An Address on Religious Instruction

THE TEXT

INTRODUCTION

Religious instruction is an essential duty of the leaders “of the mystery of our religion.” By it the Church is enlarged through the addition of those who are saved, while “the sure word which accords with the [traditional] teaching” comes within the hearing of unbelievers. The same method of teaching, however, is not suitable for everyone who approaches this word. Rather must we adapt religious instruction to the diversities of religion. While we keep in view the same objective in our teaching, we cannot use the same arguments in each case. A man of the Jewish faith has certain presuppositions; a man reared in Hellenism, others. The Anomoeans, the Manichaeans, the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, and the rest on the list of those astray in heresy, have their preconceptions, and make it necessary for us to attack their underlying ideas in each case. For we must adapt our method of therapy to the form of the disease. You will not heal the polytheism of the Greek in the same way as the Jew’s disbelief about the only-begotten God. Nor, in the case of those astray in heresy, will you refute their erroneous doctrinal inventions all in the same way. For the arguments which might correct a Sabellian are of no help to an Anomoean; nor is our contro-

1 Logos katēkhētikos: generally rendered “Catechetical Oration.” In some manuscripts the title reads “The Great Catechism.”
2 I Tim. 3:16.
3 Titus 1:9.
4 The Anomoeans were extreme Arians who emphasized that the Son was unlike (anomoeios) the Father. The Manichaeans were dualists who distinguished the ultimate principles of light and darkness and attributed the sensible creation to the latter. Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides were the leaders of second-century Gnosticism. Sabellian, in this same paragraph, refers to the doctrine which confused the Son with the Father.
excluded. Nor in respect to ancient and modern, since what does not always exist is alien to the idea of God.

If, then, goodness, righteousness, wisdom, and power are equally ascribed [to the Deity], and incorruption, eternity, and every thought compatible with religion are similarly acknowledged, all difference is in every way excluded. Excluded, too, from his doctrine is a plurality of gods, for the identity throughout brings him round to the conviction of the unity.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND HIS WORD

1. Our religious teaching, however, is able to discern some distinction of Persons in the unity. Therefore, in order to guard our controversy with the Greeks from lapsing into Judaism, we must rectify any error in this regard by making a further fine distinction. Now, those who do not accept our teaching do not suppose the divine to be without reason; and this acknowledgment of theirs will make our doctrine sufficiently intelligible to them. For he who grants that God is not without reason will agree that one who is not without reason certainly has it. The same term to be sure, we use of human reason. Therefore, if he says that he conceives God's reason by analogy with our nature, he will thus be driven to a higher conception. For it is necessary to hold that reason, like all the other attributes, corresponds to the nature [involved].

In humanity we observe a certain power and life and wisdom. But, by using the same words, no one would attribute to God the same life, power, and wisdom [as ours]. Rather are such expressions reduced in meaning to correspond to the measure of our nature. For since our nature is corruptible and weak, for this reason our life is fleeting, our power unsubstantial, and our reason unstable. In reference, however, to the transcendent nature, everything said of it is raised to a higher degree by virtue of the greatness of the object we contemplate.

If, then, we attribute the spoken word to God, it will not be thought to derive its subsistence from the impulse of the

5 Hypostasis, in the sense of a distinct center of being.
6 Alōgος, not having his Logos or Word. The difficulties of translation here are insurmountable. Gregory plays on the double meaning of logos as reason and a spoken word. God's Word, in Gregory, being a distinct center of being, is personal. Hence the corresponding pronoun should properly be "he." In the translation, however, "it" has been frequently, but not always, used to bring out the analogy he makes between God's Word and "a spoken word."
7 Logos.

speaker, and like our speech to pass into nonexistence. But just as our nature, by being perishable, has a speech which is perishable, so the incorruptible and eternal nature has a speech which is eternal and substantial. If, accordingly, it is granted that God's spoken word subsists eternally, it is necessary to admit that the subsistence of the Word is enwined with life. For it is irreverent to suppose that the Word subsists in a lifeless state in the way of stones. But if it subsists as something capable of thought and immaterial, it certainly possesses life; whereas, if it is deprived of life, it certainly has no subsistence. But we have proved that it is impious to say that God's Word does not subsist. Accordingly, we have also established that we must think of this Word as possessed of life.

Now, since the nature of the Word is with good cause held to be simple and evidences neither a double nor a composite character, one cannot consider that it possesses life by participating in it. For such a conception, which holds that one thing participates in another, would not exclude the idea of a composite character. Rather are we compelled to admit, having acknowledged its simplicity, that the Word possesses its own life, and does not participate in life.

If, then, the Word has life because it is life, it certainly has the faculty of will; for no living thing is without it. It is religious, too, to conclude that this faculty of will has the power to act. For if one were to deny that it had this power, one would surely imply that it was powerless. But impotence is very remote from our conception of the divine. For the divine nature displays no incongruity, and we are compelled to admit that the Word has power to carry out its purpose. Otherwise, a mixture or concurrence of opposites would be observed in a simple nature. The same purpose would display both power and lack of it, if it were capable of one thing and incapable of another.

We must, too, admit that the will of the Word, though capable of everything, has no inclination toward evil. For inclination toward evil is foreign to the divine nature. But whatever is good, it wills; and having willed it, it is altogether able to do it. Being able, it is not inoperative; but it brings to effect every good purpose.

Now, the world, and all the wise and skillful arrangement it displays, is something good. All this, then, is the work of the Word, which, living and subsisting because it is God's Word, has the faculty of will because it lives. It is capable of doing whatever it purposes, and it chooses what is absolutely good
and wise and everything else indicative of excellence. The world, then, is admitted to be something good, and we have already proved it is the work of the Word, which both chooses the good and can do it. This Word, however, is different from Him whose it is. For in a way it is a relative term, since “the Word” certainly implies the Father of the Word. For there cannot be a word without its being someone’s word. If, then, by its relative significance, those who hear the term mentally distinguish between the Word itself and Him from whom it comes, our religion is no longer in danger, by virtue of our controversy with Greek notions, of agreeing with those who espouse the tenets of Judaism. Rather do we equally avoid the absurdity of both viewpoints. We acknowledge God’s living Word as active and creative—a doctrine the Jew does not accept; and we admit no distinction in nature between the Word and Him from whom it comes.

In our own case we say that a spoken word comes from the mind, and is neither entirely identical with it nor altogether different. For by being derived from something else, it is different and not identical with it. Yet, since it reflects the mind, it can no longer be thought to be different from it, but is one with it in nature, though distinct as a subject. So the Word of God, by having its own subsistence, is distinct from Him from whom it derives its subsistence. On the other hand, by manifesting in itself the attributes to be seen in God, it is identical in nature with Him who is recognized by the same characteristics. In whatever way one indicates the conception of the Father, whether by goodness, or power, or wisdom, or eternal being, or freedom from evil, death, and corruption, or complete perfection, by the same attributes he will recognize the Word derived from him.

The Holy Spirit

2. Our knowledge of the Word comes from applying, in a raised degree, our own attributes to the transcendent nature. In just the same way we shall be brought to the conception of the Spirit, by observing in our own nature certain hints and likenesses of this ineffable power. In our own case, indeed,

8 Anagōgiká. A technical phrase to indicate the mystical process of ascent by which one rises to a consideration of the noetic word from the facts of the phenomenal word. Origen uses the term frequently in connection with the mystical interpretation of Scripture.

