which have dipped their roots in the water of the sacred spring, and with fresh growth have shot forth into good fruits, so as now not to be cut with the axe of the prophet, but to abound with the fruitfulness of the gospel. ON THE MYSTERIES 9.56.⁵²

THE CHURCH INVITES US. AMBROSE: Recog-

nize also the voice of the church inviting us when it says, “Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow through my garden and let my ointments flow forth. Let my brother come down into his garden and eat the fruit of his apple trees.” For knowing even then, O holy church, that from these also you would have fruitful works, you promised to your anointed one the fruit from such as these. It was you who first said that you were brought into the king’s chamber, loving [Christ’s] breasts above wine.⁵³ For you loved him who loved you, you sought him who nourished you, and you despised dangers for religion’s sake. ON HIS BROTHER SATYRUS 2.118.⁵⁴

THE WINDS AND THE REGIONS HAVE DEEPER MEANINGS. APOINIUS: By exalting the kingdom of the north above all kingdoms of the world, therefore, Almighty God commands what is [now] the kingdom of the Romans to arise. By inspiring prophets from the south, by revealing his Christ through a Virgin, whom the prophets of the south had celebrated as proceeding from a dense and intact body (as the prophet Habakkuk said, “God will come from the south,” that is, the Word of the Father, and “the holy one from a mountain shadow and dense,”⁵⁵ which refers to the assumed humanity), paradise begins to be redolent with fragrances of the deaths of the martyrs, precious and wonderful aromas, and to give great praise to the Lord, the King of heaven, and to all the heavenly host, as the prophet predicted: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”⁵⁶ EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 7.49.⁵⁷

SEEK CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT. AMBROSE: Having thus learned where to seek out Christ, learn now how to merit that he may be seeking you. Arouse the Holy Spirit by saying, “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, and let its fragrance be wafted abroad.

⁴⁸PG 69:1290. ⁴⁹FC 65:26**. ⁵⁰Ps 36:9 (35:10 LXX). ⁵¹FC 64:35.

⁵²NPNF 2 10:325*. ⁵³Song 4:10 LXX. ⁵⁴FC 22:252. ⁵⁵Hab 3:3.

⁵⁶Ps 115:15 (113:23 LXX). ⁵⁷CCL 19:175.

Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits." The garden of the Word is the affection of a flourishing soul, and its fruit is the produce of virtue. ON VIRGINITY 9.54.⁵⁸

5:1 *Eating and Drinking in the Garden*

THE CONCEPT IS NOT DISHONORABLE.

JEROME: "O my sister, my bride, come." Lest you associate anything base with the concept of bride, the word *sister* is adjoined to preclude any dishonorable love. Come, my sister: love is something sacred and for that reason I call you sister. My bride: I call you my bride that I may have a wife, and from you, my wife, beget sons in number, sons as many as clusters of grapes on the vine. HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 42 (PSALM 127).⁵⁹

CHRIST DINES AND DRINKS IN US.

AMBROSE: The bridegroom comes down and takes delight in the diversity of her fruit; he rejoices because he has found a stronger food and one that is sweeter, too.⁶⁰ For there is a kind of bread of the word, and a honey, one speech more ardent, another more persuasive. There is also one faith that is more hot like wine, another that is more clear like the taste of milk. Christ dines on such food in us. He drinks such drink in us; with the intoxication of this drink, he challenges us to make a departure from worse things to those that are better and best. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 5.49.⁶¹

BREAD AND HONEY AS THE FOOD OF CHRIST.

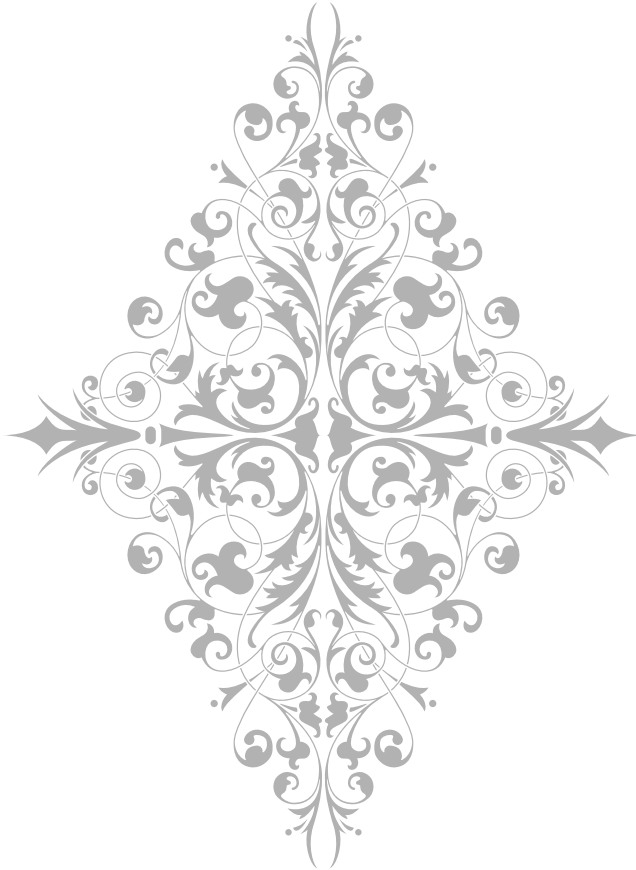
AMBROSE: "I have eaten my bread with my honey." This solid is gathered from the flowers of various virtues by the cooperative work of those bees that proclaim wisdom. Holy church puts it in honeycombs so that it may be the food of Christ. ON VIRGINITY 16.98.⁶²

NOT THE WINE OF THE FLESH.

JEROME: "Come, brethren, drink deeply of love." Wine to cheer the heart of people. The wine of the flesh does not cheer the heart of humankind but overpowers it and produces madness; it is written, in fact, that it is not for kings to drink wine.⁶³ HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 42 (PSALM 127).⁶⁴

SOBERING INEBRIATION. AMBROSE: This inebriation makes people sober. This inebriation is one of grace, not of intoxication. It leads to joy, not to befuddlement. In the banquet hall of the church there will be pleasant odors, delightful food, and drink in variety. There will be noble guests and attendants who grace that occasion. It will not be otherwise! What is there that is nobler than to have Christ at the church's banquet, as one who ministers and is ministered unto? CAIN AND ABEL 1.5.19.⁶⁵

⁵⁸AOV 27. ⁵⁹FC 48:321. ⁶⁰See 1 Cor 3:2. ⁶¹FC 65:39-40. ⁶²AOV 44. ⁶³Prov 31:4. ⁶⁴FC 48:322*. ⁶⁵FC 42:377.



A DREAM OF LOVE
SONG OF SOLOMON 5:2 — 6:3

OVERVIEW: The marriage of the Word and the soul is spiritual, not carnal (AMBROSE), and to sleep while the heart is awake has profound meaning (APONIUS). The soul speaks, for example, while it sleeps (CHRYSOSTOM). During such sleep sin is destroyed (AMBROSE), the heart is pure (GREGORY OF NYSSA), dryness is removed by heavenly dew (AMBROSE), the thoughts of the day come back as the heart watches (BASIL), the garment of corporeal life is removed (AMBROSE), the past is recalled and the future anticipated (BEDE).

A voluntary mortification of bodily passions may even be indicated by the presence of myrrh, a sign of the death of the flesh (GREGORY THE GREAT, GREGORY OF NYSSA). Still, God's Word can pierce as a sharp sword (AMBROSE), and still God can seek us (JOHN CASSIAN). If there is no answer it may well be because of God's utter transcendence, for the soul would not seek that which it could not receive (GREGORY OF NYSSA). For the bride to describe her spouse as "white and ruddy" may indicate some pairing such as white in virginity, ruddy in martyrdom (JEROME). Or it may signify white as divine, ruddy as human (THEODORET OF CYR), or of the Father's brightness but born of the Virgin (AMBROSE). It may also indicate white because of sinlessness and red because he died for us (BEDE). Or it may have still deeper significance (APONIUS, GREGORY OF NYSSA) as is the case with the locks of hair that are wavy and black (JULIAN OF ECLANUM).

The keen vision of the dove provides an image of Christ (THEODORET OF CYR, ORIGEN, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, GREGORY OF NYSSA, BEDE), as do the alabaster columns and bases of gold (AMBROSE, GREGORY OF NYSSA, CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA), the two natures being indicated by the incense and the cedar (THEODORET OF CYR). If we agree that there is an analogy from the visible world to the

incomprehensible beauty of the infinite (GREGORY OF NYSSA), then it must also be agreed that this has implications for our appearance and conduct here and now (AUGUSTINE). And this, in turn, implies that we should be loyal and faithful to the one church of Christ (LEANDER OF SEVILLE).

5:2-5 *The Heart Awake in Sleep*

HUMANITY AND DIVINITY, BOTH ASLEEP AND AWAKE. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: I sleep, he says, on the cross, insofar as he suffers death on behalf of humanity. But his heart remains awake because, as God, he plunders hades. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 5.2.¹

MARRIAGE OF THE WORD AND SOUL IS SPIRITUAL. AMBROSE: She is now awakened from sleep by him, although she was keeping watch with her heart so that she might hear his voice at once when he knocked. But while she was rising, she experienced a delay, because she could not match the swiftness of the Word. While she was opening the door, the Word passed by.² She went out at his word, sought for him through wounds, but wounds of love, and, finally and with difficulty, found him and embraced him, so that she might not lose him. . . .

Even though you are asleep, if only Christ has come to know the devotion of your soul, he comes and knocks at her door and says, "Open to me, my sister." "Sister" is well put, because the marriage of the Word and the soul is spiritual. For souls do not know covenants of wedlock or the ways of bodily union, but they are like the angels in heaven.³ "Open to me," but close to strangers. Close to the times, close to the world, do not go out of doors to

¹PG 69:1290. ²Cf. Song 5:5-6. ³Mt 22:30.

material things, do not abandon your own light and search for another's, because material light pours out a dark mist, so that the light of true glory is not seen. "Open," therefore, "to me"; do not open to the adversary or give place to the devil. "Open yourself to me," do not be confined, but expand, and I will fill you. And because, in my passage through the world, I have found very much trouble and vexation and have not readily had a place to rest, do you then open, that the Son of man may rest his head on you, for he has no rest⁴ save on one who is humble and quiet.

The soul, hearing "Open to me," and "My head is wet with dew," that is, the soul that was suddenly disturbed by the temptations of the world and was bidden to rise, and indeed is on the point of rising, as it were, speaks: fragrant with aloe and myrrh, signs of burial.⁵ ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 6.50-52.⁶

THE DEEPER MEANING OF SUCH SLEEP. APO-
NIUS: "I sleep and my heart remains awake." The divine Word, who is to be understood here under the title of the heart, never sleeps or falls asleep while hidden within the veil of the flesh, but he carries the sleeper. He explains this in a deeply mysterious way to the friends and beloveds who believe in him and whom he invites to partake of the joy of human salvation. [He does this] lest, while they see him detained in the sleep of death according to his humanity, they are deprived of the faith through which they see in him a majesty that is full and ever watchful. I am asleep to you through bodily absence, he says, but I am awake in heart by never withdrawing the presence of my deity from you. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 7.59.⁷

THE SOUL SPEAKS WHILE IT SLEEPS. CHRYSOSTOM: Both when I stayed at home and when I departed, when I walked and rested, and wherever I went, I continuously turned your love over in my mind and dreamt about it. I found pleasure in these dreams not only during the day but also at night. The very statement made by Solomon,

"I sleep but my heart is awake," was then happening to me. The necessity for sleep weighed down my eyelids, but the great power of your love chased away the sleep from the eyes of my soul; and constantly I thought that I was speaking with you in my sleep.

At night, it is natural for the soul to see in her dreams all the things that she thinks about in the day, something that I was then experiencing. Although I did not see you with the eyes of my body, I saw you with the eyes of love. In spite of my physical absence, I was close to you in disposition, and my ears always heard your vivacious voice. HOMILIES ON REPENTANCE AND ALMSGIVING 1.3-4.⁸

GOD FEASTS WHEN SIN IS DESTROYED.

AMBROSE: "I sleep, but my heart is awake." Let us learn what food and produce God feasts upon and in which ones he takes pleasure. He takes pleasure in this, if anyone dies to his sin, blots out his guilt, and destroys and buries his iniquities. The myrrh represents the burial of the dead, but sins are dead, for they cannot possess the sweetness of life. Moreover, some wounds of sinners are moistened with the ointments of Scripture and the stronger food of the word as with bread,⁹ and are treated with the sweeter word like honey. DEATH AS A GOOD 5.20.¹⁰

HEART IS PURE WHEN SENSES ARE ASLEEP.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: Once all the senses have been put to sleep and are gripped by inaction, the heart's action is pure; reason looks above while it remains undisturbed and free from the senses' movement. . . .

If a person pays attention to the senses and is drawn by pleasure in the body, he will live his life without tasting the divine joy, since the good can be overshadowed by what is inferior. For those who desire God, a good not shadowed over by anything awaits them; they realize that what

⁴Lk 9:58. ⁵See Jn 19:39. ⁶FC 65:40-41. ⁷CCL 19:180. ⁸FC 96:1-2. ⁹See Ps 104:15 (103:15 LXX, Vg). ¹⁰FC 65:86.

enters the senses must be avoided. Therefore, when the soul enjoys only the contemplation of being, it will not arise for those things that effect sensual pleasure. It puts to rest all bodily movement, and by naked, pure insight, the soul will see God in a divine watchfulness. May we be made worthy through this sleep, of which the Song has spoken, to keep our soul vigilant. **HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 10.**¹¹

THE MOISTURE OF ETERNAL LIFE. AMBROSE: As the dew from the heavens removes the dryness of the night, so the dew of our Lord Jesus Christ descends as the moisture of eternal life into the nocturnal shadows of the world. This is the head that knows nothing of the dryness caused by the heat of this world. **ON VIRGINITY 12.70.**¹²

THE VISIONS OF SLEEP. BASIL THE GREAT: According to the counsel of the apostle, the zealous person can do all things for the glory of God, so that every act and every word and every work has in it power of praise. Whether the just person eats or drinks, he does all for the glory of God.¹³ The heart of such a one watches when he is sleeping, according to him who said in the Song of Solomon: “I sleep, and my heart watches.” For on many occasions the visions seen during sleep are images of our thoughts by day. **HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 16.1 (PSALM 33).**¹⁴

THE LORD DIVESTED HIMSELF FOR US. AMBROSE: In this night of the world the garment of corporeal life is first to be taken off as the Lord divested himself in his flesh that for you he might triumph over the dominions and powers of this world. **ON VIRGINITY 9.55.**¹⁵

MYRRH INDICATES MORTIFICATION. GREGORY THE GREAT: Myrrh indicates the death of our flesh, and so the church says of its members who are striving even to death on behalf of God: “My hands dripped with myrrh.” **FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 8 (10).**¹⁶

MYRRH IS VOLUNTARY. GREGORY OF NYSSA: Resurrection is not effected in us unless a voluntary death precedes it. Such a voluntary death is indicated by the drops of myrrh dripping from the bride’s hands, for her fingers are filled with this spice. She says that myrrh did not come into her hands from any other source—if this were so, myrrh would mean something accidental and involuntary. Rather her hands (the operative faculties of the soul) drop myrrh, meaning a voluntary mortification of her bodily passions. **HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 12.**¹⁷

A REMINDER FROM THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH. BEDE: “I sleep” because I enjoy by grace a little tranquility in this life through worshiping him. Nor clearly do I bear as much of the labor of preaching as was delivered to the primitive church. Nor am I as tossed about by conflicts of the faithless as were the innumerable crowds of the nascent church at the beginning. “My heart remains awake” because the more freedom I acquire from external incursions, the more deeply within I see that he is the Lord. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 3.5.2.**¹⁸

5:6 *He Had Gone*

AS PIERCING AS A SHARP SWORD. AMBROSE: “I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had gone.” What is this going? Simply that he has penetrated into the center of the mind as it was said to Mary, “And his sword will pierce your soul.”¹⁹ For the living Word of God, as piercing as a sharp sword, comprehends both the limits of bodily thoughts and the secret places of the heart. **ON VIRGINITY 11.67.**²⁰

IT IS GOD WHO SEEKS US. JOHN CASSIAN: The Lord seeks us, when he says: “I sought and there was no one. I called, and there was no one

¹¹NPNF 2 11:430*. ¹²AOV 33. ¹³1 Cor 10:31. ¹⁴FC 46:250. ¹⁵AOV 27. ¹⁶CS 123:59*. ¹⁷GNSS 214. ¹⁸CCL 119B:274. ¹⁹Lk 2:35. ²⁰AOV 31.

to answer.” And he himself is sought by his bride who mourns with tears: “On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loved. I sought him and did not find him. I called him, and he gave me no answer.” CONFERENCE 13.12.12.²¹

NO ANSWER BECAUSE GOD IS COMPLETELY TRANSCENDENT. GREGORY OF NYSSA: The bride says, “I sought him, but found him not.” How can the bridegroom be found when he does not reveal anything of himself? He has no color, form, quality, quantity, place, appearance, evidence, comparison or resemblance. Rather, everything we can discover always transcends our comprehension and completely escapes our search. Therefore the bride says, “I have sought him by my soul’s capacities of reflection and understanding. He completely transcended them, and he escaped my mind when it drew near to him.”

How can that which is always beyond everything we know be designated by a name? For this reason the bride understands every function of a name as a sign of the ineffable good. The significance of each word falls short and shows something inferior to the truth. . . .

The soul thus calls the Word as best it can. It cannot do so as it wishes, for the soul desires more than it is capable of. The soul does not wish what it is incapable of receiving, such as God himself, but its choice is in accord with its wish. Since the one called is unattainable, the bride says, “I called him, but he did not answer.” HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 12.²²

5:10 Radiant and Ruddy

ANALOGY FROM THE VISIBLE TO THE INVISIBLE. GREGORY OF NYSSA: All these elements constituting the bridegroom’s beauty are made known for our benefit but do not show his invisible, incomprehensible beauty. . . .

Therefore, whoever looks at the visible world and understands the wisdom that has been made manifest by the beauty of creatures can make an analogy from the visible to invisible beauty, the

fountain of beauty whose emanation established all living beings in existence. Similarly, whoever views the world of this new creation in the church sees in it him who is all in all. This person is then led by faith through what is finite and comprehensible to knowledge of the infinite. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 13.²³

WHILE IN VIRGINITY, RUDDY IN MARTYRDOM. JEROME: “My beloved is white and ruddy”: white in virginity, ruddy in martyrdom. And because he is white and ruddy, therefore it is immediately added, “His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely.”²⁴ AGAINST JOVIANUS 1.31.²⁵

WHITE AS GOD, RUDDY AS A HUMAN. THEODORET OF CYR: The bride instructs the young women who had enquired as to the features of the bridegroom, saying, “My nephew is white and ruddy,” mentioning “white” first and “ruddy” second. He was always God, but he became man as well, not by abandoning what he was or being turned into a man but by putting on a human nature. So he is “white” as God: what could be whiter than light? Now, he is the true light, according to the Gospel saying, “He was the true light, which enlightens every person coming into the world.”²⁶

He is not only “white,” however, but also “ruddy.” After all, he is not only God but also man. Now, the term *ruddy* suggests earthly; hence also in Isaiah the divine powers, on seeing him ascending from earth to heaven, pose the question, “Who is this coming from Edom, the red of his garments from Bozrah? He is charming in his vesture, overpowering in his strength.”²⁷ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 5.²⁸

BRIGHTNESS OF THE FATHER. AMBROSE: “My beloved is white and ruddy.” It is fitting, O virgin, that you should fully know him whom you love, and should recognize in him all the mystery of his

²¹ACW 57:481. ²²GNSS 220*. ²³GNSS 235. ²⁴Song 5:16.

²⁵NPNF 2 6:370. ²⁶Jn 1:9. ²⁷See Is 63:1-9. ²⁸ECS 2:90.

divine nature and the body which he has assumed. He is white fittingly, for he is the brightness of the Father; and ruddy, for he was born of a Virgin. The color of each nature shines and glows in him. CONCERNING VIRGINS 1.9.46.²⁹

WHITE BECAUSE SINLESS, RED BECAUSE HE DIED FOR US. BEDE: The beloved is white because, when he appeared in the flesh, “he committed no sin, nor was a lie found in his mouth.”³⁰ And he is red because “he washed away our sins with his blood.”³¹ He is rightly called white first, then red, because the holy one first came into the world from blood and later departed from the world through his bloody passion. COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 3.5.10.³²

BOTH COLORS HAVE DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE. APONIUS: He is white because he is the light of the world, the Sun of righteousness “who enlightens everyone entering the world,”³³ according to John the Evangelist and the preaching of the prophets. He is red because he would walk on earth in the fleshly clothing derived from the Virgin Mary, a miracle to be offered through angels by rising to heaven, as was said through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah to those who asked him, “Why is your apparel red?”³⁴ EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 8.34.³⁵

THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH. GREGORY OF NYSSA: All flesh implies birth, with marriage as the means for bringing it about. The person, however, who is not subject to a birth of flesh with respect to the mystery of religion does not submit to the actions effected by human nature or to the passions arising from the mind. He understands that the generation of the flesh belongs to all humankind. The bride says that he who partakes of flesh and blood is “white and ruddy.” However, by indicating the body’s nature by these two colors, she does not say that Christ partakes of that birth common to humankind. Rather, God assumed our human nature from the multitude of people he had begotten. From the

passage of succeeding generations, Christ alone entered this life by a new form of birth. Nature did not cooperate in this birth but served it. Therefore, the bride says that her spouse is “white and ruddy.” That is, he dwells in this present life through flesh and blood while having been begotten from virginal purity. His conception is virginal. His birth is undefiled and without pangs. His bridal chamber is the power of the Most High overshadowing the virgin like a cloud. He is a nuptial torch of the Holy Spirit’s splendor. His bed is free from passion, and his marriage is incorruptibility.

The bridegroom born under such circumstances as these is rightly called “chosen from myriads.” He was free from birth resulting from marriage, for his existence does not come from marriage. No terminology pertaining to human birth can rightly pertain to Christ’s incorruptible, painless birth because virginity and childbirth cannot apply to the bridegroom at the same time. As the Son is given to us without a father, the child is thus begotten without birth. HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 13.³⁶

5:11 *Locks of Hair*

COMPARISON WITH THE BRILLIANCE OF GOLD. JULIAN OF ECLANUM: Hair is also represented by another comparison, wherein the shape of its locks seems to mimic the brilliance of gold. “His hair is like waves of palms,” so that they would surely seem to be curly and golden. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, FRAGMENT 10.³⁷

5:12 *The Dove’s Eyes*

THE DOVES ON THE WATER INDICATE BAPTISM. THEODORET OF CYR: “His eyes like doves on pools of water,” once again here by mention of the “eyes” admiring his keen sight. Hence her say-

²⁹NPNF 2 10:370*. ³⁰1 Pet 2:22. ³¹Rev 1:5. ³²CCL 119B:283. ³³Jn 1:9. ³⁴Is 63:2. ³⁵CCL 19:194-95. ³⁶GNSS 236-37*. ³⁷CCL 88:400-401.

ing they are like doves “on pools of water” reminds us of the dove coming down on him in the Jordan.³⁸ . . . Hence the bride says, “His eyes like doves on pools of water”: his eyes are constantly upon the source of baptism, awaiting those being saved and longing for the salvation of everyone. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 5.³⁹

THE HAWK’S SHADOW SEEN BY THE DOVE.

ORIGEN: In doves, the eyes are signified. For when it says, “doves over the abundance of the waters,” it means this kind of bird when it comes to the waters. There it is accustomed to suffer the attacks of the hawk and to detect its hostile arrival in flight when it sees the shadow of its wings in the waters. And so it escapes the deceit of imminent peril by the keen vision of its eyes. For if you could thus look out for the snares of the devil and avoid them, you would offer “doves” as a sacrifice to God. *HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS* 3.8.4.⁴⁰

CHRIST IN THE IMAGE OF A DOVE. **CYRIL OF JERUSALEM:** Perhaps, as some say, it was to reveal an image that he came down in the likeness of a pure, innocent, simple dove, working with prayers for the sons he begot and for the forgiveness of sins; just as in a veiled manner it was foretold that the beauty of Christ’s eyes would be manifested in this way. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES* 17.9.⁴¹

EYES BATHED IN MILK. **GREGORY OF NYSSA:** The eyes “upon the fullness of waters” are compared with doves because of their simplicity and innocence, and the Word says they have been washed in milk. A quality of milk is that it does not reflect any image. Every other liquid is like a mirror whose smooth surface serves to reflect the image of those gazing in it. However, milk lacks such reflective capacity. This is, then, the best praise for the church’s eyes. They do not reflect deceptive, shadowy pictures of nonexistent things that are erroneous, vain or contrary to the true nature of reality. They look, rather, at being itself, and do not reflect the false visions and fantasies of life. Thus the perfect soul bathes its eyes in

milk to keep them pure. *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 13.⁴²

THE DOVE SEES THE HAWK’S SHADOW. **BEDE:** [A dove] is inclined to sit above water so that it may avoid being seized by a hawk coming, since it has seen its shadow beforehand in the water. Let us also be clean, and take care to sit attentively at the cleansing streams of the Scriptures, and, thoroughly instructed by [their] mirrors, may we be capable of distinguishing and guarding ourselves against the snares of the ancient enemy. *HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS* 1.12.⁴³

5:15 Alabaster Columns and Bases of Gold

CHRIST CLAIMS THE CHURCH AS BRIDE.