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“spirit” (i.e., breath) is a drawing in of the air; and we are so constructed that something foreign to the constitution of the body is inhaled and exhaled. In the moment we give expression to a word, our breath becomes an intelligible utterance which indicates what we have in mind. In the case of the divine nature, too, we think it reverent to hold that God has a Spirit, just as we admitted that he has a Word. For it is not right that God’s Word should be more defective than our own, which would be the case if, since our word is associated with breath (spirit), we were to believe he lacked a Spirit. Yet we must not imagine that, in the way of our own breath, something alien and extraneous to God flows into him and becomes the divine Spirit in him.

When we heard of the Word of God, we did not suppose that the Word was something without subsistence, that it was dependent on acquired knowledge, or uttered by a voice, or ceased to exist when once uttered. We did not think that it was subject to such conditions as we observe in the case of our own word; but [we contended] that it had its own real subsistence, and, having the faculty of will, was active and all-powerful.

In the same way, when we learn that God has a Spirit, which accompanies his Word and manifests his activity, we do not think of it as an emission of breath. For we should degrade the majesty of God’s power were we to conceive of his Spirit in the same way as ours. On the contrary, we think of it as a power really existing by itself and in its own special subsistence. It is not able to be separated from God in whom it exists, or from God’s Word which it accompanies. It is not dissipated into non-existence; but like God’s Word it has its own subsistence, is capable of willing, and is self-moved and active. It ever chooses the good; and to fulfill its every purpose it has the power that answers to its will.

The Mean Between Judaism and Hellenism

3. In effect, a studied examination of the depths of this mystery does, in a veiled way, give a man a fair, inward apprehension of our teaching on the knowledge of God. He cannot, of course, express the ineffable depth of the mystery in words, how the same thing is subject to number and yet escapes it; how it is observed to have distinctions and is yet grasped as a unity; how it admits distinction of Persons, and yet is not

9 Pneuma, which has the double sense of breath and spirit.
ours. But our utterances, and the breath which accompanies them, are inoperative and without subsistence. Absolutely ineffective, then, and without subsistence do they prove God’s Word and Spirit to be, who degrade the divine to resemble our word. But if, as David says, the heavens were established by the Word of the Lord and their powers were fashioned by the Spirit of God, then that mystery of the truth is substantiated which leads us to speak of a Word with essential being and a Spirit with subsistence.

THE CREATION OF MAN

5. Neither Greek nor Jew, perhaps, will contest the existence of God’s Word and Spirit—the one depending on his innate ideas, the other on the Scriptures. Both, however, will equally reject the plan by which God’s Word became man, as something incredible and unbefitting to say of God. We shall, then, take a different point of departure in order to convince our opponents about this.

Either they believe that with reason and wisdom all things were created by Him who fashioned the universe, or else they find even this hard to believe. Now, if they will not grant that reason and wisdom govern the constitution of things, they will set up unreason and unskillfulness as the ruling principle of the universe. But if this is absurd and irreligious, it is clearly admitted that they will acknowledge that reason and wisdom govern existing things.

From what we have already said we have proved that the Word of God is no mere utterance or a state of possessing some knowledge or wisdom. It is a power existing in its own right, able to will all good and having the power to do everything it wills. Since, too, the world is good, this power which prefers and creates the good is the cause of it. Now if the existence of the whole universe depends on the power of the Word, as our argument has indicated, we must necessarily suppose that there is no other cause by which the different parts of the universe were created than the Word himself. Through him they all came into being.

If anyone wants to call him Word or Wisdom or Power or God or any other sublime or dignified title, we shall not contest the point. For whatever word or name is invented to indicate this subject, it expresses the same thing, viz., the eternal Power

4. If, however, this is contested by the Jew, we shall not find it equally as hard to answer him [as the Greek]. For we shall show him the truth out of the very teachings in which he has been reared. For that God has a Word and a Spirit—powers which have an independent being and which created and embrace all that exists—can be very clearly shown from the divinely inspired Scriptures. It is sufficient for us to mention a single proof text, and to leave those who are more ambitious to discover others.

Scripture says, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all their power by the Spirit [breath] of his mouth.” 10 By what Word? By what Spirit? For “the Word” [in this passage] is not an utterance, and “the Spirit” is not a breath. The divine, indeed, would be degraded to the level of our human nature, were it held that the Creator of the universe used such a word and such a breath. What power do words or breath have that would suffice to make the heavens and the powers in them? For, did God’s Word resemble our utterance, and his Spirit our breath, their power would be altogether similar; and God’s Word would have only as much force as

10 Ps. 33:6.

11 Proektikên, meaning uncertain.
of God, which creates what exists, contrives what is non-existent, sustains what is created, and foresees the future. This, then, is the implication of our argument: that he who is God the Word and Wisdom and Power created human nature. He was not, indeed, driven by any necessity to form man; but out of his abundant love he fashioned and created such a creature. For it was not right that light should remain unseen, or glory unacknowledged, or goodness unenjoyed, or that any other aspect we observe of the divine nature should lie idle with no one to share or enjoy it.

If, then, man came into being for these reasons, viz., to participate in the divine goodness, he had to be fashioned in such a way as to fit him to share in this goodness. For just as the eye shares in light through having by nature an inherent brightness in it, and by this innate power attracts what is akin to itself, so something akin to the divine had to be mingled with human nature. In this way its desire would correspond to something native to it. Even the natures of irrational creatures, whose lot is to live in water or air, are fashioned to correspond with their mode of life. In each case the particular way their bodies are formed makes the air or the water appropriate and congenial to them. In the same way man, who was created to enjoy God’s goodness, had to have some element in his nature akin to what he was to share. Hence he was endowed with life, reason, wisdom, and all the good things of God, so that by each of them his desires might be directed to what was natural to him. And since immortality is one of the good attributes of the divine nature, it was essential that the constitution of our nature should not be deprived of this. It had to have an immortal element, so that it might, by this inherent faculty, recognize the transcendent and have the desire for God’s immortality.

The account of creation sums all this up in a single expression when it says that man was created “in the image of God.” For the likeness implied by the term “image” comprehends all the divine attributes; and whatever Moses relates by way of a narrative, presenting doctrines in the form of a story, has the same teaching in mind. For the Garden he mentions and the particular fruits, the eating of which does not satisfy the belly but grants to those who taste of them knowledge and eternal life—all this corresponds to what we have been saying about man, how our nature in its origin was good and set in the midst of goodness.

**The Nature of Evil and the Fall of Man**

But someone perhaps, with an eye to our present situation, will contest what we have said. He will imagine he can refute the truth of our argument by the fact that we do not now see man in this original state, but in an almost entirely opposite condition. For where is the soul’s likeness to God? Where is the body’s freedom from suffering? Where is eternal life? Man’s life is fleeting, subject to passion, mortal, liable in soul and body to every type of suffering. Saying this sort of thing and running down our nature, he will suppose he can refute our contention about man. To this our reply will be brief, in order not to interrupt the sequence of our argument.