AMBROSE: Who indeed but Christ could dare to claim the church as his bride, whom he alone, and none other, has called from Libanus, saying, “Come here from Lebanon, my bride; come here from Lebanon”?⁴⁴ Or of whom else could the church have said, “His throat is sweetness, and he is altogether desirable”?⁴⁵ And seeing that we entered upon this discussion from speaking of the shoes of his feet, to whom else but the Word of God incarnate can those words apply? “His legs are pillars of marble, set upon bases of gold.” For Christ alone walks in the souls and makes his path in the minds of his saints, in which, as upon bases of gold and foundations of precious stone the heavenly Word has left his footprints ineffaceably impressed. *ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH* 3.10.74.⁴⁶

THE LEGS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF TRUTH.

GREGORY OF NYSSA: A pillar must rest on the foundation of truth. Truth is golden, and its bases are the bridegroom’s legs adorning his hands and head. The foundation may be interpreted as marble. We understand by the Song’s words that the body’s legs are marble pillars, that is, those per-

³⁸See Mt 3:16. ³⁹ECS 2:92*. ⁴⁰FC 83:67. ⁴¹FC 64:101-2. ⁴²GNSS 240. ⁴³CS 110:121*. ⁴⁴Song 4:8. ⁴⁵Song 5:16. ⁴⁶NPNF 2 10:253*.

sons who support and bear the body of the church by exemplary lives and sound words. Through them the base of our faith is firm, the course of virtue is completed, and the entire body is raised on high by our longing for God's promise. Truth and stability guide the church's body. Gold represents truth, which, according to Paul, is called the foundation of the divine edifice.⁴⁷ . . . Christ is the truth upon whom are founded the legs, or pillars of the church. *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 14.⁴⁸

THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: "His legs are pillars of marble." These are clearly foundations, for whoever builds does so upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. He aptly praises the legs after the belly, who says that marble is set upon bases of gold. Peter and John are pillars of the church, for example, who had Christ, called by a golden name, as their foundation.⁴⁹ And they are marble, for Paul also calls them a pillar,⁵⁰ surely on account of their stability and consistency, sustaining and supporting the common body of the church, moreover, with their enlightened lives and their saving doctrine. But the charity with which we love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves also supports the common body of the church, as though on pillars of marble. For whoever is perfected in these two commandments becomes a pillar and support of the church, such that the whole body of the church rests upon this double virtue, as though on legs. The golden foundation contains the unwavering and unchanged base of faith and in all things holds fast reasonably to the good. *FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 5.15.⁵¹

INCENSE AND CEDAR INDICATE THE TWO NATURES. THEODORET OF CYR: "His form is like choice incense, like cedars." Here again she makes reference to the fact of two natures, calling the divine nature "incense" since by the law incense was offered to God,⁵² and by "cedar"

referring to the human nature in its not being affected by the rottenness of sin, the cedar of all trees not going rotten. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 5.⁵³

5:16 *My Beloved and My Friend*

GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THE PURE SOUL.

AMBROSE: Such is the concern of the soul that is pure, such is what it perceives within; it discerns God and abounds in all good things. On this account, "his mouth is sweetness, and he is all delight." For God is the author of all good things and all things which are, are his. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 7.61.⁵⁴

SWEET IN SPEECH AND DESIRABLE. AUGUSTINE:

A person of God should so appear and conduct himself that there would be no one who would not desire to see him, no one who would not wish to hear him, no one who, having seen him, would not believe that he was a son of God. In his case the prophetic words would be fulfilled: "His throat is most sweet, and he is all lovely." *ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE* 9.⁵⁵

6:3 *Reciprocal Belonging*

APPLIED TO THE CHURCH. LEANDER OF SEVILLE:

So long as Christ wishes there to be one church of all nations, whoever is a stranger to the church is not considered a part of the body of Christ, even though he uses the name of Christian. That heresy which rejects the unity of the Catholic church is to him a concubine and not a wife, in that it loves Christ with an adulterous love, since Scripture says that there are actually two in one flesh, that is, Christ and the church, in which there is no third place for a harlot. "One is my friend, one is my bride, only daughter of her mother."⁵⁶ Of whom, likewise, the same church

⁴⁷1 Cor 3:11. ⁴⁸GNSS 252*. ⁴⁹See Eph 2:20. ⁵⁰See 1 Tim 3:15.

⁵¹PG 69:1290. ⁵²Lev 2:1-2, 15-16. ⁵³ECS 2:93. ⁵⁴FC 65:51. ⁵⁵FC 16:26*. ⁵⁶Song 6:9.

speaks, saying, “My lover belongs to me, and I to him.” **HOMILY ON THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.**⁵⁷

PERSONAL LOVE OF CHRIST. LEANDER OF SEVILLE: He is, indeed, your true bridegroom. He is also your brother. He is likewise your friend. He is your inheritance. He is your reward. He is God and the Lord. You have in him a bridegroom to love: “For he is fair in beauty above the sons of men.”⁵⁸ . . . He is a friend of whom you need not

doubt, for he himself says, “You are my only lover.” You have in him the inheritance that you may embrace, for he is himself the portion of your inheritance. You have in him the reward that you may recognize, for his blood is your redemption. You have in him God by whom you may be ruled, the Lord to fear and honor. **THE TRAINING OF NUNS, PREFACE.**⁵⁹

⁵⁷FC 62:234. ⁵⁸Ps 45:2 (44:3 LXX, Vg). ⁵⁹FC 62:185*.



THE BRIDEGROOM'S
INNER THOUGHTS
SONG OF SOLOMON 6:4-13

OVERVIEW: The beauty of Jerusalem is not the beauty of the perishable body, surpassing comprehension, but sometimes modesty is needed for the sake of others less gifted or fortunate (AMBROSE, THEODORET OF CYR). The thick coat of the goat does provide an image of beauty for the bride, and for this reason the Song's comparison with a flock of goats seems appropriate (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Likewise the teeth are appropriately likened to the shorn sheep, because the latter have laid aside worldly cares and, by human analogy, are cleansed by the sacrament of baptism (AUGUSTINE). Pomegranates are an appropriate comparison for the cheeks, because of the sweetness contained therein (AMBROSE). Those who are concubines already have their reward in this life (AUGUSTINE), and there is a reason why Solomon had sixty queens but eighty concubines (THEODORET OF CYR), although it must be conceded that Solomon had many wives (ORIGEN). The three orders in the church (APONIUS) must be considered in relation to its unity, symbolized by the one dove (RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA, CYPRIAN, BEDE). There is also a unity in the sense that the church's members should not be divided in their choices of the one good (GREGORY OF NYSSA). Nonetheless, it should be remembered that hawks are not the same as doves (AUGUSTINE), even though the heavenly Jerusalem is our only mother (JEROME). When speaking of the church, analogy with the sun and moon is also appropriate (AUGUSTINE, APONIUS, CASSIODORUS). The moon is to the sun as the church is to Christ, but the bride will shine like a sun (THEODORET OF CYR). Also appropriate is the analogy of the church to the garden of nutmeats inside their shells (THEODORET OF CYR, BEDE, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM) or the company of saints focused heavenwards (AMBROSE). Indeed, the peacemaker is the bride of the peaceable one (THEODORET OF CYR).

6:4 *The Beauty of Jerusalem*

NOT THE BEAUTY OF THE PERISHABLE BODY.
AMBROSE: He who was spoiled by the soldiers,

who was wounded by the spear, that he might heal us by the blood of his sacred wounds, will assuredly answer you (for he is meek and lowly of heart, and gentle in aspect): "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south, and blow upon my garden, that my spices may flow out."¹ For from all parts of the world has the perfume of holy religion increased, and the limbs of the consecrated Virgin have glowed. "You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem." So it is not the beauty of the perishable body, which will come to an end with sickness or old age, but the reputation for good deserts, subject to no accidents and never to perish, which is the beauty of virgins. CONCERNING VIRGINS 1.9.47.²

6:5 *Turn Away Your Eyes*

MODESTY FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.

AMBROSE: So he says to her, as if to one who is perfect, . . . "Turn your eyes from me," because she cannot withstand the fullness of his divinity and the splendor of the true light.

Yet we can also take "turn your eyes from me" as follows: "Although you have been perfected, I must still redeem other souls and strengthen them. For you exalt me by looking upon me, but I have descended so that I may exalt all humankind.³ Although I have risen up and possess the throne of the Father,⁴ still I will not leave you orphans⁵ bereft of a father's help, but by my presence I will strengthen you. You find this written in the gospel: 'I am with you even unto the consummation of the world.'⁶ Turn your eyes from me, therefore, because you exalt me." The more anyone strives toward the Lord, the more he exalts the Lord and is himself exalted. On this account also the psalmist says, "I will extol you, O Lord, because you have upheld me."⁷ For the holy person extols the Lord; the sinner brings him low. Therefore he wishes that she turn her eyes away. Otherwise, by contemplating her he

¹Song 4:16. ²NPNF 2 10:370*. ³See Jn 6:38-40. ⁴See Heb 8:1. ⁵See Jn 14:18. ⁶Mt 28:20. ⁷Ps 30:1 (29:1 LXX, 29:2 Vg).

may be exalted—for now he can attain to the higher regions—and may leave the other souls behind. Likewise in the gospel he showed his glory, not to all the disciples but to those who were more nearly perfect.⁸

Now imagine some teacher who desires to explain an obscure matter to his hearers. Although he is himself an accomplished speaker and well informed, nevertheless let him lower himself to the ignorance of those who do not understand, and let him use simple, rather plain, everyday speech so that he can be understood. Then whoever is more quick-witted among his hearers, and can follow easily, disparages and questions him. Looking on such a one, the teacher restrains him, so that the latter may permit him to spend time rather on those who are more humble and lowly, in order that the rest may also be able to follow. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 7.57.⁹

LIGHT THAT SURPASSES COMPREHENSION. THEODORET OF CYR: “Turn your eyes away from me because they set me all aflutter.” What he means is something like this: the beauty of your eyes, the sharpness of your vision and the clarity of your thinking have drawn me to love of you; but do not gaze at me immoderately lest I take harm from it. After all, I am inaccessible and incomprehensible, surpassing all comprehension, not only human but also angelic. Even if you wish to surpass limits and pry into what is beyond your power, you would not only find nothing but would also impair your sight and render it dull. Such is the nature of light, after all: as it illumines the eye, so it penalizes intemperance with damage. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.¹⁰

COMPARISON WITH A FLOCK OF GOATS. GREGORY OF NYSSA: A goat is honored because its thick coat provides an image of beauty for the bride. Another reason for praise is that a goat can pass over rocks with a sure foot, agilely turn on mountain peaks, courageously pass through difficult, rough places, and can go safely on the road of virtue. Some would maintain that this animal

is suitable for the comparison with the bride because Moses the lawgiver uses it for many of the sacred functions of the law.¹¹ HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS 15.¹²

6:6 *Teeth Again*

THE TEETH OF THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: He praises these sheep also in the Song of Solomon,¹³ speaking of some perfect ones as the teeth of his spouse the holy church. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 95.9.¹⁴

TEETH LIKE TO SHORN SHEEP. AUGUSTINE: Separated from the world, to which they were once conformed, they pass over into the members of the church. And rightly therefore are they, through whom such things are done, called teeth like to shorn sheep;¹⁵ for they have laid aside the burdens of earthly cares, and coming up from the bath, from the washing away of the filth of the world by the sacrament of baptism, every one bears twins. For they fulfill the two commandments, of which it is said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”:¹⁶ loving God with all their heart, and with all their soul and with all their mind, and their neighbor as themselves. EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 3.7.¹⁷

6:7 *The Cheeks of the Church*

CHEEKS LIKE THE HALVES OF A POMEGRANATE. AMBROSE: What are the cheeks of the church of which the Scripture elsewhere says, “Your cheeks are as the bark of pomegranates”? They are the cheeks on which modesty is accustomed to shine, beauty to sparkle, on which there is either the flower of youth or the distinguished mark of perfect age. CONSOLATION ON THE DEATH OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN 6.¹⁸

⁸See Mt 17:1-8. ⁹FC 65:47-48*. ¹⁰ECS 2:96*. ¹¹Lev 4:23, 9:3. ¹²GNSS 269*. ¹³Song 4:2. ¹⁴NPNF 1 8:469*. ¹⁵Song 4:2. ¹⁶Mt 22:40. ¹⁷NPNF 1 8:6. ¹⁸FC 22:268.

6:8 *Queens and Concubines*

THE LATTER HAVE THEIR REWARD. AUGUSTINE: The word *queens* refers to the souls that rule in the realm of the intelligible and spiritual. The word *concubines* [refers] to the souls that receive an earthly reward, concerning whom it is said, "They have received their reward."¹⁹ ON EIGHTY-THREE VARIED QUESTIONS 55.²⁰

**WHY SIXTY QUEENS BUT EIGHTY CONCU-
BINES.** THEODORET OF CYR: Let us examine why on earth he mentioned "sixty queens" but "eighty concubines." The number sixty contains six tens, and while the ten signifies perfection, the six represents the number of the world's creation: in six days the God of all formed the whole creation. Accordingly, by "sixty queens" he referred to the souls in this world who were made perfect in virtue and who longed for the kingdom. The bride lives a way of life above this world, she is outside it, flies beyond it, is totally the bridegroom's and has him constantly in mind, whereas these latter souls live in this world and practice the perfection of virtue to the extent possible while longing to attain the kingdom. But it is through fear that they obey the laws, and so they were called "eighty." The divine Scripture, remember, speaks of the time of judgment as the eighth. In describing judgment in the Psalms, blessed David used the title "On the eighth" and began this way, "Lord, do not censure me in your anger, nor chastise me in your wrath," and shortly after, "Because in death there is no one to remember you, in hades who will confess you?"²¹ Thus [he brings] out that at the time of judgment no place for repentance will be given to those who have sinned and have not had a change of heart. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.²²

SOME PATRIARCHS HAD MANY WIVES. ORIGEN: Scripture recounts that some of the patriarchs had many wives at the same time; others took other wives when previous wives had died.

The purpose of this is to indicate figuratively that some can exercise many virtues at the same time; others cannot begin those which follow before they have brought the former virtues to perfection. Accordingly, Solomon is reported to have had many wives at the same time. HOMILIES ON GENESIS II.2.²³

THREE ORDERS IN THE CHURCH. APONIUS: In the present verse, therefore, three orders of merit are indicated to be in the church according to the following enigma. First, clearly, there are teachers, living an immaculate life. Second, there are the teachable, who imitate the lives of their teachers and burn with great desire to understand the content of the teaching and to distinguish sound doctrine from unsound doctrine. But the third order is that of maidens,²⁴ for whom only belief in the one God helps toward salvation, who are not yet worthy to be joined to the sacred number. Although all of them may have the Word of the Father as King, he who was with the Father in the beginning and always remains God in the Father, the dignity of merit nevertheless escapes them. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 9.21.²⁵

6:9 *The Perfection of the Dove*

ONE CHURCH IS CREDAL BELIEF. RUFINUS OF AQUILEIA: Of this church which keeps the faith of Christ entire, hear what the Holy Spirit says in the Canticles, "My dove is one; the perfect one of her mother is one." He then who receives this faith in the church let him not turn aside in the council of vanity, and let him not enter in with those who practice iniquity. COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLES' CREED 39.²⁶

ONE CHURCH IS INDICATED BY ONE DOVE. CYPRIAN: This one church is also intended in the Song of Songs, when the Holy Spirit says, in the

¹⁹Mt 6:2. ²⁰FC 70:97. ²¹Ps 6:1, 5. ²²ECS 2:98. ²³FC 71:171. ²⁴Latin *adulescentularum*. ²⁵CCL 19:223. ²⁶NPNF 2 3:558.

person of the Lord: "My dove, my perfect one, is but one; she is the only one of her mother, the choice one of her that bare her." Can one who does not keep this unity of the church believe that he keeps the faith? Can one who resists and struggles against the church be sure that he is in the church? For the blessed apostle Paul gives the same teaching and declares the same mystery of unity when he says, "There is one body and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God."²⁷ **THE UNITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH** 4.²⁸

ONE IN THE CHOICE OF THAT WHICH IS

GOOD. GREGORY OF NYSSA: "My dove, my perfect one, is one." The Lord's words in the gospel explain this more clearly . . . that in the diversity of their lives' activities, they should not be divided in their choices of the good. Rather, they should all be one,²⁹ united into a single good through the unity of the Holy Spirit. . . . All will look to the same goal, and every evil will be destroyed. God will be all in all, and all persons will be united together in fellowship of the Good, Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. **HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS** 15.³⁰

HAWKS ARE NOT THE SAME AS DOVES.

AUGUSTINE: "For as regards the fact that to preserve the figure of unity the Lord gave the power to Peter that whatsoever he should loose on earth should be loosed,"³¹ it is clear that that unity is also described as one dove without fault. Can it be said, then, that to this same dove belong all those greedy ones, whose existence in the same Catholic church Cyprian himself so grievously bewailed? For birds of prey, I believe, cannot be called doves, but rather hawks. How then did they baptize those who used to plunder estates by treacherous deceit and increase their profits by compound usury, if baptism is only given by that indivisible and chaste and perfect dove, that unity which can only be understood as existing among the good? Is it possible that, by the prayers of the saints who are spiri-

tual within the church, as though by the frequent lamentations of the dove, a great sacrament is dispensed, with a secret administration of the mercy of God? [Thus] their sins also are loosed who are baptized, not by the dove but by the hawk, if they come to that sacrament in the peace of Catholic unity. **ON BAPTISM** 3.17.22.³²

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM. JEROME: "My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her." Now the mother of whom this is said is the heavenly Jerusalem.³³ **LETTER** 22.24.³⁴

NATURE OF THE CHURCH'S UNITY. BEDE: "My dove, my perfect one, is one." [The church] is one because it does not accept a schismatic division. It is one because it is not a collection of various parties, some before the law, some under the law, some under grace, some of the circumcision, and others of the uncircumcised. But just as "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of everyone,"³⁵ so also is there one Catholic multitude of all the elect throughout every place and every era of the world, subjected to one God and Father. This is why Luke teaches that [the church] should be called Catholic. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS** 4.6.8.³⁶

6:10 Fair as the Moon, Bright as the Sun

APPLIED TO THE CHURCH. AUGUSTINE: The church is the sun and the moon and the stars, to which it was said, "Fair as the moon, bright as the sun." By it our Joseph is adored in this world as in Egypt, when he is raised from humble to high estate. **LETTER** 199.39.³⁷

THE MOON IS TO THE SUN AS THE CHURCH IS TO CHRIST.

THEODORET OF CYR: "As beautiful

²⁷Eph 4:4-6. ²⁸LCC 5:126. ²⁹Jn 17:22. ³⁰275-76*. ³¹Mt 16:19.

³²NPNF 1 4:443. ³³Gal 4:26. ³⁴NPNF 2 6:32. ³⁵Eph 4:5-6. ³⁶CCL 119B:309. ³⁷FC 30:387.

as the special moon.” The experts in these matters say the moon gets its light from the sun’s rays and gets partial light when a small part of it faces the sun. When it is directly opposite and is in full view of the sun, it is completely lit up as though reflecting its face like a kind of mirror and leaving no part of its bulk unlit. The church of Christ likewise, therefore, the congregation of the souls made perfect in virtue, “with unveiled face seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror,” in the words of blessed Paul, “is being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, as a work of the Lord, the Spirit.”³⁸ And it becomes so completely luminous as to resemble a moon, and a “special moon,” that is, full moon. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.³⁹

BUT THE BRIDE WILL ALSO SHINE LIKE A SUN. THEODORET OF CYR: The bride, however, is not only “like a special moon,” but also she will shine in the future life “like a sun,” astounding all with its brightness. They will marvel not only at her light but also at her orderliness. There is nothing disordered about the Lord’s bride, nothing undetermined; she gives practical directions like a kind of plumb line, and regulates her own life by use of norm and rule. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.⁴⁰

THE MOON AND THE SUN. APONIUS: By clinging continually to God the Word, she is made wholly on fire, like a burning coal.⁴¹ Also like a burning coal among a number of dead coals, when joined to the others, she ignites them all. Thus, in the midst of the souls of the dead [destined] for eternal life, she alone, the singular chosen one, vivifies all souls who believe in her, makes them like herself, and draws them to her beauty. Nevertheless, uniquely splendid like the moon, perfect in heaven among the stars, she in their midst is proven to glow with everlasting beauty more than all others. Chosen like the sun in paternal majesty among all the powers of the heavenly hosts, she is proclaimed as one to be admired by all, as

the following verse teaches: “The maidens saw her and called her most blessed; queens and concubines also praised her.” EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 9.30.⁴²

A PYRAMID FULL OF HEAVENLY CORN. CASSIODORUS: You are properly compared to this figure since you raise up your precious head from all the nations, and you conduct the souls of the just, like exceptional lights to the kingdom above. You are a pyramid filled with heavenly corn, the blessed gathering of saints from many nations, a bright assembly of clear minds, an indestructible building made of living stones, the eternal happiness of all the blessed, brighter than the sun, whiter than snow, without stain, without wrinkle. It is written about you in Song of Songs: “Who is she who comes forth, rising like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, as exceptional as the sun, terrible as an army arrayed for battle?” EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS, PREFACE 17.⁴³

6:11 *Going to the Nut Garden*

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD. THEODORET OF CYR: By “nut plantation” they refer to the present life, which is harsh, troublesome and laborious but contains hidden in itself the fruit of virtue. The fruit of the nut has a bitter skin on the outside, the second one is tough and resistant, and the edible part is hidden as though deposited in a kind of inner chamber and is not extracted without effort. Such also is the present life, containing as it does harsh pain and grief, containing hardship and effort which, however, are not fruitless, not useless, holding the fruit hidden within them. Hence blessed Paul also says, “Our life is hidden with Christ in God; but when Christ our life is revealed, then we too shall live in him.”⁴⁴ COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 6.⁴⁵

³⁸2 Cor 3:18. ³⁹ECS 2:100. ⁴⁰ECS 2:101. ⁴¹See Rom 12:20; Ezek 1:27; Is 44:19. ⁴²CCL 19:226. ⁴³Cetedoc 0900, 97.praef.17.33. ⁴⁴Col 3:3-4.

⁴⁵ECS 2:102.

A FIGURE OF THE PRESENT CHURCH. BEDE: Solomon bears witness that a nut is customarily employed as a figure of the present church when in the Song of Songs he speaks in the character of the faithful teachers. . . . For just as a nut has sweet fruit on the inside but does not show it on the outside unless its hard shell can be broken, so in the same way do the righteous maintain the sweetness of spiritual grace in their inmost heart while they are in this present life. Its magnitude cannot be perceived by their neighbors until the time when the bodily dwelling is dissolved and the souls freed from it can gaze upon one another in heavenly light, and they individually shine so much with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and they are loved so much by one another, that absolutely nothing remains hidden. *ON THE TABERNACLE* 1.8.⁴⁶

A TYPE OF THE PASSION. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: You wish to know the place? He says in the Canticles, "I came down to the nut garden"; for it was a garden where he was crucified. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES* 14.5.⁴⁷

6:13 *Returning*

THE BRIDE OF THE PEACEABLE ONE. THEODORET OF CYR: Just as the work calls Solomon—our Lord, in other words—"peaceable," so too it calls his bride "peacemaker" for

attaining peace from him and being freed from the former conflict. The bridegroom's attendants, then, on seeing her driven from the chariot and under attack, comfort her in the words, "Return," peacemaker, "return, return, and we shall look upon you." That is to say, "Do not be afraid of your pursuers but hold fast the doctrine, proclaim the message of the doctrine, have no fear of the chariot, do not be afraid of war, called peacemaker as you are. In fact, if you persist in your preaching, we shall see your kingdom." *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS* 6.⁴⁸

HASTEN TO THE COMPANY OF SAINTS ON HIGH. AMBROSE: Turn to us, O peaceful soul, that you may show your glory to your sisters and that they may begin to console themselves with the security of your repose and happiness. Turn to us once only, that we may see you, and turn again and hasten with all speed to that great Jerusalem, the city of the saints. Or indeed, since Christ says this to the pious soul, he commands it to turn for a little while, that its glory and its future repose with the saints may be manifest to us, and then he commands it to hasten to the company of the saints on high. *CONSOLATION ON THE DEATH OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN* 65.⁴⁹

⁴⁶TTH 18:35. ⁴⁷FC 64:35. ⁴⁸ECS 2:103. ⁴⁹FC 22:292.



THE QUEENLY MAIDEN SONG OF SOLOMON 7:1-13

OVERVIEW: Not everyone will agree with the choice of virginity, even if selected voluntarily (JEROME). Peter, the prince of the apostles, gave an example of fleshly mortification (APONIUS). Even the belly and the navel have their mystical significance, when related to wisdom, just as is true of the palm tree when its stature is related to the church (AMBROSE). The turning of the beloved, however, is tantamount to the second advent or the conversion of the Jews (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The church is a rich field, fecund in diversity, and therefore the unity of marriage should also be preserved (AMBROSE).