The fact that human life is at present in an unnatural condition is insufficient proof that man was never created in a state of goodness. For since man is a work of God, who out of his goodness brought this creature into being, one cannot rightly suppose that he was made by his Creator in a state of evil. For his constitution had its origin in goodness. The cause of our present condition and of our being deprived of our former preferable state is to be found elsewhere. Here again the point of departure for our argument is not something with which our opponents will disagree. He who made man to share in His own goodness and so equipped his nature with the means of acquiring everything excellent that his desires might, in each case, correspond to that to which they were directed, would not have deprived him of the most excellent and precious of blessings—I mean the gift of liberty and free will. For were human life governed by necessity, the “image” would be falsified in that respect and so differ from the archetype. For how can a nature subject to necessity and in servitude be called an image of the sovereign nature? What, therefore, is in every respect made similar to the divine, must certainly possess free will and liberty by nature, so that participation in the good may be the reward of virtue.

But, you will ask, how came it that he who was honored with all excellence exchanged these blessings for something worse? The answer to this, too, is clear. The existence of evil did not have its origin in the divine will. For no blame, indeed, would
vides a mingling of the intelligible with the sensible creation. In that way, as the apostle says, “no part of creation is to be rejected,” 15 and no part fails to share in the divine fellowship.

On this account the divine nature produces in man a blending of the intelligible and the sensible, just as the account of Creation teaches. For God, it says, 16 made man by taking dust from the ground, and with his own breath planted life in the creature he had formed. In that way the earthly was raised to union with the divine, and a single grace equally extends through all creation, inasmuch as the lower nature is blended with that which transcends the world.

When the intelligible creation was already in existence, and the authority which governs all things had assigned a certain activity in connection with the framing of the universe to each of the angelic powers, one of them was appointed to maintain and take charge of the region of earth. He was equipped for this very purpose by the power which governs the universe. Then there was created that object formed of earth, which was an image of the power above; and this creature was man. In him was the divine excellence of the intelligible nature, an excellence blended with a certain ineffable power. In consequence that angelic power, which had been given the government of earth, took it amiss as something insufferable that, out of the nature subject to him, there should be produced a being to resemble the transcendent dignity.

It is irrelevant to our present purpose to explain in detail how one who was created for no evil end by Him who framed the universe in goodness fell into the passion of envy. Yet we may offer a brief explanation to those who care to hear it. We must not think of virtue as opposed to vice in the way of two existing phenomena. To illustrate: nonbeing is opposed to being; but we cannot say that the former is opposed to the latter as something existing in its own right. Rather do we say that there is a logical opposition between what does not exist and what exists. In the same way vice is opposed to the principle of virtue. It does not exist in its own right, but we think of it as the absence of the good. Again, we say that blindness is logically opposed to sight. But blindness does not by nature have real existence. On the contrary it is the privation of a former capacity. Similarly we say that vice should be viewed as the privation of the good, just as a shadow follows upon the withdrawal of the sun’s rays.

15 I Tim. 4:4.

16 Gen. 2:7.

14 I.e., a “myth” in the Platonic sense.
Uncreated nature is incapable of the movement implied in mutability, change, and variation. But everything that depends upon creation for its existence has an innate tendency to change. For the very existence of creation had its origin in change, non-being becoming being by divine power. Now that [angelic] power we have already mentioned was created, and by the movement of its own free will chose whatever it cared to. But it closed its eyes to the good and the generous; and just as one only sees darkness when one closes the eyelids in sunlight, so that power by its unwillingness to acknowledge the good contrived its opposite. That is how envy arose.

Now it is recognized that the first cause of a thing is responsible for what duly follows in its train. For instance, being in trim and at work, and leading a happy life, are consequent upon health; whereas weakness, inactivity, and feeling unwell follow upon sickness. All other things in the same way are consequent upon their particular causes. Just as freedom from passion, then, is the beginning and foundation of a life of virtue, so inclination to evil, arising through envy, paves the way for all the evils which are seen to follow it.

Now that angelic power who begot envy in himself by turning from the good developed an inclination toward evil. When this had once happened, he was like a rock breaking off from a mountain ridge and hurled headlong by its own weight. Divorced from his natural affinity with the good, he became prone to evil; and as if by a weight he was spontaneously impelled and carried to the final limit of iniquity. The capacity for thought, which he received from his Creator to help him to share in the good, he used to further his evil devices. Cunningly he cheats and deceives man by persuading him to become his own murderer and assassin.

Empowered by God’s blessing, man held a lofty position. He was appointed to rule over the earth and all the creatures on it. His form was beautiful, for he was created as the image of the archetypal beauty. By nature he was free from passion, for he was a copy of Him who is without passion. He was full of candor, reveling in the direct vision of God. But all this was tender for the adversary’s passionate envy. He could not fulfill his purpose by force or violence, for the power of God’s blessing was superior to such force. For this reason he contrived to tear man from the power which strengthened him, and so to render him an easy prey to his intrigue. Now in the case of a lamp, when the flame has caught the wick too much and one is unable to blow it out, one mixes water with the oil, and by this means dims the flame. In just such a way the adversary deceitfully mingled evil with man’s free will and thus in some measure quenched and obscured God’s blessing. When this failed, the opposite necessarily entered in. Now the opposite of life is death; in power, weakness; of blessing, cursing; of candor, shame; and of every good thing, its contrary. That is why humanity is in its present plight; for that beginning provided the occasion for such a conclusion.

God and Evil

7. Now we ought not to ask how God came to create man when he foresaw the disaster that would result from this thoughtlessness, since it would, perhaps, have been better for him not to have been made than to be in such a plight. Those who are deceived and carried away by Manichaean teachings urge such objections to support their own error and to prove that the Creator of man’s nature was evil. If God is ignorant of nothing and man is in such a plight, the principle of His goodness cannot be upheld, if He brought man to life when he was fated to live in troubles. For, they contend, if a good nature always directs its activity toward the good, we cannot refer the creation of this wretched and transient life to one who is good. Rather must we suppose that such a life has a different origin, in a nature which is inclined to evil. By their surface plausibility all these and similar arguments seem to have a certain force to those who are imbued, as it were, with the indelible dye of the deceit of heresy. Those, however, who are more perceptive of the truth, clearly recognize that they are unsound and that they afford a ready proof of their deceptive character. I think it right, too, to support our condemnation of them by bringing forward the apostle. In addressing the Corinthians he makes a distinction between fleshly and spiritual states of the soul. By what he says I think he intimates that it is not right to make judgments about good and evil on the basis of sensation. Rather must we divert the mind from bodily phenomena, and distinguish what is essentially good from its opposite. For, he says, “the spiritual man is judge of all things.”

The reason, I think, that they adduce these fabulous doctrines is this: They define the good by reference to the enjoyment of bodily pleasure. Hence, because the nature of the body is

17 Cf. I Cor. 2:14, 15.
necessarily subject to suffering and sickness (being composite and liable to dissolution), and because a painful sensation is in some way the result of such suffering, they imagine that the creation of man is the work of an evil god. But had they directed their minds to what is transcendent and, by diverting them from states of pleasure, considered the nature of things dispassionately, they would have thought that nothing was evil save wickedness. For all wickedness is marked by the privation of the good. It does not exist in its own right, nor is it observed to have subsistence. For nothing evil lies outside the will as if it existed by itself; but it gets its name from the absence of the good. Nonbeing has no subsistence; and the Creator of what exists is not the Creator of what has no subsistence. The God, therefore, of what exists is not responsible for evil, since he is not the author of what has no existence. Sight he made and not blindness: virtue he brought forth and not its privation. In the contest of free will he has appointed his blessings as the reward for those who live virtuously. Hence he has not subjected human nature to some forcible compulsion to do his will, dragging it unwillingly, like some lifeless object, toward the good. If a man in broad daylight of his own free will closes his eyes, the sun is not responsible for his failure to see.