7:1 *The Steps of Virginity*

PRAISE FOR THIS CHOICE. JEROME: The virgin bridegroom, having been praised by the virgin

bride, in turn praises the virgin bride and says to her, “How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O daughter of Aminadab,” which is, being interpreted, a people that offers itself willingly. For virginity is voluntary, and therefore the steps of the church in the beauty of chastity are praised. This is not the time for me like a commentator to explain all the mysteries of virginity from the Song of Songs. I have no doubt that the fastidious reader will turn up his nose at what has already been said. *AGAINST JOVINIANUS* 1.31.¹

THE EXAMPLE OF BLESSED PETER. APONIUS: In every way, then, [the beauty of her feet] seems to me to be understood to follow the first fruits of praise in this people who are imitators of the

¹NPNF 2 6:370.

footsteps of those who follow Christ to heaven by dying in the [steps of the] blessed prince of the apostles. Thus does this people, through its earthly works in the example of blessed Peter, by mortifying its flesh, migrate to heaven, just as it also comes into the light from the shadows of ignorance by following Christ the Head. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 10.4-5.²

7:2 *The Belly and the Navel*

MYSTIC SIGNIFICANCE. AMBROSE: Small, too, are the navel and belly of the soul that ascends to Christ. Therefore it is praised in the words of the spouse, who says, "Your navel is like a round bowl never wanting wine, your belly is like a heap of tiny wheat among lilies." It is polished by all kinds of learning, and it is a spiritual draught never failing in fullness and in the knowledge of heavenly secrets. The belly of the soul is mystic, like the navel, and it receives not only strong food to strengthen hearts but sweet and fragrant food by which it is delighted. Perhaps Moses meant that this sacrilege³ needs to be atoned for by many pious prayers. LETTER 77, TO LAYMEN.⁴

THE NAVEL OF THE SOUL. AMBROSE: "Your navel is like a round bowl, not wanting tempered wine. Your belly is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies. Your neck is like a tower of ivory. Your eyes are a pool in Heshbon." The good navel of the soul, capable of receiving all virtues, is like a bowl, fashioned by the author of faith himself.⁵ For in a bowl wisdom has mixed her wine, saying, "Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you."⁶ This navel, therefore, fashioned with all the beauty of the virtues, does not lack mixed wine. His belly also was filled not only with the wheaten food of justice, as it were, but also with that of grace, and it bloomed with sweetness like a lily.⁷ CONSOLATION ON THE DEATH OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN 69.⁸

7:5 *The Crown of the Head*

ORDERLY TEACHING COLORED WITH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. THEODORET OF CYR: "The hair of your head like purple, a king caught in its tresses." Your hair was previously loose and hence was compared with the flocks of goats emerging in Gilead, whereas now it is caught up, and not only caught up but also wondrously dyed, resembling a king clad in purple and hastening in all directions. By the comparison of her fastened hair to royal purple he refers to the teaching proposed in orderly fashion and colored with the blood of Christ. A king clad in purple is not so resplendent as the teacher of religion who carefully composes the proclamation of the knowledge of God and offers it to the devotees of truth. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 7.⁹

7:6-10 *The Church Likened to a Palm Tree*

RENUNCIATION OF THINGS TEMPORAL.

AMBROSE: The church is beautiful in [those recently baptized]. So that God the Word says to her: "You are all fair, my love, and there is no blemish in you," for guilt has been washed away. "Come here from Lebanon, my spouse, come here from Lebanon, from the beginning of faith you will pass through and pass on,"¹⁰ because, renouncing the world, she passed through things temporal and passed on to Christ. And again, God the Word says to her, "How beautiful and sweet are you made, O love, in your delights! Your stature is become like that of a palm tree, and your breasts like bunches of grapes." ON THE MYSTERIES 7.39.¹¹

THE SECOND ADVENT. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: I will offer my beloved praise, and his turning¹² will be toward me. What it calls his turning is either the second advent or the conversion of the Jewish people. FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 7.10.¹³

²CCL 19:239. ³The making and adoring of the golden calf. ⁴FC 26:434*. ⁵Heb 12:2. ⁶Prov 9:5. ⁷See Is 35:1. ⁸FC 22:293-94*. ⁹ECS 2:108. ¹⁰Cf. Song 4:7-8. ¹¹NPNF 2 10:322*. ¹²"Turning" in the sense of "desire." ¹³PG 69:1291.

EMBLEMS OF VICTORY. AMBROSE: The laurel and palm are emblems of victory. The heads of victors are crowned with laurel; the palm adorns the victor's hand. Hence the church, too, says, "I said: I will go up into the palm tree, I will take hold of the heights thereof." Seeing the sublimity of the Word and hoping to be able to ascend to its height and to the summit of knowledge, he says, "I will go up into the palm tree." So he may abandon all things that are low and strive after things that are higher, to the prize of Christ, in order that he may pluck its fruit and taste it, for sweet is the fruit of virtue. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 3.13-53.¹⁴

FLOURISH LIKE THE PALM TREE. AMBROSE: Imitate the palm, so that it may be said also to you, "Your stature is like a palm tree." Preserve the verdure of your childhood and of that natural innocence of youth which you have received from the beginning, and may you possess the fruits, prepared in due time, of what was planted along the course of the waters—and may there be no fall to your leaf! . . .

Remain, therefore, planted in the house of the Lord so as to flourish like a palm in his halls, whence the grace of the church may ascend for you and "the odor of your mouth may be like apples and your throat like the best wine," so that you may be inebriated in Christ.¹⁵ SIX DAYS OF CREATION 3.17.71.¹⁶

7:12-13 *The Church Fecund in Rich Diversity*

A FIELD WITH MANY FRUITS. AMBROSE: Actually, what has always been condemned by the church is the perverse opinion of those who dare to dissolve the unity of marriage. Listen again to the voice of holy church: "Come, my brother, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded." A field may produce many fruits, but the best field is one richly productive of both fruits and flowers. The church is a field of this sort, fecund in diversity. ON VIRGINITY 6.34.¹⁷

HIDDEN MYSTERIES, MADE NEW IN CHRIST. AMBROSE: The old things according to the flesh have passed away; all have become new. If the scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven knows not these things, he is like the householder who brings from his treasure new things and old, not old without new, or new without old.¹⁸ So the church says, "The new and the old I have kept for you." The old have passed away, that is, the hidden mysteries of the law have all been made new in Christ. LETTER 73, TO LAYMEN.¹⁹

¹⁴FC 42:108. ¹⁵Cf. Song 5:1. ¹⁶FC 42:121-22. ¹⁷AOV 19. ¹⁸See Mt 13:52. ¹⁹FC 26:418-19.



STILL YEARNING
FOR LOVE
SONG OF SOLOMON 8:1-14

OVERVIEW: The church is as a family in its baptismal unity (AMBROSE, JULIAN OF ECLANUM), and “mother’s house” is where divine teaching is received (THEODORET OF CYR). From a Christian perspective, the salvation of humankind in the incarnation of Jesus Christ was precisely what the figures in the Song of Solomon had been longing for, and now it has come (ATHANASIUS, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM). All this, in turn, is reflected in the joy and brightness of the celebration of holy bap-

tism, all covered in white (AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE, THEODORET OF CYR, JEROME), and the love that is thereby proclaimed is even stronger than death (AMBROSE, THEODORET OF CYR, FRUCTUOSUS OF BRAGA, GREGORY THE GREAT, AUGUSTINE, JOHN THE SOLITARY). This is why the examples of the myrrh-bearing women and even of the “little sister who had no breasts” find their deepest meaning in the redemption that has been won by Christ (CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, APONIUS, BEDE) and

can even be seen as a remedy for spiritual immaturity (THEODORET OF CYR). The bridegroom, therefore, is urged to take flight, and to flee heavenward after the work of redemption is complete (AMBROSE, APONIUS, BEDE).

8:1-4 *Like a Brother to Me*

TO ATTAIN THE INNERMOST MYSTERIES.

AMBROSE: The church answers unto [God the Word], “Who will give you to me, my brother, you who did suck the breasts of my mother? If I find you outside I will kiss you, and indeed they will not despise me. I will take you, and bring you into the house of my mother; and into the secret chamber of her who conceived me. You shall teach me.” You see how, delighted with the gifts of grace, she longs to attain to the innermost mysteries and to consecrate all her affections to Christ. She still seeks, she still stirs up his love, and asks of the daughters of Jerusalem to stir it up for her, and desires that by their beauty, which is that of faithful souls, her spouse may be incited to ever richer love for her. ON THE MYSTERIES 7.40.¹

THE BREAST IS BAPTISM. AMBROSE: What are the breasts of the church except the sacrament of baptism? And well does he say “sucking,” as if the baptized were seeking him as a draught of snowy milk. “Finding you without,” he says, “I shall kiss you,” that is, finding you outside the body, I embrace you with the kiss of mystical peace. No one shall despise you; no one shall shut you out. I will introduce you into the inner sanctuary and hidden places of Mother Church, and into all the secrets of mystery, so that you may drink the cup of spiritual grace. CONSOLATION ON THE DEATH OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN 75.²

IN OUR MIDST, EVEN THOUGH UNSEEN.

AMBROSE: Therefore she interceded so that he would go forth from the bosom of the Father, go out of doors like the bridegroom coming out from his chamber, and run his course.³ She interceded, too, that he would win those who were weak,

would not linger on the distant throne of the Father and in that light, for those without strength cannot follow there. Instead he would be taken up and led into the dwelling of the bride and her chamber, that he would be out of doors for her but within for us, would be in our midst, even though unseen by us.⁴ ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 8.69.⁵

TO OPEN THE DOOR TO GOD’S WORD.

AMBROSE: “I will take you up and lead you in.” It is right to take up the Word of God and lead him in, because he knocks at the soul, that the door may be opened to him, and, unless he finds the door opened to him, he does not enter. But if anyone opens the door, he enters and dines.⁶ The bride takes up the Word in such a way that she is taught in the taking up. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 8.71.⁷

DO NOT SEPARATE LITTLE ONES FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

AMBROSE: Neither hold back the maidens of whom it is written, “Thus have the maidens loved you, and they have brought you into the house of their mother.” You may not, then, separate the little ones from the love of Christ whom they proclaimed with prophetic exaltation even from their mother’s womb. ON VIRGINITY 7.41.⁸

INFANCY IN THE MOTHER’S HOUSE.

JULIAN OF ECLANUM: Here are shown many infancies in her, from which we ought to learn. First, it was the Creator of everything that is born from the union of masculine and feminine who fabricated a body from a virgin without the assistance of a man. Next, no sin is congenital to humankind, since it comes forth surrounded by the truth of the flesh and free from stain. Finally, it is impious to ascribe our origin to the works of the devil, since it rejoices that the true God is not only its founder but also its inhabitant. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS, FRAGMENT II.⁹

¹NPNF 2 10:322*. ²FC 22:296. ³Ps 19:5 (18:6 LXX, Vg). ⁴See Jn 1:26. ⁵FC 65:57. ⁶Rev 3:20. ⁷FC 65:57. ⁸AOV 22. ⁹CCL 88:401.

DIVINE TEACHING IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE.

THEODORET OF CYR: "I shall lead you into my mother's house and into the chamber of the one who conceived me." Now, what is the house of the all-holy Spirit (of whom the bride was born, after all) if not the divine temple, which resembles the Jerusalem on high, where they enter to speak with the bridegroom, having received the status of bride? And there, she says, "I shall give you some spiced wine to drink and some juice from my pomegranates," by "spiced wine" referring to the teaching redolent of divine grace, as it were spiced and proving to be fragrant. By "juice of pomegranates" she refers to the benefit deriving from the fruits of love. COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8.¹⁰

A TYPE OF THE PASSION OF CHRIST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: Again, referring to the wine mingled with myrrh, the Canticle says, "I will give you a cup of spiced wine." SERMON ON THE PARALYTIC II.¹¹

GOD APPOINTS THE TIMES AND SEASONS.

ATHANASIUS: Thus the God of all, after the manner of wise Solomon,¹² distributes everything in time and season, to the end that, at the right time, the salvation of humankind should be everywhere spread abroad. In this way, "the Wisdom of God,"¹³ our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . "passed into holy souls, making them friends of God, and prophets."¹⁴ Although very many were praying for his coming and saying, "O that the salvation of God would come out of Sion,"¹⁵ the spouse also, as it is written in the Song of Songs, was praying and saying, "O that you were like a brother to me, that nursed at my mother's breasts." And the meaning of that prayer is, "O that you were like humanity and would take on human nature for our sake." After all, it was God who set up times and seasons, and he knows our needs better than we do. Because he loves us, he exhorts us to do right things at right times so that we may be healed. Thus, when the appropriate time had come, the Father sent the Son, just as he

had promised. FESTAL LETTERS I.I.¹⁶

8:5 Coming from the Wilderness

LEANING ON CHRIST. AMBROSE: She ascends leaning on the Word of God. For those who are more perfect recline upon Christ, just as John also was reclining at Jesus' bosom.¹⁷ So then she either rested in Christ or reclined upon him or even—since I am speaking of a marriage—as if already given into the power of Christ, she was led to the bridal couch by the bridegroom. ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 8.72.¹⁸

WHITENESS A SIGN OF RENEWAL. AUGUSTINE: Therefore Christ has given a new commandment to us: that we love one another as he also has loved us. This love renews us that we may be new, heirs of the New Testament, singers of a new song. This love renewed even then those just persons of ancient times, then the patriarchs and the prophets, as it did the blessed apostles later. Even now it also renews the nations, and from the whole human race, which is scattered over the whole world, it makes and gathers a new people, the body of the new spouse, the bride of the Son of God, the Only Begotten about whom it is said in the Song of Songs, "Who is this who comes up in white?"¹⁹ In white, of course, because renewed. By what, except by the new commandment? TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 65.I.2.²⁰

FORMERLY BLACK BUT NOW COVERED IN

WHITE. THEODORET OF CYR: "Who is this coming up all covered in white, leaning on her nephew?" They do not say "white" but "all covered in white," being black, remember. While the bride said of the bridegroom, "My nephew is white,"²¹ and did not say "covered in white," being such by nature, she on the contrary was

¹⁰ECS 2:113-14. ¹¹FC 64:216. ¹²Eccles 3:7. ¹³1 Cor 1:24. ¹⁴Wis 7:27. ¹⁵Ps 14:7 (13:7 LXX, Vg). ¹⁶NPNF 2 4:506**. ¹⁷Cf. Jn 13:23. ¹⁸FC 65:58. ¹⁹"White" LXX. Those recently baptized were to wear white garments. ²⁰FC 90:50-51**. ²¹Song 5:10.

covered in black (the sun looked on her, remember)²² and is now covered in white and shares the bridegroom's whiteness. And just as being the light he both made her light and called her so, and being holy he made her holy,²³ and becoming resurrection he accorded her resurrection, so he also gave her a share in his own peculiar whiteness. Hence on seeing her, the young women say, "Who is this coming up all covered in white, leaning on her nephew?" Guided by him and as it were led hand in hand, she makes her ascent into heaven and her departure to her beloved through her firm belief in him. **COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8.**²⁴

RESPLENDENT IN FAITH. AMBROSE: She is radiant . . . because she is resplendent in faith and in works. **THE PRAYER OF JOB AND DAVID 4.4.16.**²⁵

ILLUMINATED THAT YOU MAY SHINE. AUGUSTINE: Oh, bride of Christ, beautiful among women! Oh, you in white, coming up and leaning upon your beloved! For by his light you are illuminated that you may shine; by his help you are supported that you may not fall! Oh, how well it is sung to you in that Song of Songs, your wedding song, as it were, that "there is love in your delights!"²⁶ **TRACTATES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 65.3.2.**²⁷

WE OF OURSELVES ARE INADEQUATE. JEROME: O mortal, you have now been cleansed in baptism, and it is said of you, "Who is she that comes up, cleansed and leaning upon her beloved?" so that she, indeed, is cleansed, but she is not able to guard her purity, unless she is sustained by the Lord God. You, who but a moment ago were freed from your sins, how is it that you desire to be delivered by the mercy of God, if not in the way I stated, that, when we have done everything, we confess that we of ourselves are insufficient? **AGAINST THE PELAGIANS 3.15.**²⁸

8:6 A Seal on Your Heart and Arm

SO THAT YOUR FAITH AND WORKS MAY SHINE. AMBROSE: The Lord Jesus himself, invited by such eager love and by the beauty of comeliness and grace, since now no offences pollute the baptized, says to the church, "Place me as a seal upon your heart, as a signet upon your arm"; that is, you are comely, my beloved, you are all fair, nothing is lacking in you. Place me as a seal upon your heart, so that your faith may shine forth in the fullness of the sacrament. Let your works also shine and set forth the image of God in whose image you were made. Let no persecution lessen your love, which cannot be quenched by many waters nor drowned by many rivers. **ON THE MYSTERIES 7.41.**²⁹

THE LIFE OF HEAVENLY BEINGS. AMBROSE: And since you are worthy to be compared not now with humans but with heavenly beings, whose life you are living on earth, receive from the Lord the precepts you are to observe: "Set me as a signet upon your heart, and as a seal upon your arm." [Thus] clearer proofs of your prudence and actions may be set forth, in which Christ the figure of God may shine, who, equaling fully the nature of the Father, has expressed the whole which he took of the Father's Godhead. Whence also the apostle Paul says that we are sealed in the Spirit;³⁰ since we have in the Son the image of the Father, and in the Spirit the seal of the Son. Let us then, sealed by this Trinity, take more diligent heed, lest either levity of character or the deceit of any unfaithfulness unseal the pledge which we have received in our hearts. **CONCERNING VIRGINS 1.9.48.**³¹

NOW FULLY PERFECT. AMBROSE: That we may fully know that this is true you have in the Canticles to the soul, now fully perfect, what I wish the Lord Jesus may say to you, "Put me as a seal upon your arm." May peace glow in your heart, Christ

²²Song 1:6. ²³Cf. Jn 8:12; Mt 5:14; 1 Pet 1:16. ²⁴ECS 2:114. ²⁵FC 65:401. ²⁶Cf. Song 7:6. ²⁷FC 90:53. ²⁸FC 53:372-73*. ²⁹NPNF 2 10:322*. ³⁰Eph 1:13. ³¹NPNF 2 10:370-71*.

in your works, and may there be formed in you wisdom and justice and redemption. *LETTER 80, TO LAYMEN.*³²

CHRIST IS OUR SEAL OF GOD'S LOVE.

AMBROSE: Christ is the seal on the forehead, the seal in the heart—on the forehead that we may always confess him, in the heart that we may always love him, and a sign on the arm that we may always do his work. Therefore let his image shine forth in our profession of faith, let it shine forth in our love, let it shine forth in our works and deeds so that, if it is possible, all his beauty may be represented in us. Let him be our head, because “the head of man is Christ”;³³ let him be our eye, that through him we may see the Father; let him be our voice, that through him we may speak to the Father; let him be our right hand, that through him we may bring our sacrifice to God the Father. He is also our seal, which is the mark of perfection and of love, because the Father, loving the Son, set his seal on him, just as we read, “Upon him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.”³⁴

And so Christ is our love. Good is love, since it has offered itself to death for transgressions; good is love, which has forgiven sins. And so let our soul clothe itself with love,³⁵ and love of a kind that is “strong as death.” For just as death is the end of sins, so also is love, because one who loves the Lord ceases to commit sin. For “charity thinks no evil and does not rejoice over wickedness, but endures all things.”³⁶ For if one does not seek his own goods, how will he seek the goods of another? Strong, too, is that death through the bath³⁷ through which every sin is buried and every fault forgiven. *ISAAC, OR THE SOUL 8.75-76.*³⁸

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE. *THEODORET OF CYR:* Possess “ardor” as well: if you were to acquire it, you would allow no one else to have more importance in your eyes, or yourself to be apathetic, but only her to enjoy your intimacy. “Ardor is harsh,” note, and difficult to overcome,

like hades (drawing the name hades from common usage, and applying it also to death). But love is so strong because first of all it has wings, and around its wings it has a fiery flame and emits sparks. What could be more powerful than this when enkindled, especially since its fire is of the kind that is unquenchable? *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8.*³⁹

LOVE AS STERN AS DEATH. *FRUCTUOSUS OF BRAGA:* “Stern as death is love.” Love is compared with the sternness of death, for, doubtless, once it comes, it summons the mind completely away from the love of the world. Accordingly, abbots must be such that they may perfectly love God and their neighbor; they must have their eyes removed from the evil desires of this world, as Adam did in paradise before the fall. *GENERAL RULE FOR MONASTERIES 10.*⁴⁰

LOVE FOR ETERNITY. *GREGORY THE GREAT:* Just as death destroys the body, so ardent desire for eternal life cuts off the love of material things. It renders one whom it has perfectly taken hold of insensible to earthly desires which come from without. *FORTY GOSPEL HOMILIES 9 (11).*⁴¹

DEATH CANNOT BE RESISTED. *AUGUSTINE:* When death comes, it cannot be resisted. By whatever arts, whatever medicines, you meet it; the violence of death can none avoid who is born mortal; so against the violence of love can the world do nothing. For from the contrary the similitude is made of death; for as death is most violent to take away, so love is most violent to save. Through love many have died to the world, to live to God. *EXPLANATIONS OF THE PSALMS 48.12.*⁴²

LOVE OF GOD STRONGER THAN DEATH. *JOHN OF APAMEA:* Let the love of God be stronger than

³²FC 26:454. ³³1 Cor 11:3. ³⁴Jn 6:27. ³⁵Gal 3:27. ³⁶1 Cor 13:5-7.

³⁷Tit 3:5. The reference is baptism. ³⁸FC 65:59-60. ³⁹ECS 2:115.

⁴⁰FC 63:192-93. ⁴¹CS 123:63-64. ⁴²NPNF 1 8:167-68*.

death in you. If death releases you from the desire for everything, how much more appropriate is it that the love of God should release you from the desire for everything. *LETTER 45, TO HESYCHIUS*.⁴³

DEATH FOR ONE'S FRIENDS. *AUGUSTINE:* Rightly is [love] said to be "strong as death," either because no one overcomes it as no one overcomes death, or because in this life the measure of charity is unto death, as the Lord said: "Greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁴⁴ Or, rather, because as death tears the soul away from the senses of the flesh, so charity tears it away from carnal passions. *LETTER 167.II*.⁴⁵

8:7 *Love Is Stronger Than Many Waters*

NOTHING DIMINISHES LOVE. *AMBROSE:* Love ought to exist in us in such a fashion that we are not called away from Christ by any dangers. For it is written, "Much water cannot shut out love, and floods will not confine it," because the soul of the lover passes through the torrent.⁴⁶ No storm, no profound danger, no fear of death or of punishment diminishes the strength of love; in such happenings as we are tested, in them lies the happy life, even though it is deluged by many dangers. For the wise person is not broken by bodily ills nor is he disturbed by misfortunes, but he remains happy even amid troubles. Bodily adversities do not diminish the gift of the happy life or take away anything from its sweetness. For the happiness of life does not lie in bodily pleasure, but in a conscience pure of every stain of sin, and in the mind of the one who knows that the good is also the pleasurable, even though it is harsh, and that what is shameful does not give delight, even though it is sweet. *JACOB AND THE HAPPY LIFE 1.7.27*.⁴⁷

OVERCOMING SPITE WITH LOVE. *THEODORET OF CYR:* "If a man gives his whole life for love, they will utterly despise him." Those bereft and

devoid of love will despise the one giving his life for love; hence blessed Paul also said, "When reviled we bless, when persecuted we put up with it, when blasphemed we are encouraging, we have become the world's refuse, as it were, everyone's off-scouring to this day."⁴⁸ This happens, in fact, to people who are dizzy: though they cannot stand up straight, they think everything else is spinning around; similarly also people bereft of love blaspheme the devotees of love as stupid and foolish. Far from undermining love, however, this even rendered it more ardent. When reviled the apostles gave blessings, when blasphemed they were encouraging, and on becoming the world's refuse, as it were, they claimed to be everyone's off-scouring to this day. *COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8*.⁴⁹

EXAMPLE OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN. *CYRIL OF JERUSALEM:* Though weak in body the women⁵⁰ were courageous in spirit. "Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can floods drown it." He whom they sought was dead, but their hope of the resurrection was not quenched. *CATECHETICAL LECTURES 14.13*.⁵¹

8:8 *A Little Sister*

HER MEANING IN CHRIST. *APONIUS:* This sister is undoubtedly understood to be the Jewish people (a people that we said was converted to the God of heaven in the final days), who are led out of the prophesied desert before the end of the world. [They are] "ascending from the desert"⁵² of unbelief, where God is not worshiped, "leaning upon" the Word of God, "flowing with delights," known by faith in the indivisible Trinity, without which not only are there no delights, but the soul incurs danger of starvation. She is a sister because she descended from the seed of Abraham, from whom came

⁴³CS 101:92. ⁴⁴Jn 15:13. ⁴⁵FC 30:41*. ⁴⁶Ps 124:4-5 (123:4-5 LXX, Vg). ⁴⁷FC 65:137. ⁴⁸1 Cor 4:12-13. ⁴⁹ECS 2:116. ⁵⁰Mt 28:9. ⁵¹FC 64:40. ⁵²Song 8:5.

Christ according to the flesh and the church according to faith, inasmuch as Abraham would be established by God as a father to the nations.⁵³ And from these nations comes the church, which is made one body through faith in Christ, just as the soul of Christ is proven to be made one person with the Word, to whom the Word of God the Father united himself. It is the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ which is now understood to say, with pious affection for this very people, "Our sister is little and has no breasts." EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 12.29.⁵⁴

REMEDY FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURETY. THEODORET OF CYR: It is the holy authors who were celebrated in the Old Testament who see the bride's spiritual youth and the immaturity and inconspicuous condition of her breasts. In their capacity as go-betweens and marriage brokers [they] say among themselves, "The king is now on the point of taking our sister as his bride, but she is small and without breasts. She is not yet fertile, nor can she provide the milk of instruction or offer developed nourishment to the needy. So we must give thought to what is to be done. Since she is about to be related to the great king and be like a wall of his house, watching and guarding what is within, and being like a door that protects the contents, let us build as if on a wall 'silver parapets.'" That is, [the parapets are] arguments splendid for their reasoning, the Lord's sayings, after all, being "pure sayings, silver tried in the fire, tested in the earth."⁵⁵ "So . . . from her position on them she may fire at the enemy and hunt down the schemers. Let us place on her as on a door tablets made of cedar that incur no decay from sin, cedar being incorruptible." COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8.⁵⁶

NONTHELESS REDEEMED IN CHRIST. BEDE: She is the sister of the Lord our Savior and of all his church gathered from both peoples and of every saint. [This is] not only due to the assumption of her nature, whereby he was made man, but also due to the bestowal of grace

whereby he gives those who believe in him the power to become children of God, so that he who was the only Son of God by nature might become "the firstborn among many brethren" through grace.⁵⁷ COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 5.8.8.⁵⁸

8:10-11 *A Wall with Towers*

THE WALL IS THE CHURCH. AMBROSE: The wall is the church and the towers are her priests, who have full power to teach both the natural and the moral sciences. SIX DAYS OF CREATION 6.8.49.⁵⁹

THE VINEYARD IS THE CHURCH. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: The vineyard which, it says, was given to the spiritual Solomon is surely the church. And we have already said that Baalhamon means "in believers." For who believed, apart from those who accepted his commandments? FRAGMENTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS 8.II.⁶⁰

8:14 *Away, My Beloved*

TO FLEE ABOVE THE WORLD. AMBROSE: It urges that the bridegroom flee, because already, although it is of earth, it can follow him in his flight. It says this so that it may be like the young deer that escapes the nets; for it desires also to flee and to fly away above the world. DEATH AS A GOOD 5.18.⁶¹

THE VOICE THAT CHRIST DESIRES TO HEAR. APONIUS: By saying "Flee, my beloved," Christ makes heard the voice that he desires to hear. Through this, it is confessed that he alone on the earth, alone among all humankind (true man, but born in an ineffable manner), alone found to be a foreigner and pilgrim,⁶² alone flee-

⁵³Gen 17:4. ⁵⁴CCL 19:280-81. ⁵⁵Ps 12:6 (11:7 LXX). ⁵⁶ECS 2:117.

⁵⁷Rom 8:29. ⁵⁸CCL 119B:349. ⁵⁹FC 42:262-63. ⁶⁰PG 69:1291.

⁶¹FC 65:84. ⁶²Cf. 1 Pet 2:11.

ing the sordid lifestyle of humanity, alone ascending upon the prophesied “mountains of spices,” he alone in every way is made Lord of heaven and earth. It shows that he alone fled both interior and exterior sin. He alone, who would bind the devil, fugitive of heaven, is himself a fugitive of the earth in the midst of a perverse and depraved nation. EXPOSITION OF SONG OF SONGS 12.83.⁶³

CHRIST FLEES FROM THE BARREN PLAIN.

AMBROSE: Christ, detested by coiling snakes and beset by reptiles crawling on the earth, flees from the barren plain; he knows no dwelling except the heights of virtue; he knows no home except among those daughters of the church who can say, “We are a sweet fragrance of Christ to God.” For some indeed, it is an odor of death, leading to death, for those who perish; but to others, it is an odor of life, leading to life—in those namely, who with living faith, breathe the fragrance of the Lord’s resurrection. ON VIRGINITY 9.49.⁶⁴

FINAL FLIGHT HEAVENWARD. BEDE: “Flee, my beloved, and be like a goat or a mule upon the mountains of spices.” This can be accepted as referring both to the triumph of the Lord’s ascension and to those good deeds that are accomplished daily within his holy church. For, the beloved fled after he addressed his bride and sister, when he returned to heaven with the dispensation of our redemption complete. But he is likened to a goat or a mule upon the mountains of spice because he appears frequently through the grace of compunction to the hearts of his faithful, who are the mountains of spice. For they are preserved from the lowest, most contemptible desires by their love of heaven and, having been purged of the fetid stench of vices, they are filled with the fragrance of spiritual virtues, saying with the apostle, “Our citizenship is in heaven.”⁶⁵ COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS OF SONGS 5.8.14.⁶⁶

⁶³CCL 19:305. ⁶⁴AOV 25. ⁶⁵Phil 3:20. ⁶⁶CCL 119B:356.



APPENDIX

Early Christian Writers and the Documents Cited

The following table lists all the early Christian documents cited in this volume by author, if known, or by the title of the work. The English title used in this commentary is followed in parentheses with the Latin designation and, where available, the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (=TLG) digital references or Cetedoc Clavis numbers. Printed sources of original language versions may be found in the bibliography of works in original languages.

Acacius of Beroea

Letter to Cyril of Alexandria (*Consilium universale Ephesenum anno*) TLG 5000.001

Ambrose

Cain and Abel (*De Cain et Abel*) Cetedoc 0125
Concerning Repentance (*De paenitentia*) Cetedoc 0156
Concerning Virgins (*De virginibus*) Cetedoc 0145
Consolation on the Death of Emperor Valentinian (*De obitu Valentiniani*) Cetedoc 0158
Death as a Good (*De bono mortis*) Cetedoc 0129
Duties of the Clergy (*De officiis*) Cetedoc 0144
Flight from the World (*De fuga saeculi*) Cetedoc 0133
Isaac, or the Soul (*De Isaac vel anima*) Cetedoc 0128
Jacob and the Happy Life (*De Jacob et vita beata*) Cetedoc 0130
Letters (*Epistulae*) Cetedoc 0160
On His Brother Satyrus (*De excessu fratris Satyri*) Cetedoc 0157
On the Christian Faith (*De fide libri v*) Cetedoc 0150
On the Death of Theodosius (*De obitu Theodosii*) Cetedoc 0159
On the Holy Spirit (*De spiritu sancto*) Cetedoc 0151
On the Mysteries (*De mysteriis*) Cetedoc 0155
On Virginitate (*De virginitate*) Cetedoc 0147
The Prayer of Job and David (*De interpellatione Job et David*) Cetedoc 0134
Six Days of Creation (*Exameron*) Cetedoc 0123

Aphrahat

Demonstrations (*Demonstrationes*)

Aponius

Exposition of Song of Songs (*In Canticum canticorum expositio*) Cetedoc 0194

Athanasius

Against the Heathen (*Contra gentes*) TLG 2035.001
Defense Before Constantius (*Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem*) TLG 2035.011
Defense of His Flight (*Apologia de fuga sua*) TLG 2035.012

Defense of the Nicene Definition (<i>De decretis Nicaenae synodi</i>)	TLG 2035.003
Deposition of Arius (<i>Deposition Aarii in De decretis Nicaenae synodi</i>)	TLG 2035.003
Festal Letters (<i>Epistulae festales</i>)	TLG 2035.x01
Four Discourses Against the Arians (<i>Orationes tres contra Arianos</i>)	TLG 2035.042
Letters (<i>Epistula ad Adelphium</i>)	TLG 2035.050
Letters to Monks (<i>Epistula ad monachus</i>)	TLG 2035.008
Letter to Jovian (<i>Epistula ad Jovianum</i>)	TLG 2035.119
Letter to the Bishops of Egypt (<i>Epistula ad episcopos Aegypti et Libyae</i>)	TLG 2035.041
Life of St. Anthony (<i>Vita sancti Antonii</i>)	TLG 2035.047
Statement of Faith (See Marcellus, <i>Expositio fidei</i>)	TLG 2041.004

Athenagorus

A Plea Regarding Christians (<i>Legatio sive Supplicatio pro Christianis</i>)	TLG 1205.001
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Augustine

Against Julian (<i>Contra Julianum</i>)	Cetedoc 0351
Against Two Letters of the Pelagians (<i>Contra duas epistulas pelagianorum</i>)	Cetedoc 0346
The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life (<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i>)	Cetedoc 0261
Christian Instruction (<i>De doctrina christiana</i>)	Cetedoc 0263
City of God (<i>De civitate Dei</i>)	Cetedoc 0313
Confessions (<i>Confessionum libri tredecim</i>)	Cetedoc 0251
The Correction of the Donatist (In <i>Epistulae</i>)	Cetedoc 0262
Enchiridion (<i>Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate</i>)	Cetedoc 0295
The Excellence of Widowhood (<i>De bono viduitatis</i>)	Cetedoc 0301
Explanations of the Psalms (<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>)	Cetedoc 0283
Holy Virginity (<i>De sancta virginitate</i>)	Cetedoc 0300
In Answer to the Jews (<i>Adversus Judaeos</i>)	Cetedoc 0315
Letters (<i>Epistulae</i>)	Cetedoc 0262
Of True Religion (<i>De vera religione</i>)	Cetedoc 0264
On Baptism (<i>De baptismo</i>)	Cetedoc 0332
On Eighty-three Varied Questions (<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>)	Cetedoc 0289
On Faith and the Creed (<i>De fide et symbolo</i>)	Cetedoc 0293
On Grace and Free Will (<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i>)	Cetedoc 0352
On Marriage and Concupiscence (<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia</i>)	Cetedoc 0350
On Nature and Grace (<i>De natura et gratia</i>)	Cetedoc 0344
On Patience (<i>De patientia</i>)	Cetedoc 0308
On the Christian Life (<i>De vita christiana</i>)	Cetedoc 0730
On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism (<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum</i>)	Cetedoc 0342
On the Soul and Its Origin (<i>De natura et origine animae</i>)	Cetedoc 0345
On the Spirit and the Letter (<i>De spiritu et littera</i>)	Cetedoc 0343
On the Trinity (<i>De Trinitate</i>)	Cetedoc 0329
Predestination of the Saints (<i>De praedestinatione sanctorum</i>)	Cetedoc 0354
Reply to Faustus the Manichaean (<i>Contra Faustum</i>)	Cetedoc 0321

Sermon on the Mount (<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i>)	Cetedoc 0274
Sermons (<i>Sermones</i>)	Cetedoc 0284
Tractates on the Gospel of John (<i>In Johannis evangelium tractatus</i>)	Cetedoc 0278

Babai

Letter to Cyriacus

Basil the Great

Concerning Faith (<i>Prologus 8 [de fide]</i>)	TLG 2040.045
Homilies on the Beginning of Proverbs (<i>Homilia in principium proverbiorum</i>)	TLG 2040.028
Homilies on the Psalms (<i>Homiliae super Psalmos</i>)	TLG 2040.018
Homily Concerning Envy (<i>Homilia de invidia</i>)	TLG 2040.027
Homily on the Words "Give Heed to Thyself" (<i>Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi</i>)	TLG 2040.006
The Long Rules (<i>Asceticon magnum sive Quaestiones [regulae fusius tractatae]</i>)	TLG 2040.048
The Long Rules, Preface (<i>Prologus 4 [prooemium in asceticum magnum]</i>)	TLG 2040.047
On Humility (<i>De humilitate</i>)	TLG 2040.036
On Mercy and Justice (<i>Homilia de misericordia et iudicio [Sp.]</i>)	TLG 2040.069
On Renunciation of the World (<i>Sermo 11 [sermo asceticus et exhortatio de renuntiatione mundi] [Dub.]</i>)	TLG 2040.041
On the Spirit (<i>De spiritu sancto</i>)	TLG 2040.003

Bede

Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles (<i>In epistulam septem catholicas</i>)	Cetedoc 1362
Commentary on Proverbs (<i>In proverbialia Salomonis libri iii</i>)	Cetedoc 1351
Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (<i>Expositio actuum apostolorum</i>)	Cetedoc 1357
Commentary on the Songs of Songs (<i>In Cantica canticorum libri vi</i>)	Cetedoc 1353
Homilies on the Gospels (<i>Homiliarum evangelii libri ii</i>)	Cetedoc 1367
On the Tabernacle (<i>De tabernaculo et vasis eius ac vestibis sacerdotum libri iii</i>)	Cetedoc 1345

Benedict

Rule of St. Benedict (<i>Regula</i>)	Cetedoc 1852
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Besa

Letters (*Epistulae*)
 Sermons (*Sermones*)

Braulio of Saragosa

Letters (*Epistulae*)

Caesarius of Arles

Sermons (<i>Sermones</i>)	Cetedoc 1008
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Cassian, John

Conferences (<i>Collationes xxiii</i>)	Cetedoc 0512
Institutes (<i>De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis</i>)	Cetedoc 0513

Cassiodorus

Expositions of the Psalms (*Expositio Psalmorum*) Cetedoc 0900

Clement of Alexandria

Christ the Educator (*Paedagogus*) TLG 0555.002

Stromateis (*Stromata*) TLG 0555.004

Clement of Rome

1 Clement (*Epistula i ad Corinthios*) TLG 1271.001

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (*Constitutiones apostolorum*)

TLG 2894.001

Cyprian

The Dress of Virgins (*De habitu virginum*) Cetedoc 0040

Letters (*Epistulae*) Cetedoc 0050

The Lord's Prayer (*De dominica oratione*) Cetedoc 0043

To Demetrian (*Ad Demetrianum*) Cetedoc 0046

The Unity of the Catholic Church (*De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*) Cetedoc 0041

Works and Almsgiving (*De opere et eleemosynis*) Cetedoc 0047

Cyril of Alexandria

Commentary on Luke (*Commentarii in Lucam [in catenis]*) TLG 4090.108

Fragments in the Commentary on the Song of Songs (*Fragmenta in Cantica Canticorum*) TLG 4090.102

Letters (*Epistulae in Concilium universale Ephesenum anno*) TLG 5000.001

Cyril of Jerusalem

Catechetical Lectures (*Catecheses ad illuminandos*) TLG 2110.003

Mystagogical Lectures (*Mystagogiae*) TLG 2110.002

Sermon on the Paralytic (*Homilia in paralyticum juxta piscinam jacentem*) TLG 2110.006

Didache (*Didache xii apostolorum*)

TLG 1311.001

Didymus the Blind

Commentary on Ecclesiastes

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten [1.1-8]*) TLG 2102.011

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten [3-4.12]*) TLG 2102.047

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten [5-6]*) TLG 2102.005

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten [7-8.8]*) TLG 2102.006

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten [9.8-10.20]*) TLG 2102.048

(*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten[11-12]*) TLG 2102.007

Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon (*Fragmenta in Proverbia*) TLG 2102.022

Dionysius of Alexandria

Fragments (*Fragmenta*) TLG 2952.002

Ephrem the Syrian

Commentary on Genesis (*Commentarii in Genesim*)
 Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron (*In Tatiani Diatessaron*)
 Homily on Admonition and Repentance (*Sermones*)
 Homily on Our Lord (*Sermo de Domino nostro*)
 Hymns on Paradise (*Hymni de paradiso*)
 Hymns on the Nativity (*Hymni de nativitate*)
 Hymns Preserved in Armenian (*Hymni*)

Epistle of Barnabas (*Barnabae epistula*) TLG 1216.001

Eusebius of Caesarea

Proof of the Gospel (*Demonstratio evangelica*) TLG 2018.005

Eustathius of Antioch (See Theodoret of Cyr, *Eranistes*)

Evagrius of Pontus

Scholia on Ecclesiastes (*Scholia in Ecclesiasten [fragmenta e catenis]*) TLG 4110.031
 Scholia on Proverbs (*Scholia in Proverbia [fragmenta e catenis]*) TLG 4110.030

Ezrik of Kolb

On God (*De Deo*)

Fructuosus of Braga

General Rule for Monasteries (*Regula Monastica Communis*)
 Letters (*Epistola*)
 Monastic Agreement (*Consensoria monachorum*)

Fulgentius of Ruspe

Letters (*Epistulae*) Cetedoc 0817
 Letter to Scarila (*Liber de Scarilam de incarnatione filii dei et vilium animalium autore*) Cetedoc 0822
 On the Forgiveness of Sins (*Ad Euthymium de remissione peccatorum libri II*) Cetedoc 0821

Gerontius

Sayings of the Fathers (*Apophthegmata [collection anonyma]*) TLG 2742.002

Gregory of Elvira

Explanations of the Song of Songs (*In Canticum canticorum libri quinque*) Cetedoc 0547
 Expositions of Ecclesiastes (*Fragmenta expositiones in Ecclesiasten*) Cetedoc 0556

Gregory of Nazianzus

Against the Eunomians, Theological Oration 1(27) (*Adversus Eunomianos*) TLG 2022.007
 In Defense of His Flight, Oration 2 (*Apologetica*) TLG 2022.016
 On Holy Baptism, Oration 40 (*In sanctum baptisma*) TLG 2022.048
 On His Brother St. Caesarius, Oration 7 (*Funebris in laudem Caesarii fratris oratio*) TLG 2022.005

On His Sister St. Gorgiana, Oration 8 (<i>In laudem sororis Gorgoniae</i>)	TLG 2022.021
On the Death of His Father, Oration 18 (<i>Funebris oratio in patrem</i>)	TLG 2022.031
On the Son, Theological Oration 3 (29), (<i>De filio</i>)	TLG 2022.009
On the Son, Theological Oration 4 (30), (<i>De filio</i>)	TLG 2022.010
On Theology, Theological Oration 2 (28) (<i>De theologia</i>)	TLG 2022.008

Gregory of Nyssa

Against Eunomius (<i>Contra Eunomium</i>)	TLG 2017.030
Answer to Eunomius's Second Book (<i>Contra Eunomium</i>)	TLG 2017.030
Funeral Oration on Meletius (<i>Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum</i>)	TLG 2017.021
Homilies on Ecclesiastes (<i>In Ecclesiasten</i>)	TLG 2017.029
Homilies on the Song of Songs (<i>In Canticum canticorum</i>)	TLG 2017.032
On the Lord's Prayer (<i>De oratione dominica orationes</i>)	TLG 2017.047
On Virginity (<i>De virginitate</i>)	TLG 2017.043

Gregory Thaumaturgus

Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes (<i>Metaphrasis in Ecclesiasten Salomonis</i>)	TLG 2063.006
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Gregory the Great

Commentary on the Song of Songs (<i>Expositio in Canticum canticorum</i>)	Cetedoc 1709
Dialogues (<i>Dialogorum libri iv</i>)	Cetedoc 1713
Forty Gospel Homilies (<i>Homiliarum xl in evangelica</i>)	Cetedoc 1711
Letters (<i>Registrum epistularum</i>)	Cetedoc 1714
Morals on the Book of Job (<i>Moralia in Job</i>)	Cetedoc 1708
Pastoral Care (<i>Regula pastoralis</i>)	Cetedoc 1712

Hilary of Arles

Life of St. Honoratus (<i>Vita Honorati</i>)	
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Hilary of Poitiers

Homilies on the Psalms (<i>Tractatus super psalmos I-XCI</i>)	Cetedoc 0428
On the Trinity (<i>De Trinitate</i>)	Cetedoc 0433

Hippolytus

Fragments on Proverbs	
(<i>Fragmenta in Proverbia</i>)	TLG 2115.013
(<i>Fragmenta in Proverbia [Sp.]</i>)	TLG 2115.015
(<i>Fragmenta in Proverbia</i>)	TLG 2115.044
Fragments on Song of Songs (<i>In Canticum canticorum</i>)	TLG 2115.031
Treatise on the Song of Songs (<i>In Canticum canticorum [paraphrasis]</i>)	TLG 2115.049

Horsiesi

Instructions (<i>Catecheses</i>)	
Regulations (<i>Regulae</i>)	

Ignatius of AntiochEpistle to the Ephesians (*Epistulae vii genuinae*)

TLG 1443.001

Isaac of NinevehAscetical Homilies (*De perfectione religiosa*)**Jerome**Against Jovinianus (*Adversus Jovinianum*)

Cetedoc 0610

Against Rufinus (*Apologia adversus libros Rufini*)

Cetedoc 0613

Against the Pelagians (*Dialogi contra Pelagianos libri iii*)

Cetedoc 0615

Commentary on Ecclesiastes (*Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*)

Cetedoc 0583

Homilies on the Psalms (*Tractatus lix in psalmos*)

Cetedoc 0592

Homilies on the Psalms, Alternate Series (*Tractatum in psalmos series altera*)

Cetedoc 0593

Homily on Obedience (*Tractatus de oboedientia*)

Cetedoc 0605

Letters (*Epistulae*)

Cetedoc 0620

Life of Malchus (*Vita Malchi*)

Cetedoc 0619

John ChrysostomAgainst the Anomoeans (*Contra Anomoeos*)1-5 (*Contra Anomoeos homiliae 1-5=De incomprehensibili dei natura*)

TLG 2062.012

6 (*De beato Philogonio*)

TLG 2062.014

Baptismal Instructions (*Ad illuminandos catecheses 1-2 [series prima et secunda]*)

TLG 2062.025

Commentary on Isaiah (*In Isaiam*)

TLG 2062.497

Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon (*Fragmenta in Proverbia [in catenis]*)

TLG 2062.185

Discourses Against Judaizing Christians (*Adversus Judaeos [orationes 1-8]*)

TLG 2062.021

Homilies Concerning the Statues (*Ad populam Antiochenum homiliae [de statuis]*)

TLG 2062.024

Homilies on Ephesians (*In epistulam ad Ephesios*)

TLG 2062.159

Homilies on Genesis (*In Genesim [homiliae 1-67]*)

TLG 2062.112

Homilies on Repentance and Almsgiving (*De paenitentia [homiliae 1-9]*)

TLG 2062.027

Homilies on Romans (*In epistulam ad Romanos*)

TLG 2062.155

Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles (*In Acta apostolorum [homiliae 1-55]*)

TLG 2062.154

Homilies on the Gospel of John (*In Joannem [homiliae 1-88]*)

TLG 2062.153

Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew (*In Matthaeum [homiliae 1-90]*)

TLG 2062.152

Homilies on 1 Timothy (*In epistulam i ad Timotheum*)

TLG 2062.164

On the Epistle to the Hebrews (*In epistulam ad Hebraeos*)

TLG 2062.168

John of AntiochLetter to Cyril of Alexandria (*In Concilia Oecumenica*)

TLG 5000.001

John of Apamea

Letter to Hesychius

John of DamascusBarlaam and Joseph (*Vita Barlaam et Joasaph [Sp.]*)

TLG 2934.066

Orthodox Faith (*Expositio fidei*)

TLG 2934.004

Julian of Eclanum

Commentary on the Song of Songs (*Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*)

Cetedoc 0775

Justin Martyr

Dialogue with Trypho (*Dialogus cum Tryphone*)

TLG 0645.003

Leander of Seville

Homilies on the Triumph of the Church (*Homilia in laudem ecclesiae*)

The Training of Nuns (*Regula, sive liber de institutione virginum et contemptu mundi*)

Leo the Great

Sermons (*Tractatus septem et nonaginta*)

Cetedoc 1657

Tome (*Concilia oecumenica et generalia ecclesiae catholicae Concilium Chalcedonense a. 451*)

Macarius

Fifty Spiritual Homilies (*Homiliae spiritualis 50*)

TLG 2109.002

Macrina See Gregory of Nyssa

On the Soul and the Resurrection (*Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*)

TLG 2017.056

Marcellus

Statement of Faith (*Expositio fidei*)

TLG 2041.004

Marius Victorinus

Letter to Candidus (*De generatione divini verbi*)

Cetedoc 0096

Maximus of Turin

Sermons (*Collectio sermonum antiqua*)

Cetedoc 0219a

Nilus of Ancyra

Commentary on the Song of Songs (*Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*)

Olympiodorus

Commentary on Ecclesiastes (*Commentarii in Ecclesiasten*)

TLG 2865.002

Origen

Against Celsus (*Contra Celsum*)

TLG 2042.001

Commentary on Matthew

(*Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei [lib. 10-11]*)

TLG 2042.029

(*Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei [lib.12-17]*)

TLG 2042.030

(*Fragmenta ex commentariis in evangelium Matthaei*)

TLG 2042.031

Commentary on the Gospel of John

(*Commentarii in evangelium Joannis [lib. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 13]*)

TLG 2042.005

(*Commentarii in evangelium Joannis [lib. 19, 20, 28, 32]*)

TLG 2042.079

Commentary on the Song of Songs (*Commentarium in Canticum canticorum*)