The Restoration of Man

8. Nevertheless a man who is mindful of the dissolution of the body is in any case resentful, and takes it hard that our life is dissolved by death. This, he claims, is the final evil, that death should extinguish our life. Let him, then, reflect upon God's exceeding goodness even in this melancholy prospect. For it may be that this will induce him all the more to marvel at God's gracious care for man. Those who share in life find that life is desirable because they can enjoy what they like. Hence, if a man passes his life in pain, he reckons it far preferable not to exist than to exist in a state of suffering. Let us then inquire whether He who gives us life has any other intention than that we should live under the best possible conditions.

It was by a movement of free will that we became associated with evil. To indulge some pleasure we mingled evil with our nature, like some deadly drug sweetened with honey. By this means we fell from that blessed state we think of as freedom from passion, and were changed into evil. That is the reason that man, like a clay pot, is again resolved into earth; in order that he may be refashioned into his original state through the resurrection, when once he has been separated from the filth now attaching to him.

Such a doctrine, it is, that Moses\textsuperscript{18} expounds to us by way of a story and in a veiled manner. But what the veiled allegories teach is quite clear. For since, he says, the first men became implicated in things forbidden and were stripped naked of blessedness, the Lord clothed his first creatures in suits of skins. I do not think he uses the word "skins" in its literal sense. For to what sort of animals, when slain and flayed, did this covering contrived for them belong? But since every skin taken from an animal is a dead thing, I am sure the skins mean the attribute of death. This is the characteristic mark of irrational nature; and in His care for man, He who heals our wickedness subsequently provided him with the capacity to die, but not to die permanently. For a suit is an external covering for us. The body is given the opportunity to use it for a while, but it is not an essential part of its nature.

Mortality, then, derived from the nature of irrational creatures, provisionally clothed the nature created for immortality. It enveloped his outward, but not his inward, nature. It affected the sentient part of man, but not the divine image. The sentient part, to be sure, is dissolved; but it is not destroyed. For destruction means passing into nonbeing, while dissolution means separation once more into those elements of the world from which something was constituted. When this happens, it does not perish, even if we cannot grasp this with our senses.

Now the cause of this dissolution is clear from the illustration we have given. Appropriate to sensation is what is thick and earthly. But by nature the intellect is superior to and transcends the movements of the senses. Hence, since our judgment of the good went astray by the prompting of the senses, and this departure from the good produced a contrary state of things, that part of us which was rendered useless by partaking of its opposite is dissolved. We can put our illustration about the clay pot in this way: Suppose it has been treacherously filled with molten lead, which has hardened and cannot be poured out. Suppose, too, the owner recovers the pot, and being skilled in ceramics, he pounds to pieces the clay surrounding the lead. He then remodels the pot, now rid of the intruding matter, into its former shape and for his own use. In the same

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Gen. 3:21.
way the Creator of our vessel, I mean our sentient and bodily nature, when it became mingled with evil, dissolved the material which contained the evil. And then, once it has been freed from its opposite, he will remodel it by the resurrection, and will reconstitute the vessel into its original beauty.

Now there is a certain bond and fellowship in the sinful passions between soul and body, and a certain analogy between bodily and spiritual death. Just as we call the body’s separation from sentient life “death,” so we give the same name to the soul’s separation from genuine life. As we have said, soul and body are observed to share together in evil. For by means of both of them wickedness is translated into action. Yet from being clothed with dead skins the soul is not affected by death which implies dissolution. For how could the soul be dissolved when it is not composite? But since it, too, has to be freed by some remedy from the stains contracted through sin, on this account the medicine of virtue in this present life has to be applied to it to heal these wounds. But if it remains unhealed, provision has been made for its cure in the life to come.

Now there are differences in bodily ailments, some of them readily responding to treatment, others with more difficulty. In the latter case knives, cauteries, and bitter medicines are used to remove the sickness which has attacked the body. Something similar, in reference to the healing of the soul’s sickness, is indicated by the future judgment. To thoughtless persons this is a threat and a harsh means of correction, so that by fear of a painful retribution we may be brought to our senses and flee evil. The more thoughtful, however, believe it to be a healing remedy provided by God, who thus restores his own creation to its original grace. Those who, by excisions or cauteries, remove moles and warts which have unnaturally grown on the body do not benefit and heal the patient painlessly, although they do not use the knife to hurt him. In the same way, whatever material excrescences have hardened on the surface of our souls, which have become fleshly through their association with the passions, are, at the time of judgment, cut off and removed by that ineffable wisdom and power of Him who (as the gospel says) heals the sick. For “those who are well,” it says, 19 “do not need a doctor, but those who are sick.”

Now the excision of a wart causes a sharp pain in the surface of the body, since an unnatural growth on a nature affects the

19 Matt. 9:12.

subject by a kind of sympathy. There arises an unexpected union between what is our own and what is foreign to us, so that we feel a stinging pain when the unnatural excrescence is removed. In the same way, due to the fact that the soul has developed a great affinity for evil, it pines and wastes away, being convicted of sin, as prophecy somewhere says. 20 Because of its deep kinship with evil, there necessarily follow unspeakable pangs, which are as incapable of description as the nature of the blessings we hope for. Neither the one nor the other can be put into words nor have we an inkling of either.

Anyone, therefore, who bears in mind the wise purpose of Him who governs the universe could not be so unreasonable and shortsighted as to attribute the cause of evil to the Creator of man. He could not say either that He was ignorant of the future or that by knowing it and by creating man He was involved in the impulse toward evil. For He knew what was going to happen and yet did not prevent what led it to happen. He who is able to grasp all things within his knowledge, and sees the future equally with the past, was not ignorant that man would deviate from the good. But just as He saw man’s perversion, so he perceived his restoration once more to the good. Which, then, was better? Not to have brought our nature into being at all, since he knew in advance that the one to be created would stray from the good? Or, having brought him into being, to restore him by repentance, sick as he was, to his original grace?

It is the height of shortsightedness to call God the author of evil because of the body’s sufferings, which are a necessary accompaniment of our fluctuating nature; or to imagine that he is not the creator of man at all, in order to avoid attributing to him the cause of our sufferings. Such people distinguish good and evil on the basis of sensation, and do not realize that that alone is good by nature which is unaffected by sensation, and that alone is evil which is alien to what is genuinely good. To judge good and evil on the basis of pain and suffering is inappropriate in the case of irrational natures, since by not sharing in intelligence and understanding they are unable to grasp what is genuinely good. But that man is a work of God, created good and for the noblest ends, is evident not only from what we have already said, but for thousands of other reasons, most of which we must disregard since their number is infinite.

When we call God the creator of man, we are not unmindful

20 Ps. 39:11.
of the careful distinctions we made in [that part of] our introduction addressed to the Greeks. We showed there that God’s Word is a substantial and personal being, and is both God and Word. In himself he embraces all creative power, or rather he is absolute power. His impulses are directed toward everything good, and by having power commensurate with his will, he brings to effect whatever he desires. The life of existing things is his will and his work. By him man was brought to life, and endowed with every noble attribute to resemble God.