Cetedoc 0198, TLG 2042.026

Exhortation to Martyrdom (<i>Exhortatio ad martyrium</i>)	TLG 2042.007
Exposition on Proverbs (<i>Expositio in Proverbia</i>)	TLG 2042.075
Fragments on Jeremiah	
(<i>Fragmenta in Jeremiam [e Philocalia]</i>)	TLG 2042.084
(<i>Fragmenta in Jeremiam [in catenis]</i>)	TLG 2042.010
Fragments on Luke (<i>Fragmenta in Lucam [in catenis]</i>)	TLG 2042.017
Homilies on Exodus (<i>Homiliae in Exodum</i>)	TLG 2042.023
Homilies on Genesis (<i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>)	TLG 2042.022
Homilies on Jeremiah	
(<i>In Jeremiam [homiliae 1-11]</i>)	TLG 2042.009
(<i>In Jeremiam [homiliae 12-20]</i>)	TLG 2042.021
Homilies on Joshua (<i>In Jesu nave</i>)	
Homilies on Leviticus (<i>Homiliae in Leviticum</i>)	TLG 2042.024
Homilies on the Gospel of Luke (<i>Homiliae in Lucam</i>)	TLG 2042.016
Homilies on the Song of Songs (<i>Homiliae in Canticum canticorum</i>)	
Letter to Julius Africanus (<i>Epistula ad Africanum</i>)	TLG 2042.045
On First Principles	
(<i>De principiis</i>)	TLG 2042.002
(<i>Fragmenta de principiis</i>)	TLG 2042.003
On Prayer (<i>De oratione</i>)	TLG 2042.008
Pachomius	
Fragments (<i>Fragmenta</i>)	
Instructions (<i>Catecheses</i>)	
Pacian of Barcelona	
Letters (<i>Epistulae</i>)	
On Penitents (<i>De paenitentibus</i>)	
The Passing of Mary (<i>Tranitus Mariae</i>)	
Paulinus of Milan	
Life of St. Ambrose (<i>Vita S. Ambrosii</i>)	
Peter Chrysologus	
Sermons (<i>Collectio sermonum</i>)	Cetedoc 0227+
Peter of Alexandria	
Canonical Epistles (<i>Epistula canonica</i>)	TLG 2962.004
[Peter of Alexandria]	
Homilies on Riches	
Prosper of Aquitaine	
Grace and Free Will (<i>De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio contra Collatorem</i>)	Cetedoc 0523

Prudentius

Hymns for Every Day (*Liber Cathemerinon*) Cetedoc 1438

Pseudo-Clement of Rome

Homilies (*Homiliae [Sp.]*) TLG 1271.006

Letters on Virginity (*Epistulae de virginitate [Sp.]*) TLG 1271.010

Pseudo-Dionysius

Divine Names (*De divinis nominibus*) TLG 2798.004

Letter (*Epistulae*) TLG 2798.006-015

Revelation of Esdras (Apocalypsis Esdrae)

Rufinus of Aquileia

Commentary on the Apostles' Creed (*Expositio symboli*) Cetedoc 0196

Salvian the Presbyter

Four Books of Timothy to the Church (*Ad ecclesiam [sive Adversus avaritiam]*)

The Governance of God (*De gubernatione Dei*) Cetedoc 0485

Shenoute

Fragments on Ecclesiastes (*Fragmenta*)

On Language (*De lingua*)

To the Gentile Philosopher (*Ad philosophum gentilem*)

Shepherd of Hermas (*Hermas, Pastor*) TLG 1419.001

Symeon the New Theologian

Discourses (*Catecheses*)

Tertullian

Against Hermogenes (*Adversus Hermogenem*) Cetedoc 0013

Against Praxeas (*Adversus Praxean*) Cetedoc 0026

On Fasting (*De jejunio adversus psychicos*) Cetedoc 0029

On Flight in Time of Persecution (*De fuga in persecutione*) Cetedoc 0025

On Patience (*De patientia*) Cetedoc 0009

On Prayer (*De oratione*) Cetedoc 0007

On the Veiling of Virgins (*De virginibus velandis*) Cetedoc 0027

Prescriptions Against Heretics (*De praescriptione haereticorum*) Cetedoc 0005

Theodore of Mopsuestia

Paraphrase of the Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia

Theodore of Tabennesi

Fragment

Theodoret of Cyr

Commentary on the Psalms (<i>Interpretatio in Psalmos</i>)	TLG 4089.024
Commentary on the Song of Songs (<i>Explanatio in Canticum canticorum</i>)	TLG 4089.025
Eranistes (<i>Eranistes</i>)	TLG 4089.002
Letters (<i>Ad eos qui in Euphratesia et Osrhoena regione, Syria, Phoeni</i>)	TLG 4089.034

Theodotus the Valentinian

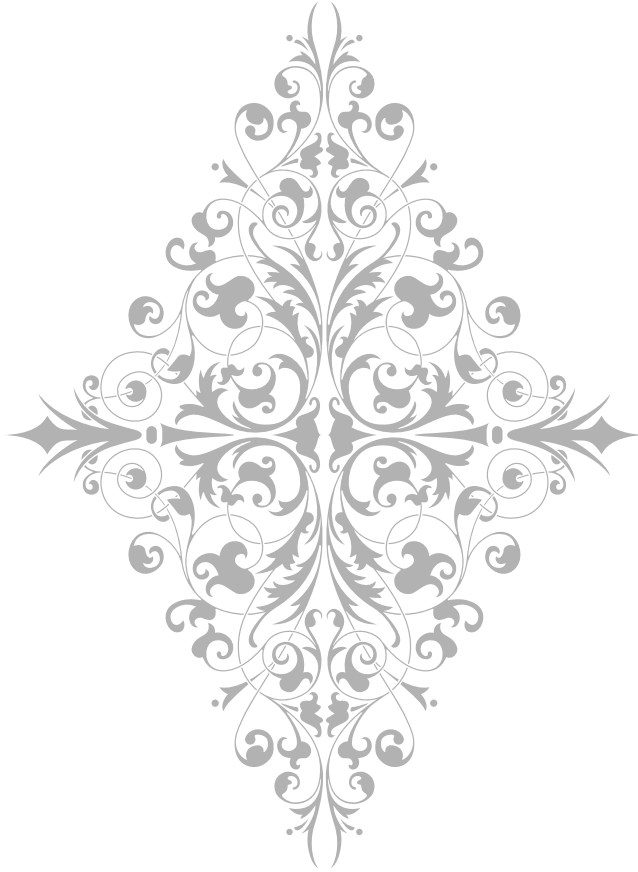
Excerpts of Theodotus (<i>See Clement of Alexandria Eclogae propheticae</i>)	TLG 0555.005
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Valerian

Homilies (*Homiliae*)

Vincent of Lérins

Commonitories (<i>Commonitorium</i>)	Cetedoc 0510
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**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES &
SHORT DESCRIPTIONS
OF SELECT ANONYMOUS WORKS**

This listing is cumulative, including all the authors and works cited in this series.

Abba John (date unknown). Noted monk in John Cassian's *Conferences* who presided over a coenobitic community in the desert of Scetis and was sought out for his wisdom.

Abba Moses (c. 332-407). Moses the Ethiopian or Moses the Black. He began as a house slave of a government official, later dismissed for robbery, a life he continued after his dismissal. After his conversion, he became a monk of Scetis and then a priest trained by Isidore the Priest. He retired to Petra where he was martyred with seven others by barbarian invaders.

Abba Pior (d. 373). An Egyptian desert father. He left his family while still a boy. His sister sought him out fifty years later, trying to persuade him to return from his life of solitude, but she was unsuccessful. He was known as a generous monk who was willing to put up with much discomfort, living in a horrible cell that no one who followed after him could stand to live in.

Abraham of Nathpar (fl. sixth-seventh century). Monk of the Eastern Church who flourished during the monastic revival of the

sixth to seventh century. Among his works is a treatise on prayer and silence that speaks of the importance of prayer becoming embodied through action in the one who prays. His work has also been associated with John of Apamea or Philoxenus of Mabbug.

Acacius of Beroea (c. 340-c. 436). Syrian monk known for his ascetic life. He became bishop of Beroea in 378, participated in the council of Constantinople in 381, and played an important role in mediating between Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch; however, he did not take part in the clash between Cyril and Nestorius.

Acacius of Caesarea (d. c. 365). Pro-Arian bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, disciple and biographer of Eusebius of Caesarea, the historian. He was a man of great learning and authored a treatise on Ecclesiastes.

Acts of Paul and Thecla (second century). A story about a disciple of Paul known for her continence and miraculous deliverances from martyrdom. Originally a part of *The Acts of Paul*, the work was judged a forgery by Tertullian who opposed its use in the advocacy of

female preaching and baptizing. Nonetheless, the work was widely popular and translated into several languages.

Acts of Peter (c. 190). An apocryphal account of the apostle's life and ministry, including his conflicts with Simon Magus and his death via inverted crucifixion.

Acts of Thomas (c. 225). A widely circulated apocryphal account of the missionary and wonderworking activities of Thomas, which includes the earliest report of the apostle's martyrdom in India.

Adamantius (early fourth century). Surname of Origen of Alexandria and the main character in the dialogue contained in *Concerning Right Faith in God*. Rufinus attributes this work to Origen. However, trinitarian terminology, coupled with references to Methodius and allusions to the fourth-century Constantinian era bring this attribution into question.

Adamnan (c. 624-704). Abbot of Iona, Ireland, and author of the life of St. Columba. He was influential in the process of assimilating the Celtic church into Roman liturgy and church order. He also wrote *On the Holy Sites*, which influenced Bede.

Alexander of Alexandria (fl. 312-328). Bishop of Alexandria and predecessor of Athanasius, on whom he exerted considerable theological influence during the rise of Arianism. Alexander excommunicated Arius, whom he had appointed to the parish of Baucalis, in 319. His teaching regarding the eternal generation and divine substantial union of the Son with the Father was eventually confirmed at the Council of Nicaea (325).

Ambrose of Milan (c. 333-397; fl. 374-397). Bishop of Milan and teacher of Augustine who defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit and the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Ambrosiaster (fl. c. 366-384). Name given to the author of an anonymous Pauline commentary once thought to have been composed by Ambrose.

Ammonas (fourth century). Student of An-

tony the Great and member of a colony of anchorite monks at Pispir in Egypt. He took over leadership of the colony upon Antony's death in 356. He was consecrated by Athanasius as bishop of a small unknown see. He died by 396. Fourteen letters and eleven sayings in the Apophthegmata Patrum are attributed to him, although it is unlikely that all of the identified sayings are his.

Ammonius of Alexandria (late fifth-early sixth century). Alexandrian presbyter who was one of the more moderate anti-Chalcedonian theologians of Alexandria and served as a prominent representative of Alexandrian theology and Christology in his day. His exegetical method, however, exhibits more affinity with Antioch than Alexandria. Fragments from his commentary on John number over 600, and he is often identified as the author of catena fragments from commentaries on both the Old and New Testament (see PG 85:1362-1814), though, due to the prevalence of this name in Egypt and the existence of other possible authors, attribution remains uncertain.

Amphilochius of Iconium (b. c. 340-345; d. c. 398-404). An orator at Constantinople before becoming bishop of Iconium in 373. He was a cousin of Gregory of Nazianzus and active in debates against the Macedonians and Mes-salians.

Anastasius I of Antioch (d. 598/599). Patriarch of Antioch (559-570 and 593-598), exiled by Justinian II and restored by Gregory the Great. His writing significantly influenced later theologians, though only his five-part treatise on orthodox belief survives in its entirety.

Anastasius of Sinai (d. c. 700). Abbot of the monastery of St. Catherine. He argued against various heresies in his dogmatic and polemical works. His main treatise, the *Hodegos* or "Guide," is primarily an attack on monophysism.

Andreas (c. seventh century). Monk who

collected commentary from earlier writers to form a catena on various biblical books.

Andrew of Caesarea (early sixth century). Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He produced one of the earliest Greek commentaries on Revelation and defended the divine inspiration of its author.

Andrew of Crete (c. 660-740). Bishop of Crete, known for his hymns, especially for his "canons," a genre which supplanted the *kontakia* and is believed to have originated with him. A significant number of his canons and sermons have survived and some are still in use in the Eastern Church. In the early Iconoclastic controversy he is also known for his defense of the veneration of icons.

Antony (or Anthony) the Great (c. 251-c. 356). An anchorite of the Egyptian desert and founder of Egyptian monasticism. Athanasius regarded him as the ideal of monastic life, and he has become a model for Christian hagiography.

Aphrahat (c. 270-350; fl. 337-345). "The Persian Sage" and first major Syriac writer whose work survives. He is also known by his Greek name Aphraates.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-c. 392). Bishop of Laodicea who was attacked by Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Theodore for denying that Christ had a human mind.

Aponius/Apponius (fourth-fifth century). Author of a remarkable commentary on Song of Solomon (c. 405-415), an important work in the history of exegesis. The work, which was influenced by the commentaries of Origen and Pseudo-Hippolytus, is of theological significance, especially in the area of Christology.

Apostolic Constitutions (c. 381-394). Also known as *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* and thought to be redacted by Julian of Neapolis. The work is divided into eight books, and is primarily a collection of and expansion on previous works such as the *Didache* (c. 140) and the *Apostolic Traditions*. Book 8 ends with eighty-five canons from various sources and is

elsewhere known as the *Apostolic Canons*.

Apringius of Beja (mid sixth century). Iberian bishop and exegete. Heavily influenced by Tyconius, he wrote a commentary on Revelation in Latin, of which two large fragments survive.

Arator (c. 490-550). Roman subdeacon appointed by Pope Vigilius. From Liguria, Italy, he served as an imperial ambassador for the Gothic court prior to his appointment as subdeacon. A poet at heart, his *De actibus apostolorum*, a poetic paraphrase and allegorical expansion of the book of Acts, was popular in the Middle Ages.

Arethas of Caesarea (c. 860-940). Byzantine scholar and disciple of Photius. He was a deacon in Constantinople, then archbishop of Caesarea from 901.

Aristides (second century). Christian philosopher and early apologist. Reputed to be from Athens, he wrote his *Apologia*, addressed either to Hadrian or Antoninus Pius, to defend the Christian understanding of God against that of the barbarian, Greek and Jewish traditions.

Arius (fl. c. 320). Heretic condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325) for refusing to accept that the Son was not a creature but was God by nature like the Father.

Armenian Liturgy (c. fourth or fifth century). Ancient Christian liturgy based in part on Syrian rites used by early missionaries to Armenia and similar in structure to the old rite of Antioch. The Armenian liturgy also incorporates unique elements and influences from a variety of traditions. The invention of a national script in the fifth century allowed for the translation of the liturgy into Armenian.

Arnobius of Sicca (d. c. 327). Teacher of rhetoric at Sicca Veneria in Numidia in North Africa and opponent of Christianity, he converted late in life and became an apologist for the faith he formerly opposed. According to Jerome, Arnobius's one extant work, *Against the Nations*, was written at the request of his bishop, who wanted proof that his conversion was genuine. It was probably composed during

the persecution under Diocletian.

Arnobius the Younger (fifth century). A participant in christological controversies of the fifth century. He composed *Confliktus cum Serapione*, an account of a debate with a monophysite monk in which he attempts to demonstrate harmony between Roman and Alexandrian theology. Some scholars attribute to him a few more works, such as *Commentaries on Psalms*.

Asterius the Homilist (late fourth-early fifth century). Author of thirty-one homilies on Psalms 1–15 and 18, abbreviated versions of which are preserved under the name of John Chrysostom. This otherwise unknown preacher, sometimes identified with Asterius of Amasea and Asterius the Sophist, lived in or near Antioch.

Athanasian Creed (c. fourth or fifth century). One of the three ecumenical creeds in Western Christianity. Also known as the *Quicumque vult*, it expounds in great detail the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. Traditionally attributed to Athanasius, the creed's origin and date are now disputed; it likely arose in Southern Gaul.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295-373; fl. 325-373). Bishop of Alexandria from 328, though often in exile. He wrote his classic polemics against the Arians while most of the eastern bishops were against him.

Athenagoras (fl. 176-180). Early Christian philosopher and apologist from Athens, whose only authenticated writing, *A Plea Regarding Christians*, is addressed to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, and defends Christians from the common accusations of atheism, incest and cannibalism.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Bishop of Hippo and a voluminous writer on philosophical, exegetical, theological and ecclesiological topics. He formulated the Western doctrines of predestination and original sin in his writings against the Pelagians.

Babai (c. early sixth century). Author of the

Letter to Cyriacus. He should not be confused with either Babai of Nisibis (d. 484) or Babai the Great (d. 628).

Babai the Great (d. 628). Syriac monk who founded a monastery and school in his region of Beth Zabday and later served as third superior at the Great Convent of Mount Izla during a period of crisis in the Nestorian church.

Bardesanes (154-222). Philosopher who sought to reconcile Christian thought with contemporary astrological theories, while rejecting Zoroastrian determinism. His ideas, including arguments against the Marcionites, were recorded by a disciple in the *Book of the Laws of the Lands*. He also wrote 150 doctrinal hymns.

Barsanuphius and John (fifth to sixth century). Two anchorite friends who served as spiritual directors to coenobites at a monastery near Gaza. The two communicated with others, including one another, almost exclusively through letters. Little is known of them apart from their correspondence, included among 850 letters of Barsanuphius. Dorotheus of Gaza was one of Barsanuphius's most important disciples.

Basil of Seleucia (fl. 444-468). Bishop of Seleucia in Isauria and ecclesiastical writer. He took part in the Synod of Constantinople in 448 for the condemnation of the Eutychian errors and the deposition of their great champion, Dioscurus of Alexandria.

Basil the Great (b. c. 330; fl. 357-379). One of the Cappadocian fathers, bishop of Caesarea and champion of the teaching on the Trinity propounded at Nicaea in 325. He was a great administrator and founded a monastic rule.

Basilides (fl. second century). Alexandrian heretic of the early second century who is said to have believed that souls migrate from body to body and that we do not sin if we lie to protect the body from martyrdom.

Bede the Venerable (c. 672/673-735). Born in Northumbria, at the age of seven he was put under the care of the Benedictine monks

of Saints Peter and Paul at Jarrow and given a broad classical education in the monastic tradition. Considered one of the most learned men of his age, he is the author of *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-547). Considered the most important figure in the history of Western monasticism. Benedict founded many monasteries, the most notable found at Montecassino, but his lasting influence lay in his famous Rule. The Rule outlines the theological and inspirational foundation of the monastic ideal while also legislating the shape and organization of the cenobitic life.

Besa the Copt (fifth century). Coptic monk, disciple of Shenoute, whom he succeeded as head of the monastery. He wrote numerous letters, monastic catecheses and a biography of Shenoute.

Book of Steps (c. 400). Written by an anonymous Syriac author, this work consists of thirty homilies or discourses which specifically deal with the more advanced stages of growth in the spiritual life.

Braulio of Saragossa (c. 585-651). Bishop of Saragossa (631-651) and noted writer of the Visigothic renaissance. His *Life of St. Aemilianus* is his crowning literary achievement.

Byzantine Order. Eastern rite incorporating diverse local traditions from throughout the empire. Byzantine liturgy, which fused into a more standard order in the late Middle Ages, is marked by a variety of rich cultural influences, especially lyrical and mystical elements.

Caesarius of Arles (c. 470-543). Bishop of Arles renowned for his attention to his pastoral duties. Among his surviving works the most important is a collection of 238 sermons that display an ability to preach Christian doctrine to a variety of audiences.

Callinicus (mid fifth century). Disciple and biographer of Hypatius, third abbot of the monastery at Rufiniane near Chalcedon and Constantinople. Callinicus's *Life of Hypatius* shows clear borrowings from Athanasius's *Life*

of *Antony*, but nevertheless gives insight into the development of monastic life near Constantinople.

Callistus of Rome (d. 222). Pope (217-222) who excommunicated Sabellius for heresy. It is very probable that he suffered martyrdom.

Cassia (b. c. 805; d. between 848 and 867). Nun, poet and hymnographer who founded a convent in Constantinople.

Cassian, John (360-432). Author of the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, works purporting to relay the teachings of the Egyptian monastic fathers on the nature of the spiritual life which were highly influential in the development of Western monasticism.

Cassiodorus (c. 485-c. 580). Founder of the monastery of Vivarium, Calabria, where monks transcribed classic sacred and profane texts, in Greek and Latin, preserving them for the Western tradition.

Chromatius (fl. 400). Bishop of Aquileia, friend of Rufinus and Jerome and author of tracts and sermons.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215). A highly educated Christian convert from paganism, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria and pioneer of Christian scholarship. His major works, *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus* and the *Stromata*, bring Christian doctrine face to face with the ideas and achievements of his time.

Clement of Rome (fl. c. 92-101). Pope whose *Epistle to the Corinthians* is one of the most important documents of subapostolic times.

Commodian (probably third or possibly fifth century). Latin poet of unknown origin (possibly Africa, Syria, Rome or Gaul) whose two surviving works suggest chiliast and patripasionist tendencies.

Constantine (d. 337). Roman emperor from 306, with his fellow-emperor Licinius. The two proclaimed religious tolerance in the *Edict of Milan* in 313, allowing Christianity to be practiced freely. He became sole emperor in 324 and sought to preserve the unity and structure of the church for the good of

the state. Constantine issued decrees against schisms and summoned the Council of Nicaea (325) to settle the Arian controversy.

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles. See Apostolic Constitutions.

Cosmas of Maiuma (c. 675-c. 751). Adopted son of John of Damascus and educated by the monk Cosmas in the early eighth century. He entered the monastery of St. Sabas near Jerusalem and in 735 became bishop of Maiuma near Gaza. Cosmas in his capacity as Melodus ("Songwriter") is known for his canons composed in honor of Christian feasts. An alternate rendering of his name is Kosmas Melodos.

Council of Chalcedon (451). The fourth of seven ecumenical councils. The council was summoned by Emperor Marcian in response to a controversy over the person and nature of Christ. The Definition of Chalcedon, informed by Leo's *Tome*, affirmed the statements of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) while further defining the relationship between the two natures in the one person of Christ as unmixed, unchangeable, indivisible and inseparable. The Oriental Orthodox Church refused to accept Chalcedon's definition of the faith, preferring to stay with the *miaphysite* Christology of Cyril of Alexandria.

Council of Constantinople (381). The second ecumenical council, convened by Theodosius I to unify the Eastern Church. The council endorsed the Nicene Creed of 325, expanding it at certain controverted points in order to answer to challenges from, among others, the Eunomians and Pneumatomachians who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, while also condemning the Apollinarian denial of Christ's full humanity.

Council of Rome (382). Called by Damasus in response to the Council of Constantinople, this gathering affirmed the Council of Constantinople while also seeking to establish the primacy of the Roman see. The first three chapters of the *Decretum Gelasianum*, which

list a hierarchy of authoritative sources and a biblical canon, may have been produced by this council.

Council of Toledo (447). Affirmed the earlier Council of Toledo I (400) and the liturgical practice already established in the West of including the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (*filioque*), which had been added to the recitation of the creed by some in the West in order to combat the heresy of Arianism which subordinated the Son to the Father.

Cyprian of Carthage (fl. 248-258). Martyred bishop of Carthage who maintained that those baptized by schismatics and heretics had no share in the blessings of the church.

Cyril of Alexandria (375-444; fl. 412-444). Patriarch of Alexandria whose extensive exegesis, characterized especially by a strong espousal of the unity of Christ, led to the condemnation of Nestorius in 431.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386; fl. c. 348). Bishop of Jerusalem after 350 and author of Catechetical Homilies.

Cyril of Scythopolis (b. c. 525; d. after 557). Palestinian monk and author of biographies of famous Palestinian monks. Because of him we have precise knowledge of monastic life in the fifth and sixth centuries and a description of the Origenist crisis and its suppression in the mid-sixth century.

Damasus of Rome (c. 304-384). Appointed pope in 366, following a conflict with Ursinus settled by Valentinian I. Damasus solidified the authority of Rome, attacked heresy using councils and strategic partnerships, promoted the cult of the martyrs, and commissioned Jerome's production of the Vulgate.

Dhuoda (ninth century). Wife of Bernard, Duke of Septimania, and author of a work on Christian virtue, *Manual*, which she wrote for her eldest son, William.

Diadochus of Photice (c. 400-474). Antimono-physite bishop of Epirus Vetus whose work *Discourse on the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus*

Christ exerted influence in both the East and West through its Chalcedonian Christology. He is also the subject of the mystical *Vision of St. Diadochus Bishop of Photice in Epirus*.

Didache (c. 140). Of unknown authorship, this text intertwines Jewish ethics with Christian liturgical practice to form a whole discourse on the "way of life." It exerted an enormous amount of influence in the patristic period and was especially used in the training of catechumens.

Didascalia Apostolorum (*Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and Holy Disciples of Our Savior*) (early third century). A Church Order composed for a community of Christian converts from paganism in the northern part of Syria. This work forms the main source of the first six books of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and provides an important window to view what early liturgical practice may have looked like.

Didymus the Blind (c. 313-398). Alexandrian exegete who was much influenced by Origen and admired by Jerome.

Diodore of Tarsus (d. c. 394). Bishop of Tarsus and Antiochene theologian. He authored a great scope of exegetical, doctrinal and apologetic works, which come to us mostly in fragments because of his condemnation as the predecessor of Nestorianism. Diodore was a teacher of John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia.

Dionysius of Alexandria (d. c. 264). Bishop of Alexandria and student of Origen. Dionysius actively engaged in the theological disputes of his day, opposed Sabellianism, defended himself against accusations of tritheism and wrote the earliest extant Christian refutation of Epicureanism. His writings have survived mainly in extracts preserved by other early Christian authors.

Dorotheus of Gaza (fl. c. 525-540). Member of Abbot Seridos's monastery and later leader of a monastery where he wrote *Spiritual Instructions*. He also wrote a work on traditions

of Palestinian monasticism.

Dracontius (fifth century). Latin poet and legal scholar. During imprisonment (484-c. 496) for angering the ruler of Carthage, Dracontius produced his *Satisfactio* and *Laudes Dei*, which explore, in particular, biblical themes of mercy. **Egeria** (or Etheria, Aetheria) (fourth century). Possible name for the author of an *Itinerary* or pilgrimage diary that records valuable details on early liturgy, traditions, and church and monastic structure. Through letters to her religious community, likely in Gaul, Egeria describes a journey (c. 381-384) to Egypt, Palestine and Asia Minor.

Ennodius (474-521). Bishop of Pavia, a prolific writer of various genre, including letters, poems and biographies. He sought reconciliation in the schism between Rome and Acacius of Constantinople, and also upheld papal autonomy in the face of challenges from secular authorities.

Ephrem the Syrian (b. c. 306; fl. 363-373). Syrian writer of commentaries and devotional hymns which are sometimes regarded as the greatest specimens of Christian poetry prior to Dante.

Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-403). Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, author of a refutation of eighty heresies (the *Panarion*) and instrumental in the condemnation of Origen.

Epiphanius the Latin. Author of the late fifth-century or early sixth-century Latin text *Interpretation of the Gospels*, with constant references to early patristic commentators. He was possibly a bishop of Benevento or Seville.

Epistle of Barnabas. See *Letter of Barnabas*.

Epistula Apostolorum (mid second century). A self-purported letter of doubtful authenticity from the apostles to the churches of the world that emphasizes the divinity and sonship of Jesus along with his childhood miracles.

Ethiopian Liturgy. Liturgical rite similar to the rite of Alexandria. Ethiopian liturgy has evolved since the introduction of Coptic liturgy to Ethiopia, traditionally by St. Frumen-

tius in the fourth century. Significant Eastern and Jewish influences were added over time.

Eucherius of Lyons (fl. 420-449). Bishop of Lyons c. 435-449. Born into an aristocratic family, he, along with his wife and sons, joined the monastery at Lérins soon after its founding. He explained difficult Scripture passages by means of a threefold reading of the text: literal, moral and spiritual.

Eugippius (b. 460). Disciple of Severinus and third abbot of the monastic community at Castrum Lucullanum, which was made up of those fleeing from Noricum during the barbarian invasions.

Eunomius (d. 393). Bishop of Cyzicyus who was attacked by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa for maintaining that the Father and the Son were of different natures, one ingenerate, one generate.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/263-340). Bishop of Caesarea, partisan of the Emperor Constantine and first historian of the Christian church. He argued that the truth of the gospel had been foreshadowed in pagan writings but had to defend his own doctrine against suspicion of Arian sympathies.

Eusebius of Emesa (c. 300-c. 359). Bishop of Emesa from c. 339. A biblical exegete and writer on doctrinal subjects, he displays some semi-Arian tendencies of his mentor Eusebius of Caesarea.

Eusebius of Gaul, or Eusebius Gallicanus (c. fifth century). A conventional name for a collection of seventy-six sermons produced in Gaul and revised in the seventh century. It contains material from different patristic authors and focuses on ethical teaching in the context of the liturgical cycle (days of saints and other feasts).

Eusebius of Vercelli (fl. c. 360). Bishop of Vercelli who supported the trinitarian teaching of Nicaea (325) when it was being undermined by compromise in the West.

Eustathius of Antioch (fl. 325). First bishop of Beroea, then of Antioch, one of the leaders

of the anti-Arians at the council of Nicaea. Later, he was banished from his seat and exiled to Thrace for his support of Nicene theology.

Euthymius (377-473). A native of Melitene and influential monk. He was educated by Bishop Otreius of Melitene, who ordained him priest and placed him in charge of all the monasteries in his diocese. When the Council of Chalcedon (451) condemned the errors of Eutyches, it was greatly due to the authority of Euthymius that most of the Eastern recluses accepted its decrees. The empress Eudoxia returned to Chalcedonian orthodoxy through his efforts.

Evagrius of Pontus (c. 345-399). Disciple and teacher of ascetic life who astutely absorbed and creatively transmitted the spirituality of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism of the late fourth century. Although Origenist elements of his writings were formally condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II, A.D. 553), his literary corpus continued to influence the tradition of the church.

Eznik of Kolb (early fifth century). A disciple of Mesrob who translated Greek Scriptures into Armenian, so as to become the model of the classical Armenian language. As bishop, he participated in the synod of Astisat (449).

Facundus of Hermiane (fl. 546-568). African bishop who opposed Emperor Justinian's postmortem condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyr and Ibas of Ebessa at the fifth ecumenical council. His written defense, known as "To Justinian" or "In Defense of the Three Chapters," avers that ancient theologians should not be blamed for errors that became obvious only upon later theological reflection. He continued in the tradition of Chalcedon, although his Christology was supplemented, according to Justinian's decisions, by the theopaschite formula *Unus ex Trinitate passus est* ("Only one of the three suffered").

Fastidiosus (late fifth-early sixth century).

African Catholic priest who converted to Arianism. The text of one of his sermons survives in a refutation by Fulgentius.

Fastidius (c. fourth-fifth centuries). British author of *On the Christian Life*. He is believed to have written some works attributed to Pelagius.

Faustinus (fl. 380). A priest in Rome and supporter of Lucifer and author of a treatise on the Trinity.

Faustus of Riez (c. 400-490). A prestigious British monk at Lérins; abbot, then bishop of Riez from 457 to his death. His works include *On the Holy Spirit*, in which he argued against the Macedonians for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and *On Grace*, in which he argued for a position on salvation that lay between more categorical views of free will and predestination. Various letters and (pseudonymous) sermons are extant.

The Festal Menaion. Orthodox liturgical text containing the variable parts of the service, including hymns, for fixed days of celebration of the life of Jesus and Mary.

Filastrius (fl. 380). Bishop of Brescia and author of a compilation against all heresies.

Firmicus Maternus (fourth century). An anti-Pagan apologist. Before his conversion to Christianity he wrote a work on astrology (334-337). After his conversion, however, he criticized paganism in *On the Errors of the Profane Religion*.

Firmilian of Caesarea (fl. c. 230-c. 268). Influential bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He studied under Origen and became involved in the controversies over the return of the lapsed into the church and rebaptism, having written to Cyprian concerning the latter issue.

First Creed of the Council of Antioch (341). Eastern bishops' response to charges of Arianism from Western leaders. At a gathering that marked the dedication of the Golden Church at Antioch, the bishops put forth four creeds as alternatives to the Nicene formula.

Flavian of Chalon-sur-Saône (d. end of

sixth century). Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône in Burgundy, France. His hymn *Verses on the Mandate in the Lord's Supper* was recited in a number of the French monasteries after the washing of the feet on Maundy Thursday.

Fructuosus of Braga (d. c. 665). Son of a Gothic general and member of a noble military family. He became a monk at an early age, then abbot-bishop of Dumium before 650 and metropolitan of Braga in 656. He was influential in setting up monastic communities in Lusitania, Asturia, Galicia and the island of Gades.

Fulgentius of Ruspe (c. 467-532). Bishop of Ruspe and author of many orthodox sermons and tracts under the influence of Augustine.

Gaudentius of Brescia (fl. 395). Successor of Filastrius as bishop of Brescia and author of twenty-one Eucharistic sermons.

Gennadius of Constantinople (d. 471). Patriarch of Constantinople, author of numerous commentaries and an opponent of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria.

Germanus of Constantinople (c. 640-c. 733). Patriarch of Constantinople (715-730). He wrote the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which served for centuries as the explanation of the divine liturgy of the Byzantine Church, written during the outbreak of the great iconoclastic controversies in Eastern Christianity. One of the leading theologians of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681), which condemned monothelism.

Gerontius (c. 395-c. 480). Palestinian monk, later archimandrite of the cenobites of Palestine. He led the resistance to the council of Chalcedon.

Gildas (sixth century). British monk and historian. His major work is *De excidio Britanniae*, a history focused on the pagan invasion of Britain and the vices of contemporary Britons. Fragments of letters and a Penitential are also attributed to Gildas.

Gnostics. Name now given generally to followers of Basilides, Marcion, Valentinus, Mani and others. The characteristic belief is that

matter is a prison made for the spirit by an evil or ignorant creator, and that redemption depends on fate, not on free will.

Gospel of Peter (late second century). An early apocryphal writing with Docetic aspects that likely originated in Syria. It was referred to by Serapion (c. 190) and Origen, though only one section survives in an eighth-century manuscript.

Gospel of Philip (second or third century). A Gnostic collection of sayings, including several attributed to Jesus, on the process of salvation. This Coptic document, discovered at Nag Hammadi, is probably unconnected with the *Gospel of Philip* cited by Epiphanius.

Gospel of Truth (second century). One of the Coptic texts found at Nag Hammadi. This Gnostic treatise discusses the nature, ministry and death of Jesus, and includes several unique speculations. Some scholars have connected it with the second-century Gnostic Valentinus. Irenaeus referred to it disparagingly as the so-called *Gospel of Truth*, which he found to be in conflict with the four canonical Gospels.

Gregory of Elvira (fl. 359-385). Bishop of Elvira who wrote allegorical treatises in the style of Origen and defended the Nicene faith against the Arians.

Gregory of Narek (950-1003). Armenian monk, philosopher, mystic and poet who lived in the monasteries of Narek (greater Armenia, now Turkey). He wrote a mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs and the Armenian Prayer book and liturgy. The latter, which he authored in his mature years, he referred to as his "last testament."

Gregory of Nazianzus (b. 329/330; fl. 372-389). Cappadocian father, bishop of Constantinople, friend of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, and author of theological orations, sermons and poetry.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394). Bishop of Nyssa and brother of Basil the Great. A Cappadocian father and author of catechetical

orations, he was a philosophical theologian of great originality.

Gregory of Tours (c. 538-594). Bishop of Tours elected in 573. Gregory produced hagiographical and historical works. His *Historia Francorum*, a fragmentary yet valuable source, begins with creation and highlights sixth-century Gaul.

Gregory Thaumaturgus (fl. c. 248-264). Bishop of Neocaesarea and a disciple of Origen. There are at least five legendary *Lives* that recount the events and miracles which led to his being called "the wonder worker." His most important work was the *Address of Thanks to Origen*, which is a rhetorically structured panegyric to Origen and an outline of his teaching.

Gregory the Great (c. 540-604). Pope from 590, the fourth and last of the Latin "Doctors of the Church." He was a prolific author and a powerful unifying force within the Latin Church, initiating the liturgical reform that brought about the Gregorian Sacramentary and Gregorian chant.

Hegemonius (fl. early fourth century). Author of *Acta disputationis*, traditionally believed to have been written in fourth-century Syria. This work is a fictitious debate between a Mesopotamian bishop and a Manichaean.

Hegesippus (second century). An author, possibly of Jewish descent, who served as a source for Eusebius and is best known for five books of anti-Gnostic polemic.

Heracleon (fl. c. 145-180). Gnostic teacher and disciple of Valentinus. His commentary on John, which was perhaps the first commentary to exist on this or any Gospel, was so popular that Ambrose commissioned Origen to write his own commentary in response, providing a more orthodox approach to the Fourth Gospel.

Hesychius of Jerusalem (fl. 412-450). Presbyter and exegete, thought to have commented on the whole of Scripture.

Hilary of Arles (c. 401-449). Archbishop of Arles and leader of the Semi-Pelagian party.

Hilary incurred the wrath of Pope Leo I when he removed a bishop from his see and appointed a new bishop. Leo demoted Arles from a metropolitan see to a bishopric to assert papal power over the church in Gaul.

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315-367). Bishop of Poitiers and called the "Athanasius of the West" because of his defense (against the Arians) of the common nature of Father and Son.

Hippolytus (fl. 222-245). Recent scholarship places Hippolytus in a Palestinian context, personally familiar with Origen. Though he is known chiefly for *The Refutation of All Heresies*, he was primarily a commentator on Scripture (especially the Old Testament) employing typological exegesis.

Horsiesi (c. 305-c. 390). Pachomius's second successor, after Petronius, as a leader of cenobitic monasticism in Southern Egypt.

Hyperichius (c. fifth century). A monk known only from his *Exhortation to the Monks*, 160 statements in Greek on monastic virtues, and the collection *Sayings of the Fathers*, which quotes eight of these exhortations.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107/112). Bishop of Antioch who wrote several letters to local churches while being taken from Antioch to Rome to be martyred. In the letters, which warn against heresy, he stresses orthodox Christology, the centrality of the Eucharist and unique role of the bishop in preserving the unity of the church.

Ildefonsus of Toledo (mid seventh century). Archbishop of Toledo (657-667). Previously a monk, he served as abbot of Agalí, and later as archbishop. Only a portion of his works is extant, including some theological works and letters. He is best known for his *De viris illustribus* (Lives of Illustrious Men) continuing the catalog begun by Isidore of Seville. His extant writing reflects his Marian piety.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 135-c. 202). Bishop of Lyons who published the most famous and influential refutation of Gnostic thought.

Isaac of Nineveh (d. c. 700). Also known as

Isaac the Syrian or Isaac Syrus, this monastic writer served for a short while as bishop of Nineveh before retiring to live a secluded monastic life. His writings on ascetic subjects survive in the form of numerous homilies.

Isaiah of Scete (late fourth century). Author of ascetical texts, collected after his death under the title of the *Ascetic Discourses*. This work was influential in the development of Eastern Christian asceticism and spirituality.

Isho'dad of Merv (fl. c. 850). Nestorian bishop of Hedatta. He wrote commentaries on parts of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament, frequently quoting Syriac fathers.

Isidore of Pelusium (d. c. 440). Egyptian ascetic. Born to a prominent Egyptian family in Alexandria, he left behind his wealth to live on a mountain near Pelusium, and was often consulted by church and civic leaders alike, such as Cyril of Alexandria and Theodosius II, for his wisdom and his counsel of moderation. Many of his letters also have come down to us, some of which provide keen insight into the interpretation of Scripture.

Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636). Youngest of a family of monks and clerics, including sister Florentina and brothers Leander and Fulgentius. He was an erudite author of comprehensive scale in matters both religious and sacred, including his encyclopedic *Etymologies*.

Jacob of Nisibis (d. 338). Bishop of Nisibis. He was present at the council of Nicaea in 325 and took an active part in the opposition to Arius.

Jacob of Sarug (c. 450-c. 520). Syriac ecclesiastical writer. Jacob received his education at Edessa. At the end of his life he was ordained bishop of Sarug. His principal writing was a long series of metrical homilies, earning him the title "The Flute of the Holy Spirit."

Jerome (c. 347-420). Gifted exegete and exponent of a classical Latin style, now best known as the translator of the Latin Vulgate. He defended the perpetual virginity of Mary, attacked Origen and Pelagius and supported

extreme ascetic practices.

John Chrysostom (344/354-407; fl. 386-407). Bishop of Constantinople who was noted for his orthodoxy, his eloquence and his attacks on Christian laxity in high places.

John of Antioch (d. 441/42). Bishop of Antioch, commencing in 428. He received his education together with Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia in a monastery near Antioch. A supporter of Nestorius, he condemned Cyril of Alexandria, but later reached a compromise with him.

John of Apamea (fifth century). Syriac author of the early church who wrote on various aspects of the spiritual life, also known as John the Solitary. Some of his writings are in the form of dialogues. Other writings include letters, a treatise on baptism, and shorter works on prayer and silence.

John of Carpathus (c. seventh/eighth century). Perhaps John the bishop from the island of Carpathus, situated between Crete and Rhodes, who attended the Synod of 680/81. He wrote two "centuries" (a literary genre in Eastern spirituality consisting of 100 short sections, or chapters). These were entitled *Chapters of Encouragement to the Monks of India* and *Chapters on Theology and Knowledge* which are included in the *Philokalia*.

John of Damascus (c. 650-750). Arab monastic and theologian whose writings enjoyed great influence in both the Eastern and Western Churches. His most influential writing was the *Orthodox Faith*.

John of Jerusalem (John II of Jerusalem) (late fourth-early fifth century). Successor of Cyril as bishop of Jerusalem (386-417). Engaged with Epiphanius in the first Origenist controversy and became involved in the Pelagian controversy. He is probably the author of the five Mystagogical Lectures attributed to Cyril.

John the Elder (c. eighth century). A Syriac author also known as John of Dalyatha or John Saba ("the elder") who belonged to monastic circles of the Church of the East and lived in

the region of Mount Qardu (northern Iraq). His most important writings are twenty-two homilies and a collection of fifty-one short letters in which he describes the mystical life as an anticipatory experience of the resurrection life, the fruit of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

John the Monk. Traditional name found in *The Festal Menaion*, believed to refer to John of Damascus. See John of Damascus.

Joseph of Thebes (fourth century). One of the desert fathers of Scetis, also known as Abba Joseph, who taught the most important virtue of a monk was to remain in complete submission to a spiritual father in total renunciation of one's own will.

Joseph's Bible Notes (Hypomnestikon) (fourth or fifth century). A pastiche of biblical and historical questions drawn from various writers, including the Jewish historian, Josephus. It was believed to have been written by Josephus Christianus, derived from the brief poem appended at the end of the book, but the author ultimately is unknown. It evidences an Alexandrian Christology.

Josephus, Flavius (c. 37-c. 101). Jewish historian from a distinguished priestly family. Acquainted with the Essenes and Sadducees, he himself became a Pharisee. He joined the great Jewish revolt that broke out in 66 and was chosen by the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem to be commander-in-chief in Galilee. Showing great shrewdness to ingratiate himself with Vespasian by foretelling his elevation and that of his son Titus to the imperial dignity, Josephus was restored his liberty after 69 when Vespasian became emperor.

Julian of Eclanum (c. 385-450). Bishop of Eclanum in 416/417 who was removed from office and exiled in 419 for not officially opposing Pelagianism. In exile, he was accepted by Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose Antiochene exegetical style he followed. Although he was never able to regain his ecclesiastical position, Julian taught in Sicily until his death. His

works include commentaries on Job and parts of the Minor Prophets, a translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on the Psalms, and various letters. Sympathetic to Pelagius, Julian applied his intellectual acumen and rhetorical training to argue against Augustine on matters such as free will, desire and the locus of evil.

Julian Pomerius (late fifth-early sixth century). Author of *On the Contemplative Life* and a teacher of Caesarius of Arles. Originally from Mauretania, Julian moved to southern Gaul where he was ordained as a priest. He eventually settled in Arles as a teacher of rhetoric.

Julian the Arian (c. fourth century). Antiochene, Arian author of *Commentary on Job*, and probably a follower of Aetius and Eunomius. The 85 *Apostolic Canons*, once part of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and the Pseudo-Ignatian writings are also attributed to him.

Julius Africanus (c. 160-c. 240). First Christian chronographer who influenced later historians such as Eusebius. Born in Jerusalem, he was charged with organizing a library in the Pantheon at Rome. He was acquainted with Origen during the time he studied in Alexandria and corresponded with him. He died in Palestine.

Justin Martyr (c. 100/110-165; fl. c. 148-161). Palestinian philosopher who was converted to Christianity, "the only sure and worthy philosophy." He traveled to Rome where he wrote several apologies against both pagans and Jews, combining Greek philosophy and Christian theology; he was eventually martyred.

Justinian the Emperor (482-565). Emperor of Byzantium, 527-565. As the second member of the Justinian Dynasty, he instituted an ambitious, though failed, restoration of the Byzantine Empire. He sought theological unity through a politicized Christianity that persecuted perceived heretics and apostates along with Jews and pagans. Many of his writings are extant, including twenty-one letters and four dogmatic works.

Lactantius (c. 260-c. 330). Christian apologist removed from his post as teacher of rhetoric at Nicomedia upon his conversion to Christianity. He was tutor to the son of Constantine and author of *The Divine Institutes*.

Leander (c. 545-c. 600). Latin ecclesiastical writer, of whose works only two survive. He was instrumental in spreading Christianity among the Visigoths, gaining significant historical influence in Spain in his time.

Leo the Great (regn. 440-461). Bishop of Rome whose *Tome to Flavian* helped to strike a balance between Nestorian and Cyrilline positions at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Letter of Barnabas (c. 130). An allegorical and typological interpretation of the Old Testament with a decidedly anti-Jewish tone. It was included with other New Testament works as a "Catholic epistle" at least until Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/263-340) questioned its authenticity.

Letter to Diognetus (c. third century). A refutation of paganism and an exposition of the Christian life and faith. The author of this letter is unknown, and the exact identity of its recipient, Diognetus, continues to elude patristic scholars.

Liturgy of St. Basil (fourth century and onward). The liturgical collections of the Byzantine liturgy containing an anaphora attributed to Basil the Great. The liturgy has evolved considerably over the centuries.

Liturgy of St. James. A liturgy adopted throughout the East, including by the Syrian Orthodox Church. Traditionally attributed to St. James the bishop of Jerusalem, it survives in both Greek and Syriac versions.

Liturgy of St. Mark (fourth century). Traditional Eucharistic liturgy of the Alexandrian Church. First adopted by the Egyptian Melchites, its extant manuscripts are based on an early Egyptian text, and forms of the rite are still used by the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches.

Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles (first or second

century). One of the earliest Christian liturgies. Attributed to Addai (Addaeus) and Mari (Maris), Christian missionaries to Edessa and surrounding areas of Syria, the liturgy was also celebrated in Mesopotamia and Persia. It was likely used in the Syrian church and was also taken up later by the Nestorians.

Liturgy of the Coptic Jacobites (sixth century). Liturgy of the West Syrian Church named after the monophysite Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578) who used this rite, in the Coptic language, to solidify the hierarchy of monophysitism. Many of the anaphorae can be traced back in their basic structure to the church of Jerusalem in apostolic times.

Liturgy of the Hours (third century). Early liturgy for prayers throughout the day. The church community, especially monastics, offered prayer at set times of the day: morning prayer, prayers of terce (third hour), sext (sixth hour) and none (ninth hour) that correspond to the hours of Christ's crucifixion and death. Evening prayer was associated with the nighttime rest of the world itself. More elaborate and extended divisions of the hours followed that included Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline, reflective of a theology of time that celebrates the rhythm of life as God's people communicate with him.

Lucifer (d. 370/371). Bishop of Cagliari and vigorous supporter of Athanasius and the Nicene Creed. In conflict with the emperor Constantius, he was banished to Palestine and later to Thebaid (Egypt).

Luculentius (fifth century). Unknown author of a group of short commentaries on the New Testament, especially Pauline passages. His exegesis is mainly literal and relies mostly on earlier authors such as Jerome and Augustine. The content of his writing may place it in the fifth century.

Macarius of Egypt (c. 300-c. 390). One of the Desert Fathers. Accused of supporting Athanasius, Macarius was exiled c. 374 to an island in the Nile by Lucius, the Arian successor of

Athanasius. Macarius continued his teaching of monastic theology at Wadi Natrun.

Macrina the Younger (c. 327-379). The elder sister of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, she is known as "the Younger" to distinguish her from her paternal grandmother. She had a powerful influence on her younger brothers, especially on Gregory, who called her his teacher and relates her teaching in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

Manichaeans. A religious movement that originated circa 241 in Persia under the leadership of Mani but was apparently of complex Christian origin. It is said to have denied free will and the universal sovereignty of God, teaching that kingdoms of light and darkness are coeternal and that the redeemed are particles of a spiritual man of light held captive in the darkness of matter (see Gnostics).

Marcellus of Ancyra (d. c. 375). Wrote a refutation of Arianism. Later, he was accused of Sabellianism, especially by Eusebius of Caesarea. While the Western church declared him orthodox, the Eastern church excommunicated him. Some scholars have attributed to him certain works of Athanasius.

Marcion (fl. 144). Heretic of the mid second century who rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament, claiming that the Father of Jesus Christ was other than the Old Testament God (see Gnostics).

Marius Victorinus (b. c. 280/285; fl. c. 355-363). Grammarian of African origin who taught rhetoric at Rome and translated works of Platonists. After his conversion (c. 355), he wrote works against the Arians and commentaries on Paul's letters.

Mark the Hermit (c. sixth century). Monk who lived near Tarsus and produced works on ascetic practices as well as christological issues.

Martin of Braga (fl. c. 568-579). Anti-Arian metropolitan of Braga on the Iberian peninsula. He was highly educated and presided over the provincial council of Braga in 572.

Martyrdom of Polycarp (c. 160). A letter

written shortly after the death of the eighty-six-year-old bishop of Smyrna which provides, in sometimes gruesome detail, the earliest account of Christian martyrdom outside of the New Testament.

Martyrius. See Sahdona.

Maximinus (the Arian) (b. c. 360-65). Bishop of an Arian community, perhaps in Illyricum. Of Roman descent, he debated publicly with Augustine at Hippo (427 or 428), ardently defending Arian doctrine. Besides the polemical works he wrote against the orthodox, such as his *Against the Heretics, Jews and Pagans*, he also wrote fifteen sermons that are considered much less polemical, having been previously attributed to Maximus of Turin. He is also known for his twenty-four *Explanations of Chapters of the Gospels*.