Now that alone is unchangeable by nature which does not originate through creation. But whatever is derived from the uncreated nature has its subsistence out of nonbeing. Once it has come into being through change, it constantly proceeds to change. If it acts according to its nature, this continual change is for the better. But if it is diverted from the straight path, there succeeds a movement in the opposite direction. Such was man’s condition. His mutable nature lapsed in the opposite direction. His departure from the good at once introduced as a consequence every form of evil. By his turning from life, death came in instead. Privation of light engendered darkness. Absence of virtue brought in wickedness; and in the place of every form of goodness there was now to be reckoned the list of opposing evils. Into just such a condition man fell by his thoughtlessness. For it was not possible for him to be discreet, once he had turned from discretion, or to form any wise decision once he had departed from wisdom. By whom did he have to be restored once more to his original grace? To whom did it belong to raise him up when he had fallen, to restore him when he was lost, to lead him back when he had gone astray? To whom, but to the very Lord of his nature? For only the one who had originally given him life was both able and fitted to restore it when it was lost. This is what the revelation of the truth teaches us, when we learn that God originally made man, and saved him when he had fallen.

THE INCARNATION

9. One who has followed the course of our argument up to this point will probably agree with it, since we do not appear to have said anything unbefitting a right conception of God. He will not, however, take a similar view of what follows,

although it substantiates the revelation of the truth in a special way. I refer to the human birth, the advance from infancy to manhood, the eating and drinking, the weariness, the sleep, the grief, the tears, the false accusations, the trial, the cross, the death, and the putting in the tomb. For these facts included as they are in the revelation, in some way blunt the faith of little minds, so that they do not accept the sequel of our argument because of what precedes. Owing to the unworthiness connected with the death, they do not admit that the resurrection from the dead was worthy of God.

For myself, however, I think we must for a moment divert our thoughts from the coarseness of the flesh, and consider what real goodness and its contrary are, and by what distinctive marks each is known. For I imagine that no one who has seriously thought about it will gainsay that one thing alone in the universe is by nature shameful, viz., the malady of evil, while no shame at all attaches to what is alien to evil. What is unmixed with shame is certainly understood to be comprised in the good, and what is genuinely good is unmixed with its opposite.

Now everything we see included in the good is fitting to God. In consequence, either our opponents must show that the birth, the upbringing, the growth, the natural advance to maturity, the experience of death and the return from it are evil. Or else, if they concede that these things fall outside the category of evil, they must of necessity acknowledge there is nothing shameful in what is alien to evil. Since we have shown that what is good is altogether free from all shame and evil, must we not pity the stupidity of those who claim that the good is unbefitting to God?

10. But, they object, is not human nature paltry and circumscribed, while Deity is infinite? How, then, could the infinite be contained in an atom? But who claims that the infinity of the Godhead was contained within the limits of the flesh as in a jar? For in our own case the intellectual nature is not enclosed in the limits of the flesh. The body’s bulk, to be sure, is circumscribed by its particular parts, but the soul is free to embrace the whole creation by the movement of thought. It ascends to the heavens, sets foot in the depths, traverses the dimensions of the world, and in its constant activity makes its way to the underworld. Often it is involved in contemplating the marvels of the heavens, and it is not loaded down by being attached to the body.
If, then, the soul of man, although united to the body by natural necessity, is free to roam everywhere, why do we have to say that the Godhead is confined in a fleshly nature? Why should we not rather rely on examples we can understand, in order to form some sort of proper conception of God's plan of salvation? To illustrate: We see the flame of a lamp laying hold of the material which feeds it. Now reason distinguishes between the flame on the material, and the material which kindles the flame, though we cannot actually divorce the one from the other and point out the flame as something separate from the material. The two together form a single whole. So it is with the incarnation. (My illustration must not be pressed beyond the point where it is appropriate. What is incongruous must be omitted, and the perishable character of fire must not be taken as part of the example.) Just, then, as we see the flame hugging the material and yet not encased in it, what prevents us from conceiving of a similar union and connection of the divine nature with the human? Can we not preserve a right idea of God even when we hold to this connection, by believing that the divine is free from all circumscription despite the fact he is in man?

11. If you inquire how the Deity is united with human nature, it is appropriate for you first to ask in what way the soul is united to the body. If the manner in which your soul is joined to your body is a mystery, you must certainly not imagine this former question is within your grasp. In the one case, while we believe the soul to be something different from the body because on leaving the flesh it renders it dead and inactive, we are ignorant of the manner of the union. Similarly in the other case we realize that the divine nature by its greater majesty differs from that which is mortal and perishable; but we are unable to detect how the divine is mingled with the human. Yet we have no doubt, from the recorded miracles, that God underwent birth in human nature. But how this happened we decline to investigate as a matter beyond the scope of reason. While we believe that the corporeal and intelligent creature owes its being to the incorporeal and uncreated nature, our faith in this regard does not involve an examination of the source and manner of this. The fact of creation we accept; but we renounce a curious investigation of the way the universe was framed as a matter altogether ineffable and inexplicable.

12. One who is looking for proofs that God manifested himself to us in the flesh must look to his activities. For of God's very existence he can get no other proof than the testimony of his actions themselves. When we survey the universe and note the orderly government of the world and the blessings we receive in life from God, we recognize the existence of some transcendent power which both created and maintains existing things. It is the same with regard to God's manifesting himself in our flesh. The wonders evident in his actions we regard as sufficient proof of the presence of the Godhead, and in the deeds recorded we mark all those attributes by which the divine nature is characterized.

It is a mark of God to give man life; to preserve by his providence all existing things; to afford food and drink to those who have been granted life in the flesh; to care for those in want; by health to restore to itself the nature perverted by sickness; to exercise an equal sway over all creation, over land, sea, and air, and over the heavenly regions; to possess power sufficient for everything, and above all to be the vanquisher of death and corruption. If, then, the record about him were defective in any of these or suchlike things, unbelievers would have good reason to take exception to our religion. But if everything by which we know God is evident in the record about him, what stands in the way of believing?

13. But, it is objected, birth and death belong to the nature of flesh. Yes, indeed. But what preceded His birth and followed his death lies outside the nature we share. When we look at the two limits of our human life, we observe the nature of our beginning and our end. Man begins his existence in weakness and similarly ends his life through weakness. But in God's case, the birth did not have its origin in weakness, neither did the death end in weakness. For sensual pleasure did not precede the birth and corruption did not follow the death.

Do you fail to believe the miracle? I welcome your incredulity. For by your very recognition that what we have said surpasses belief, you acknowledge that the miracles transcend nature. This very fact, then, that the gospel proclamation transcends natural categories, should be proof to you that He who was manifested was God. For had the narratives of the Christ been confined within the limits of nature, where would the divine
be? But if the account transcends nature, then the proof that the one we preach is God is evident in the very things you disbelieve.

Man is born through copulation, and after death lies in corruption. Were these elements comprised in the gospel preaching, you would certainly not imagine Him to be God of whom it was said he only had the properties of our nature. But since you learn that, while he was born, he transcended our nature both in manner of birth and in not being subject to the change of corruption, it would be well for you to exercise your incredulity in a different direction. It would be consistent for you to refuse to think of him as a mere man, as one instance among others of human nature.