Maximus of Turin (d. 408/423). Bishop of Turin. Over one hundred of his sermons survive on Christian festivals, saints and martyrs.

Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662). Palestinian-born theologian and ascetic writer. Fleeing the Arab invasion of Jerusalem in 614, he took refuge in Constantinople and later Africa. He died near the Black Sea after imprisonment and severe suffering, having his tongue cut off and his right hand mutilated. He taught total preference for God and detachment from all things.

Melito of Sardis (d. c. 190). Bishop of Sardis. According to Polycrates, he may have been Jewish by birth. Among his numerous works is a liturgical document known as *On Pascha* (ca. 160-177). As a Quartodeciman, and one intimately involved in that controversy, Melito celebrated Pascha on the fourteenth of Nisan in line with the custom handed down from Judaism.

Methodius of Olympus (d. 311). Bishop of Olympus who celebrated virginity in a Symposium partly modeled on Plato's dialogue of that name.

Minucius Felix (second or third century). Christian apologist who was an advocate in Rome. His *Octavius* agrees at numerous points

with the *Apologeticum of Tertullian*. His birthplace is believed to be in Africa.

Montanist Oracles. Montanism was an apocalyptic and strictly ascetic movement begun in the latter half of the second century by a certain Montanus in Phrygia, who, along with certain of his followers, uttered oracles they claimed were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Little of the authentic oracles remains and most of what is known of Montanism comes from the authors who wrote against the movement. Montanism was formally condemned as a heresy before by Asiatic synods.

Muratorian Fragment (second century). Earliest known list of New Testament books, preserved in an eighth-century manuscript. The document is missing its first lines yet includes all but five books of the final canon. It also discusses various contested writings, several of which are clearly rejected.

Nemesius of Emesa (fl. late fourth century). Bishop of Emesa in Syria whose most important work, *Of the Nature of Man*, draws on several theological and philosophical sources and is the first exposition of a Christian anthropology.

Nestorius (c. 381-c. 451). Patriarch of Constantinople (428-431) who founded the heresy which says that there are two persons, divine and human, rather than one person truly united in the incarnate Christ. He resisted the teaching of theotokos, causing Nestorian churches to separate from Constantinople.

Nicetas of Remesiana (fl. second half of fourth century). Bishop of Remesiana in Serbia, whose works affirm the consubstantiality of the Son and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Nilus of Ancyra (d. c. 430). Prolific ascetic writer and disciple of John Chrysostom. Sometimes erroneously known as Nilus of Sinai, he was a native of Ancyra and studied at Constantinople.

Novatian of Rome (fl. 235-258). Roman theologian, otherwise orthodox, who formed a schismatic church after failing to become pope.

His treatise on the Trinity states the classic Western doctrine.

Odes of Solomon (early second century). A collection of forty-two pseudo-Solomonic poems containing commentary on the liturgy of a Judeo-Christian community in Syria. The poems are permeated with soteriological concerns, though they never mention the name Jesus.

Oecumenius (sixth century). Called the Rhetor or the Philosopher, Oecumenius wrote the earliest extant Greek commentary on Revelation. Scholia by Oecumenius on some of John Chrysostom's commentaries on the Pauline Epistles are still extant.

Olympiodorus (early sixth century). Exegete and deacon of Alexandria, known for his commentaries that come to us mostly in catenae.

Optatus (fourth century). Bishop of Milevis in North Africa. He wrote a treatise against Donatism. These six books emphasize the uniqueness of the Catholic Church and include a list of documents on the Donatist controversy.

Origen of Alexandria (b. 185; fl. c. 200-254). Influential exegete and systematic theologian. He was condemned (perhaps unfairly) for maintaining the preexistence of souls while purportedly denying the resurrection of the body. His extensive works of exegesis focus on the spiritual meaning of the text.

Pachomius (c. 292-347). Founder of cenobitic monasticism. A gifted group leader and author of a set of rules, he was defended after his death by Athanasius of Alexandria.

Pacian of Barcelona (c. fourth century). Bishop of Barcelona whose writings polemicize against popular pagan festivals as well as Novatian schismatics.

Palladius of Helenopolis (c. 363/364-c. 431). Bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia (400-417) and then Aspuna in Galatia. A disciple of Evagrius of Pontus and admirer of Origen, Palladius became a zealous adherent of John Chrysostom and shared his troubles in 403. His *Lausaic History* is the leading source for

the history of early monasticism, stressing the spiritual value of the life of the desert.

Papias of Hierapolis (c. early second century). Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia who may have known the apostle John. Through his writings, which are extant only in fragments preserved in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, Papias influenced later theologians including Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Victorinus, and provided an important witness to traditions about the origins of the Gospels.

Paschasius of Dumium (c. 515-c. 580). Translator of sentences of the Desert Fathers from Greek into Latin while a monk in Dumium.

Paterius (c. sixth-seventh century). Disciple of Gregory the Great who is primarily responsible for the transmission of Gregory's works to many later medieval authors.

Patrick (d. c. 492). Saint known as the apostle to Ireland. Born in Britain and later kidnapped at the age of sixteen by pirates, Patrick was taken to Ireland where he worked as a shepherd. He later returned to Britain and undertook training in Gaul and possibly also Lerins for the apostolate. According to tradition, he was consecrated a bishop and returned to northern Ireland in 432 where he preached the gospel and established his see at Armagh, which was extended to the continent via Irish missionaries. His two works that survive are *Epistle to the Soldier Coroticus* and *Confession*, written toward the end of his life. His feast day is March 17.

Paulinus of Milan (late 4th-early 5th century). Personal secretary and biographer of Ambrose of Milan. He took part in the Pelagian controversy.

Paulinus of Nola (355-431). Roman senator and distinguished Latin poet whose frequent encounters with Ambrose of Milan (c. 333-397) led to his eventual conversion and baptism in 389. He eventually renounced his wealth and influential position and took up his pen to write poetry in service of Christ. He also wrote many letters to, among others,

Augustine, Jerome and Rufinus.

Paulus Orosius (b. c. 380). An outspoken critic of Pelagius, mentored by Augustine. His *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* was perhaps the first history of Christianity.

Pelagius (c. 354-c. 420). Contemporary of Augustine whose followers were condemned in 418 and 431 for maintaining that even before Christ there were people who lived wholly without sin and that salvation depended on free will.

Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-450). Latin archbishop of Ravenna whose teachings included arguments for adherence in matters of faith to the Roman see, and the relationship between grace and Christian living.

Peter of Alexandria (d. c. 311). Bishop of Alexandria. He marked (and very probably initiated) the reaction at Alexandria against extreme doctrines of Origen. During the persecution of Christians in Alexandria, Peter was arrested and beheaded by Roman officials. Eusebius of Caesarea described him as "a model bishop, remarkable for his virtuous life and his ardent study of the Scriptures."

Philip the Priest (d. 455/56) Acknowledged by Gennadius as a disciple of Jerome. In his *Commentary on the Book of Job*, Philip utilizes Jerome's Vulgate, providing an important witness to the transmission of that translation. A few of his letters are extant.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.-c. A.D. 50). Jewish-born exegete who greatly influenced Christian patristic interpretation of the Old Testament. Born to a rich family in Alexandria, Philo was a contemporary of Jesus and lived an ascetic and contemplative life that makes some believe he was a rabbi. His interpretation of Scripture based the spiritual sense on the literal. Although influenced by Hellenism, Philo's theology remains thoroughly Jewish.

Philoxenus of Mabbug (c. 440-523). Bishop of Mabbug (Hierapolis) and a leading thinker in the early Syrian Orthodox Church. His exten-

sive writings in Syriac include a set of thirteen *Discourses on the Christian Life*, several works on the incarnation and a number of exegetical works.

Phoebadius of Agen (d. c. 395). Bishop of Agen whose *Contra arianos* attacked the 357 pro-Arian formula of Sirmium. Phoebadius was the last leader induced to sign the formula of Ariminum in 359, a compromise widely viewed as an Arian triumph.

Photius (c. 820-891). An important Byzantine churchman and university professor of philosophy, mathematics and theology. He was twice the patriarch of Constantinople. First he succeeded Ignatius in 858, but was deposed in 863 when Ignatius was reinstated. Again he followed Ignatius in 878 and remained the patriarch until 886, at which time he was removed by Leo VI. His most important theological work is *Address on the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, in which he articulates his opposition to the Western filioque, i.e., the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. He is also known for his *Amphilochia* and *Library* (*Bibliotheca*).

Poemen (c. fifth century). One-seventh of the sayings in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* are attributed to Poemen, which is Greek for shepherd. Poemen was a common title among early Egyptian desert ascetics, and it is unknown whether all of the sayings come from one person.

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69-155). Bishop of Smyrna who vigorously fought heretics such as the Marcionites and Valentinians. He was the leading Christian figure in Roman Asia in the middle of the second century.

Possidius (late fourth-fifth century). A member of Augustine's monastic community at Hippo from 391, then bishop of Calama in Numidia sometime soon after 397. He fled back to Hippo when Vandals invaded Calama in 428 and cared for Augustine during his final illness. Returning to Calama after the death of Augustine (430), he was expelled by

Genseric, Arian king of the Vandals, in 437. Nothing more is known of him after this date. Sometime between 432 and 437 he wrote *Vita Augustini*, to which he added *Indiculus*, a list of Augustine's books, sermons and letters.

Potamius of Lisbon (fl. c. 350-360). Bishop of Lisbon who joined the Arian party in 357, but later returned to the Catholic faith (c. 359?). His works from both periods are concerned with the larger Trinitarian debates of his time.

Primasius (fl. 550-560). Bishop of Hadrumentum in North Africa (modern Tunisia) and one of the few Africans to support the condemnation of the Three Chapters. Drawing on Augustine and Tyconius, he wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse, which in allegorizing fashion views the work as referring to the history of the church.

Proclus of Constantinople (c. 390-446). Patriarch of Constantinople (434-446). His patriarchate dealt with the Nestorian controversy, rebutting, in his *Tome to the Armenian Bishops*, Theodore of Mopsuestia's Christology where Theodore was thought to have overly separated the two natures of Christ. Proclus stressed the unity of Christ in his formula "One of the Trinity suffered," which was later taken up and spread by the Scythian monks of the sixth century, resulting in the theopaschite controversy. Proclus was known as a gifted preacher and church politician, extending and expanding Constantinople's influence while avoiding conflict with Antioch, Rome and Alexandria.

Procopius of Gaza (c. 465-c. 530). A Christian exegete educated in Alexandria. He wrote numerous theological works and commentaries on Scripture (particularly the Hebrew Bible), the latter marked by the allegorical exegesis for which the Alexandrian school was known.

Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390-c. 463). Probably a lay monk and supporter of the theology of Augustine on grace and predestination. He collaborated closely with Pope Leo I in his doctrinal statements.

Prudentius (c. 348-c. 410). Latin poet and

hymn writer who devoted his later life to Christian writing. He wrote didactic poems on the theology of the incarnation, against the heretic Marcion and against the resurgence of paganism.

Pseudo-Clementines (third-fourth century). A series of apocryphal writings pertaining to a conjured life of Clement of Rome. Written in a form of popular legend, the stories from Clement's life, including his opposition to Simon Magus, illustrate and promote articles of Christian teaching. It is likely that the corpus is a derivative of a number of Gnostic and Judeo-Christian writings. Dating the corpus is a complicated issue.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fl. c. 500). Author who assumed the name of Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned in Acts 17:34, and who composed the works known as the *Corpus Areopagiticum* (or *Dionysiacum*). These writings were the foundation of the apophatic school of mysticism in their denial that anything can be truly predicated of God.

Pseudo-Macarius (fl. c. 390). An anonymous writer and ascetic (from Mesopotamia?) active in Antioch whose badly edited works were attributed to Macarius of Egypt. He had keen insight into human nature, prayer and the inner life. His work includes some one hundred discourses and homilies.

Quodvultdeus (fl. 430). Carthaginian bishop and friend of Augustine who endeavored to show at length how the New Testament fulfilled the Old Testament.

Rabanus (Hrabanus) Maurus (c. 780-856). Frankish monk, theologian and teacher, student of Alcuin of York, then Abbot of Fulda from 822 to 842 and Archbishop of Mainz from 848 until his death in 856. The author of poetry, homilies, treatises on education, grammar, and doctrine, and an encyclopedia titled *On the Nature of Things*, he also wrote commentaries on Scripture, including the books of Kings and Esther. Though he is technically an early medieval writer, his works are included as

they reflect earlier thought.

Riddles in the Apocalypse (eighth century). Commentary on Revelation of unknown authorship. *De Enigmatibus ex Apocalypsi* in Latin, the commentary explores the enigmatic symbolism of the book. It is contained in the one volume commentary known as the *Irish Reference Bible*, or *Das Bibelwerk* which dates from the late eighth century (see also CCL 7:231-95).

Romanus Melodus (fl. c. 536-556). Born as a Jew in Emesa not far from Beirut where after his baptism he later became deacon of the Church of the Resurrection. He later moved to Constantinople and may have seen the destruction of the Hagia Sophia and its rebuilding during the time he flourished there. As many as eighty metrical sermons (*kontakia*, sg. *kontakion*) that utilize dialogical poetry have come down to us under his name. These sermons were sung rather than preached during the liturgy, and frequently provide theological insights and Scriptural connections often unique to Romanus. His Christology, closely associated with Justinian, reflects the struggles against the Monophysites of his day.

Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 345-411). Orthodox Christian thinker and historian who nonetheless translated and preserved the works of Origen, and defended him against the strictures of Jerome and Epiphanius. He lived the ascetic life in Rome, Egypt and Jerusalem (the Mount of Olives).

Sabellius (fl. 200). Allegedly the author of the heresy which maintains that the Father and Son are a single person. The patripassian variant of this heresy states that the Father suffered on the cross.

Sahdona (fl. 635-640). Known in Greek as Martyrius, this Syriac author was bishop of Beth Garmai. He studied in Nisibis and was exiled for his christological ideas. His most important work is the deeply scriptural *Book of Perfection* which ranks as one of the master-

pieces of Syriac monastic literature.

Salvian the Presbyter of Marseilles (c. 400-c. 480). An important author for the history of his own time. He saw the fall of Roman civilization to the barbarians as a consequence of the reprehensible conduct of Roman Christians. In *The Governance of God* he developed the theme of divine providence.

Second Letter of Clement (c. 150). The so called *Second Letter of Clement* is an early Christian sermon probably written by a Corinthian author, though some scholars have assigned it to a Roman or Alexandrian author.

Sedulius, Coelius (fl. 425-450). Author of the *Paschale carmen*, a poem in five books, which focuses on the miraculous character of Christ's suffering. Sedulius learned philosophy in Italy and was later converted to Christianity by the presbyter Macedonius. He has at times been confused with the poet Sedulius Scotus (ninth century). He is also known for the similarly themed *Paschale opus*, among other works.

Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian (256). One of many Carthaginian councils convened in response to the controversy surrounding rebaptisms. All bishops present, including Cyprian, deemed that baptism administered by heretics was invalid and necessitated rebaptism, a position later revised by Augustine.

Severian of Gabala (fl. c. 400). A contemporary of John Chrysostom, he was a highly regarded preacher in Constantinople, particularly at the imperial court, and ultimately sided with Chrysostom's accusers. He wrote homilies on Genesis.

Severus of Antioch (fl. 488-538). A monophysite theologian, consecrated bishop of Antioch in 522. Born in Pisidia, he studied in Alexandria and Beirut, taught in Constantinople and was exiled to Egypt.

Shenoute (c. 350-466). Abbot of Athribis in Egypt. His large monastic community was known for very strict rules. He accompanied Cyril of Alexandria to the Council of Ephesus in 431, where he played an important

role in deposing Nestorius. He knew Greek but wrote in Coptic, and his literary activity includes homilies, catecheses on monastic subjects, letters, and a couple of theological treatises.

Shepherd of Hermas (second century). Divided into five *Visions*, twelve *Mandates* and ten *Similitudes*, this Christian apocalypse was written by a former slave and named for the form of the second angel said to have granted him his visions. This work was highly esteemed for its moral value and was used as a textbook for catechumens in the early church.

Sibylline Oracles (second century B.C.-second century A.D.) An apocryphal collection of Greek prophecies. Spanning the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., the collection is the product of Christian redaction of Jewish adaptations and expansions of pagan Greek oracles.

Socrates (Scholasticus) (c. 380-450). Greek historian and lawyer from Constantinople. His *Ecclesiastical History*, meant to continue the work of Eusebius, comprises seven books, each covering the reign of one emperor between 306 and 439.

Sophronius of Jerusalem (Sophronius Sophistes) (c. 550-638). Patriarch of Jerusalem (634-638) and opponent of monothelitism. Born in Damascus of Arabic descent, Sophronius became a monk and friend to John Moschus at a monastery near Jerusalem, though he also ministered in Sinai, Egypt and Italy.

Stephen of Hnes (Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna) (seventh century?). Bishop of Hnes who built two small chapels, or monasteries, in the district of Cusae in upper Egypt. He wrote a panegyric to Apollo the archimandrite of the monastery of Isaac. Apollo, who had met the Patriarch Severus of Antioch just before his death in 538, was Stephen's spiritual father. He wrote another encomium to St. Helias who was later venerated by her followers in the cult of St. Helias.

Sulpicius Severus (c. 360-c. 420). An eccle-

siastical writer from Bordeaux born of noble parents. Devoting himself to monastic retirement, he became a personal friend and enthusiastic disciple of St. Martin of Tours.

Symeon the New Theologian (c. 949-1022). Compassionate spiritual leader known for his strict rule. He believed that the divine light could be perceived and received through the practice of mental prayer.

Syncretica (fifth century). Egyptian nun known from collected sayings and a fifth-century *Life*. Syncretica began ascetic practices in her parents' Alexandria home and after their death retired to desert life. Until succumbing to illness in her eighties, she was a spiritual leader to women who gathered to learn from her piety.

Synesios of Cyrene (c. 370-c. 413). Bishop of Ptolemais elected in 410. Born of a noble pagan family, Synesios studied in Alexandria under the neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia. His work includes nine hymns that present a complex Trinitarian theology with neoplatonic influences.

Synod of Alexandria (362). A gathering of Egyptian bishops and Nicene delegates, called by Athanasius after the death of Constantius. The synod published a letter that expressed anti-Arian agreement on Trinitarian language.

Tarasius of Constantinople (d. 806). Patriarch of Constantinople from 784. Tarasius promoted reconciliation between Eastern and Western churches. At his urging Empress Irene II called the Second Council of Nicaea (787) to address debates over iconoclasm.

Tatian (second century). Christian apologist from the East who studied under Justin in Rome, returning to his old country after his mentor's martyrdom. Famous for his Gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron*, Tatian also wrote *Address to the Greeks*, which was a defense of Christianity addressed to the pagan world.

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155/160-225/250; fl. c. 197-222). Brilliant Carthaginian apologist and polemicist who laid the foundations

of Christology and trinitarian orthodoxy in the West, though he himself was later estranged from the catholic tradition due to its laxity.

Theodore bar Koni (d. 845). Important Nestorian author and apologist who taught at the school of Kashkar [Iraq] in Beth Aramaye and later became metropolitan of Beth Garmai. Numerous works are attributed to him, though only a collection of scholia on the Old and New Testaments which offers a defense of East Syrian Christianity and refutations of Islam and various heresies is extant. He also wrote an ecclesiastical history that provided a glimpse into the lives of Nestorian patriarchs, a book on logic, and treatises against monophysitism and Arianism.

Theodore of Heraclea (d. c. 355). An anti-Nicene bishop of Thrace. He was part of a team seeking reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christianity. In 343 he was excommunicated at the council of Sardica. His writings focus on a literal interpretation of Scripture.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428). Bishop of Mopsuestia, founder of the Antiochene, or literalistic, school of exegesis. A great man in his day, he was later condemned as a precursor of Nestorius.

Theodore of Tabennesi (d. 368) Vice general of the Pachomian monasteries (c. 350-368) under Horsiesi. Several of his letters are known.

Theodoret of Cyr (c. 393-466). Bishop of Cyr (Cyrrhus), he was an opponent of Cyril who commented extensively on Old Testament texts as a lucid exponent of Antiochene exegesis.

Theodotus of Ancyra (d. before 446). Bishop of Ancyra in Galatia and friend-turned-enemy of Nestorius. He fought against John of Antioch who consequently excommunicated him. Several of his works are extant.

Theodotus the Valentinian (second century). Likely a Montanist who may have been related to the Alexandrian school. Extracts of his

work are known through writings of Clement of Alexandria.

Theophanes (775-845). Hymnographer and bishop of Nicaea (842-845). He was persecuted during the second iconoclastic period for his support of the Seventh Council (Second Council of Nicaea, 787). He wrote many hymns in the tradition of the monastery of Mar Sabbas that were used in the *Paraklitiki*.

Theophilus of Alexandria (d. 412). Patriarch of Alexandria (385-412) and the uncle of his successor, Cyril. His patriarchate was known for his opposition to paganism, having destroyed the Serapeion and its library in 391, but he also built many churches. He also was known for his political machinations against his theological enemies, especially John Chrysostom, whom he himself had previously consecrated as patriarch, ultimately getting John removed from his see and earning the intense dislike of Antioch Christians. He is, however, venerated among the Copts and Syrians, among whom many of his sermons have survived, although only a few are deemed authentically his. His *Homily on the Mystical Supper*, commenting on the Last Supper, is perhaps one of his most well known.

Theophilus of Antioch (late second century). Bishop of Antioch. His only surviving work is *Ad Autholycum*, where we find the first Christian commentary on Genesis and the first use of the term Trinity. Theophilus's apologetic literary heritage had influence on Irenaeus and possibly Tertullian.

Theophylact of Ohrid (c. 1050-c. 1108).

Byzantine archbishop of Ohrid (or Achrida) in what is now Bulgaria. Drawing on earlier works, he wrote commentaries on several Old Testament books and all of the New Testament except for Revelation.

Third Council of Constantinople (681).

The Sixth Ecumenical Council, convoked by Constantine IV to resolve the Monothelite controversy. The council's decree affirmed the doctrine that Christ's two natures correspond

to two distinct wills and two energies.

Treatise on Rebaptism (third century). An anonymous treatise arguing, possibly against Cyprian, that those receiving baptism by heretics in the name of Jesus ought not be rebaptized.

Tyconius (c. 330-390). A lay theologian and exegete of the Donatist church in North Africa who influenced Augustine. His *Book of Rules* is the first manual of scriptural interpretation in the Latin West. In 380 he was excommunicated by the Donatist council at Carthage.

Valentinian Exposition (second century). A type of secret catechism for those who were to be initiated into the Valentinian version of gnosis. It provided an exposition of the origin of creation and was also concerned with the process of how our salvation is achieved in light of the myth of Sophia. There are references to the sacramental rituals of baptism and the Eucharist and also early evidences of the disagreements and theological controversies that existed among Valentinian theologians.

Valentinus (fl. c. 140). Alexandrian heretic of the mid second century who taught that the material world was created by the transgression of God's Wisdom, or Sophia (see Gnostics).

Valerian of Cimiez (fl. c. 422-439). Bishop of Cimiez. He participated in the councils of Riez (439) and Vaison (422) with a view to strengthening church discipline. He supported Hilary of Arles in quarrels with Pope Leo I.

Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530-c. 610). Latin poet. In 597 Venantius was appointed bishop of Poitiers, where he had served the community of former queen Radegunde since 567. His works include lives of saints and two hymns that were soon incorporated into Western liturgy.

Verecundus (d. 552). An African Christian writer, who took an active part in the christological controversies of the sixth century, especially in the debate on Three Chapters.

He also wrote allegorical commentaries on the nine liturgical church canticles.

Victor of Cartenna (fifth century). Bishop of Cartenna in Mauretania Caesariensis to whom Gennadius attributed *Adversus Arianos*. Other works have been attributed to him, including select works associated with Pseudo-Ambrose and Pseudo-Basil.

Victor of Vita (fl. 480/481-484). Bishop of Vita in the Byzacena province and author of a history of the Vandal persecution in Africa. There is disagreement over the details of his life.

Victorinus of Petovium (d. c. 304). Latin biblical exegete. With multiple works attributed to him, his sole surviving work is the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* and perhaps some fragments from *Commentary on Matthew*. Victorinus expressed strong millenarianism in his writing, though his was less materialistic than the millenarianism of Papias or Irenaeus. In his allegorical approach he could be called a spiritual disciple of Origen. Victorinus died during the first year of Diocletian's persecution, probably in 304.

Vigilius of Thapsus (fl. c. 484). Bishop of Thapsus, who took part in talks between Catholics and Arians at Carthage in 484. Vigilius was the author of *Contra Eutychemet* and the *Dialogus contra arianos, sabellianos et photinianos*, and probably *Contra Felicianum*.