Now by refusing to believe such a one was a mere man, a person is forced to acknowledge him to be God. For the one who recorded his birth, recorded also his birth from a virgin. If, then, the account of his birth is credible, there is surely nothing incredible, in the same account, about its manner. For the one who told of his birth told also of his birth from a virgin. And the one who mentioned his death also bore witness to his resurrection along with the death. If, then, on the basis of what you are told, you grant that he both died and was born, you must similarly admit his birth and death were free from weakness. These things, however, transcend nature. In consequence, he, whom we have shown to be born supernaturally, cannot possibly be confined within nature.

14. Why, then, they ask, did the divine stoop to such humiliation? Our faith falterst when we think that God, the infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable reality, transcending all glory and majesty, should be defiled by associating with human nature, and his sublime powers no less debased by their contact with what is abject.

15. We are not at a loss to find a fitting answer even to this objection. Do you ask the reason why God was born among men? If you exclude from life the benefits which come from God, you will have no way of recognizing the divine. It is from the blessings we experience that we recognize our benefactor, since by observing what happens to us, we deduce the nature of Him who is responsible for it. If, then, the love of man is a proper mark of the divine nature, here is the explanation you are looking for, here is the reason for God’s presence among men. Our nature was sick and needed a doctor. Man had fallen and needed someone to raise him up. He who had lost life needed someone to restore it. He who had ceased to participate in the good needed someone to bring him back to it. He who was shut up in darkness needed the presence of light. The prisoner was looking for someone to ransom him, the captive for someone to take his part. He who was under the yoke of slavery was looking for someone to set him free. Were these trifling and unworthy reasons to impel God to come down and visit human nature, seeing humanity was in such a pitiful and wretched state?

**Why Did not God Redeem Man by a Sovereign Act?**

But, it is objected, man could have been benefited and yet God could have remained at the same time free from weakness and suffering. By his will he framed the universe: by a mere act of will he brought into existence that which was not. Why, then, if he loved man, did he not wrest him from the opposing power and restore him to his original state by some sovereign and divine act of authority? Why did he take a tedious, circumvoluted route, submit to a bodily nature, enter life through birth, pass through the various stages of development, and finally taste death, and so gain his end by the resurrection of his own body? Could he not have remained in his transcendent and divine glory, and saved man by a command, renouncing such circuitous routes?

To such objections we must oppose the truth, so that those who are seriously searching for the rational basis of our religion may find no obstacle in the way of their faith.

We must inquire first—and we have already done this in part—what it is that stands in opposition to virtue. As darkness is the contrary of light and death of life, so it is clear that vice and nothing else is the contrary of virtue. We observe many things in the created order, but none of them—not stone, wood, water, man, or anything else—is the contrary of light and life except their precise opposites, i.e., darkness and death. So it is with respect to virtue. One cannot say that any created thing is to be thought of as its opposite, except the idea of vice.

Did, then, our teaching represent the divine as born in a state of evil, our opponents would have occasion to criticize our faith, on the ground that we hold views inconsistent and incongruous with the divine nature. For it certainly would not be right to say that he who is wisdom itself and goodness and incorruption and every other sublime idea and title had been
changed into the opposite. God is genuine virtue, and vice alone is by nature opposed to virtue. If, then, God entered not a state of evil but human nature, and if shame and indecency alone attach to the weakness of vice and God neither entered such a state nor can by his nature enter it, why are our opponents ashamed to acknowledge God's contact with human nature? There is nothing in man's constitution which is opposed to the principle of virtue. Neither his capacity for reason or thought or understanding nor any similar attribute peculiar to his nature stands opposed to the principle of virtue.

But, it is urged, our body is subject to change and hence to weakness. He who is born in such a state is born in weakness; but the divine is above weakness. It is therefore an idea foreign to God to contend that he who is by nature above weakness came to share in weakness.

In answering this objection we shall use an argument already employed, viz., that "weakness" \(^{22}\) can be used in a strictly proper sense and also in an extended sense. What affects the will and perverts it toward evil and away from virtue is weakness, properly speaking. On the other hand, the successive changes we observe in nature as it proceeds on its way are more properly referred to as modes of activity than of weakness. I mean birth, growth, continuance of life \(^{23}\) through taking in and expelling food, the union, and then later the dissolution, of the body's constituent parts, and its return to its kindred elements. With what, then, does our religion contend the divine came into contact? Was it weakness in its strict sense, that is, evil, or was it the changing movement of nature? Were our teaching to affirm that the divine entered a state which is morally forbidden, it would be our duty to avoid such a preposterous doctrine, implying, as it does, an unsound view of the divine nature. But if we affirm that he had contact with our nature, which derived its original being and subsistence from him, in what way does the gospel proclamation fail to have a fitting conception of God? In our faith we introduce no element of weakness in our ideas of God. For we do not say

\(^{22}\) *Pathos*. No English word can adequately render *pathos*, which has several nuances. Gregory regards its primary sense as moral. It is the condition of weakness by which the soul is drawn to wickedness. In an extended sense it refers to the natural changes and vicissitudes of existence, to which moral issues are irrelevant.

\(^{23}\) Literally, "the continuance of the subject." The idea is that one's identity remains unchanged despite the changes implied in bodily nourishment.

that a doctor incurs weakness when he heals someone in a state of weakness. Even though he comes into contact with sickness, the doctor remains free from such weakness.

If birth in itself is not weakness, one cannot call life weakness. It is the sensual pleasure which precedes human birth that is weakness, and it is the impulse to evil in living beings that is the sickness of our nature. But our religion claims He was pure from both of these. If, then, his birth was free from sensual pleasure and his life from wickedness, what weakness remains for God to have shared in, according to our devout religion? If you call the separation of the body from the soul weakness, you would be much more justified in so naming their union. For if the separation of united elements is weakness, then the union of separated elements will equally be weakness. For the union of things that are separate and the separation of things conjoined or united implies motion and change.

The name, therefore, we give to the final change ought also to apply to that which precedes it. And if the first change, which we call birth, does not involve weakness, neither can the second change, which we call death and which dissolves the union of body and soul, be logically called weakness.

We hold that God was involved in both these changes of our nature, by which the soul is united to the body and separated from it. He was united with both elements in man's make-up—I mean the sensible and intelligible elements. And by means of this ineffable and inexpressible union he brought it about that, once these elements of soul and body were united, the union would remain permanent. For when, in his case too, soul and body had been separated by that successive movement of change our nature undergoes, he joined the parts together again with a kind of glue—I mean by divine power. And so he united what was separated in an unbreakable union. This is what the resurrection means—the restoration of elements into an indissoluble union after their separation, so that they can grow together. In this way man's primal grace was restored and we retrieved once more eternal life. By our dissolution the wickedness mingled with our nature was poured off like a liquid which, when the vessel holding it is broken to pieces, is dispersed and lost, since there is nothing more to contain it.
extends to all humanity. He who united again the soul he had assumed, with his own body, did so by means of his own power, which was fused with each element at their first formation. In the same way he conjoined the intelligible and sensible nature on a larger scale, the principle of the resurrection extending to its logical limits. For when in the case of the man in whom he was incarnate the soul returned once more to the body after the dissolution, a similar union of the separated elements potentially passed to the whole of human nature, as if a new beginning had been made. This is the mystery of God's plan with regard to death, and of the resurrection from the dead. He does not prevent the soul's separation from the body by death in accordance with the inevitable course of nature. But he brings them together again by the resurrection. Thus he becomes the meeting point of both, of death and of life. In himself he restores the nature which death has disrupted, and becomes himself the principle whereby the separated parts are reunited.

But, someone urges, the objection raised to our viewpoint has not yet been answered. Rather the argument put forward by unbelievers has been strengthened by what we have said. For if he was as powerful as we have indicated, so that he could destroy death and gain entrance to life, why did he not do what he wanted to do by a mere act of will? Why did he effect our salvation in a devious way, by being born and nurtured and by experiencing death in the process of saving man? He could have saved us without submitting to these things.

In addressing reasonable persons it should suffice to answer such an objection in this way: Sick people do not prescribe to doctors their manner of treatment. They do not argue with their benefactors about the form of their cure, asking why the doctor felt the ailing part and devised this or that remedy to relieve the sickness, when something different was needed. Rather do they keep in view the aim of his kind services and accept them gratefully.

But, as the prophet 26 says, God's abounding goodness aids us in a hidden way, and in the present life it is not clearly evident. For every objection of unbelievers would be removed, could we actually see what we only hope for. But our hopes await the ages to come, so that there may then be revealed what at present our faith alone apprehends. In consequence we must search out, as far as we can, some reasonable solution of the question posed, and one in harmony with our preceding line of thought.

18. And yet it is perhaps superfluous for us who already believe that God entered human life to criticize the manner of his appearing, on the ground that it lacked something in wisdom and superior judgment. For those who do not strongly oppose the truth have no small proof that God dwelt with us. Even in advance of the life to come, it is evident in this present life; I mean we have the testimony of the facts themselves.

Who does not know that the deceit of demons filled every corner of the world and held sway over man's life by the madness of idolatry? Who does not realize that every people on earth was accustomed to worship demons under the form of idols, by sacrificing living victims and making foul offerings on their altars? But, as the apostle says, 27 from the moment that God's saving grace appeared among men and dwelt in human nature, all this vanished into nothing, like smoke. The madness of their oracles and prophecies has ceased. Their annual processions and foul and bloody hecatombs have been done away. Among many peoples altars, temple porches, and precincts and shrines have entirely disappeared, along with the ceremonies practiced by the devotees of demons for their own deceit and that of their friends. The result is that in many places where such things were once current they are not even remembered. Throughout the world, churches and altars have been erected instead in the name of Christ; and the holy and bloodless priesthood and the sublime philosophy which consists in deeds rather than words now flourish. The life of the body is held in contempt; death is despised. Those who were forced by tyrants to renounce their faith gave clear testimony to this. Bodily torture and the sentence of death they reckoned as nothing. Clearly they would not have endured such things had they not had a clear and indubitable proof of the incarnation.

For Jews the following fact is a sufficient indication of the presence of Him whom they renounce. Up to the time that God appeared in Jesus Christ they could see in Jerusalem the splendor of royal palaces, the famous Temple, and the customary sacrifices through the year. And all that the law enjoined in mysteries for those who grasp their inner meaning up to that moment went on unhindered in accordance with the ritual.

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24 I.e., to all humanity.
26 Ps. 31:19, in the LXX rendering.
27 Titus 2:11.
originally imposed on them by their religion. But when they saw the One they expected (for they had already learned of him through the Prophets and the Law), they held what from now on was a mere superstition in higher esteem than faith in him who had come. For they misconstrued their religion. They kept the letter of the law and were in bondage to custom rather than to right reason. As a consequence they refused to accept the grace made manifest; and all that is left of their holy religion is barren narratives. Not a trace of their Temple remains. The splendor of their city is left in ruins. There survives to the Jews none of their ancient customs the law enjoined; and access to their holy city, Jerusalem, is denied them by imperial decree.28

19. However, neither Hellenists nor the leaders of Judaism are willing to regard these things as proof of God’s presence. Hence it will be well, in the face of the objections urged, to give a more particular reason why the divine nature became joined to ours, and saved man by its own presence and did not execute its purpose by a mere command. What starting point, then, shall we adopt in order to bring our argument satisfactorily to the proposed conclusion? What other starting point is there than to give a brief review of spiritual conceptions of God?

**The Union of God’s Goodness, Wisdom, Justice, and Power in the Incarnation**

20. It is universally agreed that we should believe the Divine to be not only powerful, but also just and good and wise and everything else that suggests excellence. It follows, therefore, in the plan of God we are considering, that there should not be a tendency for one of his attributes to be present in what happened, while another was absent. For not a single one of these sublime attributes by itself and separated from the others constitutes virtue. What is good is not truly such unless it is associated with justice, wisdom, and power. For what is unjust and stupid and impotent is not good. Power, too, if it is separated from justice and wisdom, cannot be classed as virtue. Rather is it a brutal and tyrannical form of power. The same holds good of the other attributes. If wisdom exceeds the bounds of justice, or if righteousness is not associated with power and goodness, one would more properly call them wickedness. For how can we reckon as good what is deficient in excellence?

29 Cf. Ps. 119:68. There are several passages of the LXX which Gregory may have in mind.
as we have shown; and being subject to change, its being is not entirely permanent.

Now change is a perpetual movement toward a different state. And it takes two forms. In the one case it is always directed toward the good; and here its progress is continual, since there is no conceivable limit to the distance it can go. In the other case it is directed toward the opposite, the essence of which lies in nonexistence. For the opposite of the good, as we have already indicated, implies some such notion of opposition as we intend when we oppose being to nonbeing and existence to nonexistence. By reason, then, of its impulse toward change and movement, our nature cannot remain essentially unchanged. Rather does the will drive it toward some end, desire for the good naturally setting it in motion.

Now the good is of two kinds: what is really good in the nature of things, and what is not such, but has only an outward and artificial appearance of the good. It is the mind, with which we have been endowed, that discriminates between these. In this way we run the risk either of gaining what is essentially good, or else, by being diverted from it by some misleading prospect, of lapsing into the opposite. This is what happened in the pagan fable about the dog which saw in the water the reflection of what it had in its mouth. It let go the real food, and, opening its mouth to swallow the reflection, remained hungry.

Being cheated of the desire for the genuine good, the mind was thus diverted to nonbeing. By the deceit of the advocate and contriver of wickedness, it was convinced that good was its opposite. Nor would this deception have succeeded, had not the fishhook of evil been furnished with an outward appearance of good, as with a bait. Of his own free will man fell into this misfortune, and through pleasure became subject to the enemy of life.

Let us now, in this connection, study all the appropriate attributes of God—goodness, wisdom, justice, power, incorruption, and everything else that indicates excellence. As good he has pity on him who has fallen; as wise he is not ignorant of the way to restore him. For it belongs to wisdom to make just decisions, since one would not associate genuine justice with stupidity.

22. Wherein, then, did [God's] justice consist in this matter? In His not exercising an arbitrary authority over him who held us in bondage. Also, in His not wresting us from him who held us, by His superior power, and so leaving him who had enslaved man through pleasure, with a just cause of complaint. Those who give up their liberty for money become the slaves of their purchasers. By their selling themselves, neither they nor anyone else can reclaim their freedom, even when those who reduce themselves to this wretched state are nobly born. And should anyone, out of concern for one so sold, exercise force against the purchaser, he would seem unjust in dictatorial freeing one legally acquired. On the other hand, no law stands in the way of his buying back the man's freedom, if he wants to. In the same way, when once we had voluntarily sold ourselves, he who undertook out of goodness to restore our freedom had to contrive a just and not a dictatorial method to do so. And some such method is this: to give the master the chance to take whatever he wants to as the price of the slave.