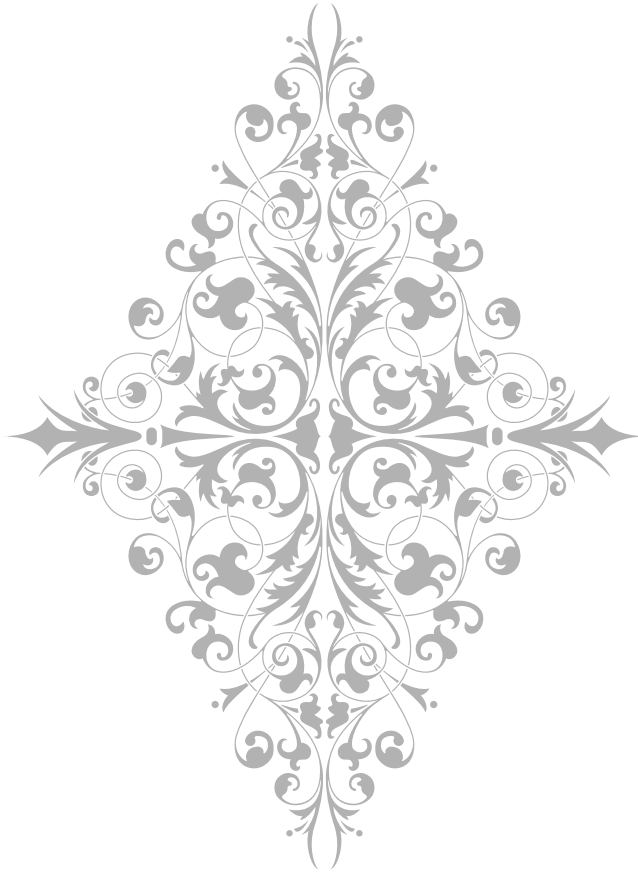
Vincent of Lérins (d. before 450). Monk who has exerted considerable influence through his writings on orthodox dogmatic theological method, as contrasted with the theological methodologies of the heresies.

Walafridius (Walahfrid) Strabo (808-849). Frankish monk, writer and student of Rabanus Maurus. Walafridius was made abbot of the monastery of Reichenau in 838 but was exiled in 840, when one of the sons of Emperor Louis the Pious—to whom Walafridius was loyal—invaded Reichenau. He was restored in 842 and died in 849. His writings include poetry, commentaries on scripture, lives of saints and

a historical explanation of the liturgy. Though he is technically an early medieval writer, his works are included

Zephyrinus (d. 217). Bishop of Rome from 199 to 217. Renewed his predecessor Victor's condemnation of the adoptionism being taught in Rome by Theodotus of Byzantium and re-admitted the excommunicated modalist bishop Natalius upon the latter's repentance, but as a

layperson. Much of what we know about him is from the work of Hippolytus, whose negative opinion of Zephyrinus may have been colored by his antagonism toward Zephyrinus's successor, Callistus. The epistles attributed to Zephyrinus are now considered spurious (part of the so-called False Decretals of the ninth century) but are included as possibly reflecting earlier thought.



TIMELINE OF WRITERS OF THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

The following chronology will assist readers in locating patristic writers, writings and recipients of letters referred to in this patristic commentary. Persons are arranged chronologically according to the terminal date of the years during which they flourished (fl.) or, where that cannot be determined, the date of death or approximate date of writing or influence. Writings are arranged according to the approximate date of composition. This list is cumulative with respect to all volumes of the ACCS.

Timeline of Writers of the Patristic Period

Location	British Isles	Gaul	Spain, Portugal	Rome* and Italy	Carthage and Northern Africa
Period 2nd century				Clement of Rome, fl. c. 92-101 (Greek)	
				<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i> , c. 140 (Greek)	
				Justin Martyr (Ephesus, Rome), c. 100/110-165 (Greek)	
				Tatian (Rome/Syria), 2nd cent. (Greek)	
				<i>Muratorian Fragment</i> , 2nd cent. (Latin [orig. Greek])	
				Valentinus the Gnostic (Rome), fl. c. 140 (Greek)	
				Hegesippus, 2nd cent. (Greek)	
			Irenaeus of Lyons, c. 135-c. 202 (Greek)	Marcion (Rome), fl. 144 (Greek)	
				Heracleon, 145-180 (Greek)	
				Zephyrinus (Rome), regn. 199-217	Tertullian of Carthage, c. 155/160-c. 225 (Latin)
3rd century				Callistus of Rome, regn. 217-222 (Latin)	
				Minucius Felix of Rome, fl. 218-235 (Latin)	
				Hippolytus (Rome, Palestine?), fl. 222-235/245 (Greek)	
				Novatian of Rome, fl. 235-258 (Latin)	Cyprian of Carthage, fl. 248-258 (Latin)
					Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian, 256 (Latin)
				<i>Treatise on Rebaptism</i> , 3rd cent. (Latin)	
				Victorinus of Petovium, 230-304 (Latin)	

*One of the five ancient patriarchates

Alexandria* and Egypt	Constantinople* and Asia Minor, Greece	Antioch* and Syria	Mesopotamia, Persia	Jerusalem* and Palestine	Location Unknown
Philo of Alexandria, c. 20 B.C. - c. A.D. 50 (Greek)				Flavius Josephus (Rome), c. 37-c. 101 (Greek)	
Basilides (Alexandria), 2nd cent. (Greek)	Polycarp of Smyrna, c. 69-155 (Greek) <i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i> , c. 160 (Greek)	Ignatius of Antioch, c. 35-107/112 (Greek) <i>Didache</i> (Egypt?), c. 100 (Greek)			
<i>Letter of Barnabas</i> (Syria?), c. 130 (Greek)	Aristides, 2nd cent. (Greek)	<i>Odes of Solomon</i> (perhaps also Palestine or Egypt), early 2nd cent. (Syriac/Aramaic)			
<i>Gospel of Truth</i> (Egypt?), 2nd cent. (Coptic/Greek)	Papias of Hierapolis, c. early 2nd cent. (Greek)				<i>Second Letter of Clement</i> (spurious; Corinth, Rome, Alexandria?) c. 150, (Greek)
Valentinian Exposition, 2nd cent. (Greek)					
Theodotus the Valentinian, 2nd cent. (Greek)	Athenagoras (Greece), fl. 176-180 (Greek)				
<i>Epistula Apostolorum</i> , mid 2nd cent. (Greek [Coptic/Ethiopic])	Melito of Sardis, d. c. 190 (Greek)			Julius Africanus, c. 160-c. 240 (Greek)	
	<i>Acts of Paul and Thecla</i> , 2nd cent. (Greek)	<i>Gospel of Peter</i> , late 2nd cent. (Greek)			
	<i>Acts of Peter</i> , c. 190 (Greek)	Theophilus of Antioch, c. late 2nd cent. (Greek)			
Clement of Alexandria, c. 150-215 (Greek)	<i>Montanist Oracles</i> , late 2nd cent. (Greek)				
Sabellius (Egypt), 2nd-3rd cent. (Greek)		<i>Gospel of Philip</i> (Syria, Egypt?) 2nd or 3rd cent. (Coptic/Greek)			
<i>Letter to Diognetus</i> , 3rd cent. (Greek)		Bardesanes, 154-222 (Syriac)			
		<i>Acts of Thomas</i> , c. 225 (Syriac)	Mani (Manichaeans), c. 216-276 (Persian/Syriac)		Pseudo-Clementines 3rd cent. (Greek)
Origen (Alexandria, Caesarea of Palestine), 185-254 (Greek)	Firmilian of Caesarea, fl. c. 230-c. 268 (Greek)	<i>Didascalia Apostolorum</i> , early 3rd cent. (Syriac)			
	Gregory Thaumaturgus (Neo-caesarea), fl. c. 248-264 (Greek)				
Dionysius of Alexandria, d. 264/5 (Greek)					
	Methodius of Olympus (Lycia), d. c. 311 (Greek)				

Timeline of Writers of the Patristic Period

Location	British Isles	Gaul	Spain, Portugal	Rome* and Italy	Carthage and Northern Africa
4th century		Lactantius, c. 260- 330 (Latin)		Firmicus Maternus (Sicily), fl. c. 335 (Latin)	Arnobius of Sicca, d. c. 327 (Latin)
			Hosius of Cordova, d. 357 (Latin)	Marius Victorinus (Rome), fl. 355-363 (Latin)	
			Potamius of Lisbon, fl. c. 350-360 (Latin)	Eusebius of Vercelli, fl. c. 360 (Latin)	
		Hilary of Poitiers, c. 315-367 (Latin)	Gregory of Elvira, fl. 359-385 (Latin)	Lucifer of Cagliari (Sardinia), d. 370/371 (Latin)	
				Damasus of Rome, c. 304-384 (Latin)	Optatus of Milevis, 4th cent. (Latin)
				Ambrosiaster (Italy?), fl. c. 366-384 (Latin)	
				Filastrius of Brescia, fl. 380 (Latin)	
			Pacian of Barcelona, 4th cent. (Latin)	Faustinus (Rome), fl. 380 (Latin)	
			Prudentius, c. 348-c. 410 (Latin)	Faustus of Riez, fl. c. 380 (Latin)	Isaiah of Scete, late 4th cent. (Greek)
	5th century		Egeria, 4th cent. (Latin)		Gaudentius of Brescia, fl. 395 (Latin)
		Phoebadius of Agen, d. c. 395 (Latin)		Ambrose of Milan, c. 333-397; fl. 374-397 (Latin)	Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 (Latin)
		<i>Athanasian Creed</i> , c. 4th or 5th cent. (Latin)		Paulinus of Milan, late 4th-early 5th cent. (Latin)	Synesios of Cyrene (Alexandria, Cyrene), c. 370-c. 413 (Greek)
Fastidius (Britain), c. 4th-5th cent. (Latin)		<i>Joseph's Bible Notes</i> , 4th or 5th cent. (Latin)		Rufinus (Aquilaia, Rome), c. 345-411 (Latin)	Possidius, late 4th-5th cent. (Latin)
		Sulpicius Severus (Bordeaux), c. 360-c. 420/425 (Latin)		Chromatius (Aquilaia), fl. 400 (Latin)	
		John Cassian (Palestine, Egypt, Constantinople, Rome, Marseilles), 360-432 (Latin)		Aponius, fl. 405-415 (Latin)	Luculentius, 5th cent. (Latin)
Sedulius, Coelius, fl. 425-450 (Latin)		Vincent of Lérins, d. 435 (Latin)		Pelagius (Britain, Rome), c. 354-c. 420 (Greek)	Quodvultdeus (Carthage), fl. 430 (Latin)
		Valerian of Cimiez, fl. c. 422-449 (Latin)		Maximus of Turin, d. 408/423 (Latin)	
		Eucherius of Lyons, fl. 420-449 (Latin)		Paulinus of Nola, 355-431 (Latin)	
		Hilary of Arles, c. 401-449 (Latin)		Peter Chrysologus (Ravenna), c. 380-450 (Latin)	Dracontius, 5th cent. (Latin)
			Julian of Eclanum, 386-454 (Latin)		

*One of the five ancient patriarchates

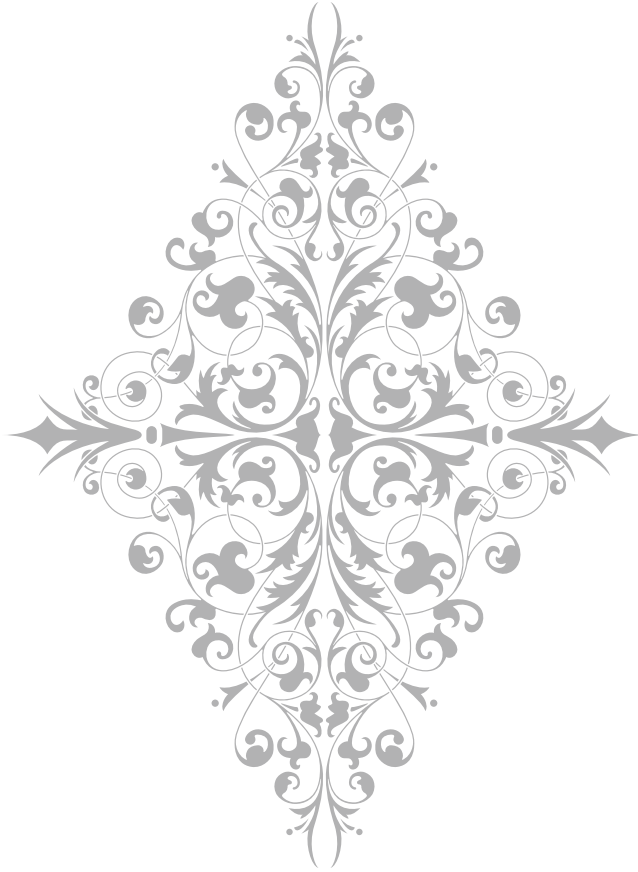
Alexandria* and Egypt	Constantinople* and Asia Minor, Greece	Antioch* and Syria	Mesopotamia, Persia	Jerusalem* and Palestine	Location Unknown
	Constantine, d. 337 (Greek)		Hegemonius, fl. early 4th cent. (Greek)		
Antony, c. 251-355 (Coptic /Greek)	Theodore of Heraclea (Thrace), fl. c. 330-355 (Greek)	Eustathius of Antioch, fl. 325 (Greek)	Aphrahat (Persia) c. 270-350; fl. 337-345 (Syriac)	Eusebius of Caesarea (Palestine), c. 260/263-340 (Greek)	Commodian, c. 3rd or 5th cent. (Latin)
Peter of Alexandria, d. c. 311 (Greek)	Marcellus of Ancyra, d. c. 375 (Greek)	Eusebius of Emesa, c. 300-c. 359 (Greek)			
Arius (Alexandria), fl. c. 320 (Greek)	Epiphanius of Salamis (Cyprus), c. 315-403 (Greek)	Ephrem the Syrian, c. 306-373 (Syriac)	Jacob of Nisibis, fl. 308-325 (Syriac)		
Alexander of Alexandria, fl. 312-328 (Greek)	Basil (the Great) of Caesarea, b. c. 330; fl. 357-379 (Greek)	Julian the Arian, c. 4th cent. (Greek)			
Pachomius, c. 292-347 (Coptic/Greek?)	Macrina the Younger, c. 327-379 (Greek)	First Creed of the Council of Antioch, 341 (Greek)			
Theodore of Tabennesi, d. 368 (Coptic/Greek)	Apollinaris of Laodicea, 310-c. 392 (Greek)				
Athanasius of Alexandria, c. 295-373; fl. 325-373 (Greek)	Gregory of Nazianzus, b. 329/330; fl. 372-389 (Greek)	Nemesius of Emesa (Syria), fl. late 4th cent. (Greek)			Maximinus, b. c. 360-365 (Latin)
Abba Pior, d. 373 (Coptic/Greek)	Gregory of Nyssa, c. 335-394 (Greek)	Diodore of Tarsus, d. c. 394 (Greek)		Acacius of Caesarea (Palestine), d. c. 365 (Greek)	
Horsiesi, c. 305-390 (Coptic/Greek)	Amphilochius of Iconium, c. 340/345- c. 398/404 (Greek)	John Chrysostom (Constantinople), 344/354-407 (Greek)		Cyril of Jerusalem, c. 315-386 (Greek)	
Macarius of Egypt, c. 300-c. 390 (Greek)	Evagrius of Pontus, 345-399 (Greek)	<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> , c. 375-400 (Greek)		John (II) of Jerusalem, late 4th-early 5th cent. (Greek)	
Abba John, date unknown (Coptic/Greek)		<i>Didascalia</i> , 4th cent. (Syriac)			
Didymus (the Blind) of Alexandria, 313-398 (Greek)	Eunomius of Cyzicus, fl. 360-394 (Greek)	Theodore of Mopsuestia, c. 350-428 (Greek)			
Tyconius, c. 330-390 (Latin)	Pseudo-Macarius (Mesopotamia?), late 4th cent. (Greek)	Acacius of Beroea, c. 340-c. 436 (Greek)		Diodore of Tarsus, d. c. 394 (Greek)	
Joseph of Thebes, 4th cent. (Coptic/Greek)	Nicetas of Remesiana, d. c. 414 (Latin)	Asterius the Homilist (Antioch), late 4th- early 5th (Greek)		Jerome (Rome, Antioch, Bethlehem), c. 347-420 (Latin)	
Ammonas, 4th cent. (Syriac)		<i>Book of Steps</i> , c. 400 (Syriac)			
Abba Moses, c. 332-407 (Coptic/Greek)	Socrates (Scholasticus), c. 380-450 (Greek)	Severian of Gabala, fl. c. 400 (Greek)			
Theophilus of Alexandria, d. 412 (Greek)	Theodotus of Ancyra, d. before 446 (Greek)				
Palladius of Helenopolis (Egypt), c. 365-425 (Greek)	Proclus of Constantinople, c. 390-446 (Greek)		Eznik of Kolb, fl. 430-450 (Armenian)	Philip the Priest (d. 455/56)	
Cyril of Alexandria, 375-444 (Greek)	Nestorius (Constantinople), c. 381-c. 451 (Greek)			Hesychius of Jerusalem, fl. 412-450 (Greek)	
Isidore of Pelusium, d. c. 440 (Greek)	Basil of Seleucia, fl. 440-468 (Greek)	Nilus of Ancyra, d. c. 430 (Greek)		Euthymius (Palestine), 377-473 (Greek)	
Hyperichius, c. 5th cent. (Coptic/Greek)	Diadochus of Photice (Macedonia), 400-474 (Greek)	John of Antioch, d. 441/2 (Greek)			

Timeline of Writers of the Patristic Period

Location	British Isles	Gaul	Spain, Portugal	Rome* and Italy	Carthage and Northern Africa
5th century (cont.)		Eusebius of Gaul, 5th cent. (Latin)			Victor of Cartenna, 5th cent. (Latin)
		Prosper of Aquitaine, c. 390-c. 463 (Latin)		Leo the Great (Rome), regn. 440-461 (Latin)	
		Salvian the Presbyter of Marseilles, c. 400-c. 480 (Latin)		Arnobius the Younger (Rome), fl. c. 450 (Latin)	
		Gennadius of Marseilles, d. after 496 (Latin)		Ennodius (Arles, Milan, Pavia) c. 473-521 (Latin)	Victor of Vita, fl. 480/481-484 (Latin)
		Julian Pomerius, late 5th-early 6th cent. (Latin)		Epiphanius the Latin, late 5th-early 6th cent. (Latin)	Vigilius of Thapsus, fl. c. 484 (Latin)
6th century		Caesarius of Arles, c. 470-543 (Latin)	Paschasius of Dumium (Portugal), c. 515-c. 580 (Latin)	Eugippius, c. 460- c. 533 (Latin)	Fulgentius of Ruspe, c. 467-532 (Latin)
	Gildas, 6th cent. (Latin)		Apringius of Beja, mid-6th cent. (Latin)	Benedict of Nursia, c. 480-547 (Latin)	Fastidiosus, late 5th-early 6th cent. (Latin)
			Leander of Seville, c. 545-c. 600 (Latin)	Cassiodorus (Calabria), c. 485-c. 540 (Latin)	Verecundus, d. 552 (Latin)
		Gregory of Tours, c. 538-594 (Latin)	Martin of Braga, fl. 568-579 (Latin)	Arator, c. 490-550 (Latin)	Primasius, fl. 550-560 (Latin)
7th century		Flavian of Chalon-sur-Saône, fl. 580-600 (Latin)	Isidore of Seville, c. 560-636 (Latin)	Gregory of Agrigentium, d. 592 (Greek)	Facundus of Hermiane, fl. 546-568 (Latin)
			Braulio of Saragossa, c. 585-651 (Latin)	Gregory the Great (Rome), c. 540-604 (Latin)	
			Ildefonsus of Toledo, mid 7th cent. (Latin)	Paterius, 6th/7th cent. (Latin)	
		Venantius Fortunatus (Gaul, Italy), c. 530-c. 610 (Latin)	Fructuosus of Braga, d. c. 665 (Latin)		
8th-12th century	Adamnan, c. 624-704 (Latin)				
	Bede the Venerable, c. 672/673-735 (Latin)	Rabanus Maurus (Frankish), c. 780-856 (Latin)			
	<i>Riddles in the Apocalypse</i> , 8th cent. (Latin)	Walafridius Strabo (Frankish), 808-849 (Latin)			
	Dhuoda, 9th cent. (Latin)				

*One of the five ancient patriarchates

Alexandria* and Egypt	Constantinople* and Asia Minor, Greece	Antioch* and Syria	Mesopotamia, Persia	Jerusalem* and Palestine	Location Unknown
Syncretica, 5th cent. (Coptic/Greek)	Callinicus, mid 5th cent. (Greek)				
Poemen, 5th cent. (Greek)	Gennadius of Constantinople, d. 471 (Greek)	Theodoret of Cyr, c. 393-466 (Greek)		Gerontius of Petra c. 395-c. 480 (Syriac)	
Besa the Copt, 5th cent. (Sahidic)		Pseudo-Victor of Antioch, 5th cent. (Greek)			
Shenoute, c. 350-466 (Coptic)		John of Apamea, 5th cent. (Syriac)			
Ammonius of Alexandria, late 5th-early 6th cent. (Greek)				Barsanuphius and John, 5th/6th cent. (Greek)	
Olympiodorus, early 6th cent. (Greek)	Andrew of Caesarea (Cappadocia), early 6th cent. (Greek)	Philoxenus of Mabbug (Syria), c. 440-523 (Syriac)	Jacob of Sarug, c. 450-520 (Syriac)	Procopius of Gaza (Palestine), c. 465-530 (Greek)	Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, fl. c. 500 (Greek)
	Oecumenius (Isauria), 6th cent. (Greek)	Severus of Antioch, c. 465-538 (Greek)	Babai, early 6th cent. (Syriac)	Dorotheus of Gaza, fl. 525-540 (Greek)	
	Romanus Melodus, fl. c. 536-556 (Greek)	Mark the Hermit (Tarsus), c. 6th cent. (4th cent.?) (Greek)		Cyril of Scythopolis, b. c. 525; d. after 557 (Greek)	
	Justinian the Emperor, 482-565 (Greek)	Anastasius I of Antioch, d. 598/599 (Latin)	Abraham of Nathpar, fl. 6th-7th cent. (Syriac)		(Pseudo-) Constantius, before 7th cent.? (Greek)
	Maximus the Confessor (Constantinople), c. 580-662 (Greek)		Babai the Great, c. 550-628 (Syriac)		
Anastasius of Sinai (Egypt, Syria), d. c. 700 (Greek)	Germanus of Constantinople, c. 640-c. 733 (Greek)	Sahdona/Martyrius, fl. 635-640 (Syriac)	Isaac of Nineveh, d. c. 700 (Syriac)	Sophronius of Jerusalem, c. 550-638 (Greek)	Andreas, c. 7th cent. (Greek)
	Andrew of Crete, c. 660-740 (Greek)	John of Damascus (John the Monk), c. 650-750 (Greek)		Cosmas Melodus, c. 675-751 (Greek)	
Stephen of Hnes, 7th cent. (Coptic)	John of Carpathus, 7th-8th cent. (Greek)		John the Elder of Qardu (north Iraq), 8th cent. (Syriac)		
	Tarasius of Constantinople, d. 806 (Greek)				
	Theophanes (Nicaea), 775-845 (Greek)	Theodore bar Koni, d. 845 (Syriac)			
	Cassia (Constantinople), c. 805-c. 848/867 (Greek)		Isho'dad of Merv, d. after 852 (Syriac)		
	Photius (Constantinople), c. 820-891 (Greek)				
	Arethas of Caesarea (Constantinople/Caesarea), c. 860-940 (Greek)				
	Gregory of Narek, 950-1003 (Armenian)				
	Symeon the New Theologian (Constantinople), 949-1022 (Greek)				
	Theophylact of Ohrid (Bulgaria), 1050-1126 (Greek)				



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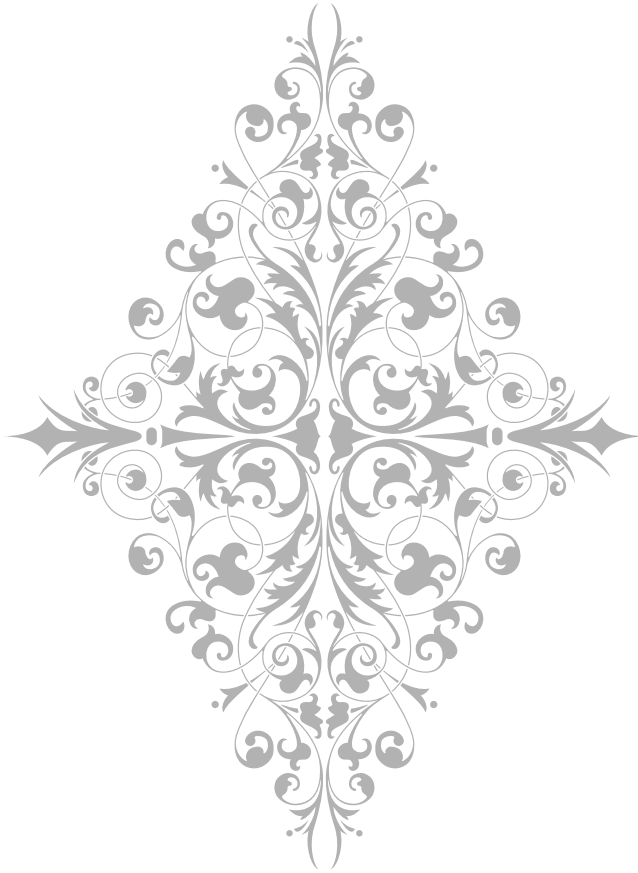
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