23. What, then, was it likely that our lord would choose to take? It is possible to make a reasonable guess about his wishes, if we proceed from facts already clear. We argued at the beginning that he envied man his happiness and closed his eyes to the good. He begot in himself the darkness of wickedness, and sickened with the love of power. This was the origin of his decline toward evil, and the foundation and, as it were, the mother of all other wickedness. What, then, would he exchange for the one in his power, if not something clearly superior and better? Thus, by getting the better of the bargain he might the more satisfy his pride.

Among those whom history records from the beginning, he was aware of none who was connected with such circumstances as he saw in His appearance. There was conception without sexual union, birth without impurity, a virgin suckling a child, and heavenly voices witnessing to his eminence. The healing of natural diseases was performed by him without technical skill, but by a mere word and act of will. There was the restoration of the dead to life, the rescue of the condemned, the fear inspired in demons, and authority over the elements. He walked across the sea so that the water was not parted to lay bare the bottom for those who passed over (as happened in Moses’ miracle); but the surface of the water became like land to his tread, and supported his footsteps by offering a firm resistance. He ignored food as long as he wished. There were abundant feasts in the desert, which fed many thousands. Heaven did not rain down manna; nor did the earth naturally

30 Possibly a reference to those possessed by demons.
bring forth wheat to fill their need. But from the secret storehouses of God's power this abundance proceeded. Bread was produced ready-made in the hands of those who served it, and, indeed, increased as it satisfied those who ate of it. Then there were the relishes of fish—not that the sea supplied their need, but He who sowed the sea with its different kinds of fish.

But how can we recount in detail each of the gospel miracles? When the enemy saw such power, he recognized in Christ a bargain which offered him more than he held. For this reason he chose him as the ransom for those he had shut up in death's prison. Since, however, he could not look upon the direct vision of God, he had to see him clothed in some part of that flesh which he already held captive through sin. Consequently the Deity was veiled in flesh, so that the enemy, by seeing something familiar and natural to him, might not be terrified at the approach of transcendent power. So when he saw this power softly reflected more and more through the miracles, he reckoned that what he saw was to be desired rather than feared.

You observe here how goodness is combined with justice, and wisdom is not separated from them. Through the covering of the flesh the divine power is made accessible, so that the enemy will not take fright at God's appearing and so thwart his plan for us. All God's attributes are at once displayed in this—his goodness, his wisdom, and his justice. That he decided to save us is proof of his goodness. That he struck a bargain to redeem the captive indicates his justice. And it is evidence of his transcendent wisdom that he contrived to make accessible to the enemy what was [otherwise] inaccessible.

24. It is likely, however, that one who has followed our train of thought will inquire where the power of the Godhead and the incorruptible nature of divine power can be seen in the account we have given. That this too may be clear, let us penetrate the successive events of the gospel story, in which the union of power with love for man is displayed.

In the first place, that the omnipotent nature was capable of descending to man's lowly position is a clearer evidence of power than great and supernatural miracles. For it somehow accords with God's nature, and is consistent with it, to do great and sublime things by divine power. It does not startle us to hear it said that the whole creation, including the invisible world, exists by God's power, and is the realization of his will. But descent to man's lowly position is a supreme example of power—of a power which is not bounded by circumstances contrary to its nature.

It belongs to the nature of fire to shoot upwards; and no one would think it wonderful for a flame to act naturally. But if he saw a flame with a downward motion like that of heavy bodies, he would take it for a marvel, wondering how it could remain a flame and yet contravene its nature by its downward motion. So it is with the incarnation. God's transcendent power is not so much displayed in the vastness of the heavens, or the luster of the stars, or the orderly arrangement of the universe or his perpetual oversight of it, as in his condescension to our weak nature. We marvel at the way the sublime entered a state of lowliness and, while actually seen in it, did not leave the heights. We marvel at the way the Godhead was entwined in human nature and, while becoming man, did not cease to be God.

As we have already observed, the opposing power could not, by its nature, come into immediate contact with God's presence and endure the unveiled sight of him. Hence it was that God, in order to make himself easily accessible to him who sought the ransom for us, veiled himself in our nature. In that way, as it is with greedy fish, he might swallow the Godhead like a fishhook along with the flesh, which was the bait. Thus, when life came to dwell with death and light shone upon darkness, their contraries might vanish away. For it is not in the nature of darkness to endure the presence of light, nor can death exist where life is active.

Summary

Let us then, by way of summary, review our argument about the gospel revelation, and so make an effective reply to those who criticize God's plan because he personally intervened to save man. Throughout we must have fitting notions of God. We must not attribute to him one transcendent attribute, and then exclude another which equally befits him. But our faith must certainly include every sublime and devout thought of God, and these must be properly related to each other.

We have shown that God's goodness, wisdom, justice, power, and incorruptible nature are all to be seen in his plan for us. His goodness is evident in his choosing to save one who was lost. His wisdom and justice are to be seen in the way he saved us. His power is clear in this: that he came in the likeness of man and in the lowly form of our nature, inspiring the hope
that, like man, he could be overcome by death; and yet, having come, he acted entirely in accordance with his nature. Now it belongs to light to dispel darkness, and to life to destroy death. Seeing, then, we have been led astray from the right path, with the result we were diverted from the life we once had and were involved in death, what is there improbable in what we learn from the gospel revelation? Purity lays hold of those stained with sin, life lays hold of the dead, and guidance is given to those astray, so that the stain may be cleansed, the error corrected, and the dead may return to life.

25. There is no good reason for those who do not take too narrow a view of things to find anything strange in the fact that God assumed our nature. For when he considers the universe, can anyone be so simple-minded as not to believe that the Divine is present in everything, pervading, embracing, and penetrating it? For all things depend on Him who is, and nothing can exist which does not have its being in Him who is. If, then, all things exist in him and he exists in all things, why are they shocked at a scheme of revelation which teaches that God became man, when we believe that even now he is not external to man? For, granted that God is not present in us in the same way as he was in the incarnation, it is at any rate admitted he is equally present in us in both instances. In the one case he is united to us in so far as he sustains existing things. In the other case he united himself with our nature, in order that by its union with the Divine it might become divine, being rescued from death and freed from the tyranny of the adversary. For with his return from death, our mortal race begins its return to immortal life.

**DID GOD USE DECEIT?**

26. But perhaps someone who has examined the justice and wisdom apparent in this plan is driven to conclude that such a scheme as God contrived for us involved deceit. For in a way it was a fraud and deception for God, when he placed himself in the power of the enemy who was our master, not to show his naked deity, but to conceal it in our nature, and so escape recognition. It is the mark of deceivers to divert the hopes of those they plot against to one thing, and then to do something different from what is expected. But he who penetrates the truth of the matter will agree that we have here a crowning example of justice and wisdom.

Now it is the character of justice to render to each his due. It belongs to wisdom, on the other hand, neither to pervert justice nor to divorce its just decisions from the noble end of the love of man. Both must be skillfully combined. By justice due recompense is given; by goodness the end of the love of man is not excluded. Let us then inquire whether the two are to be seen in what happened. Justice is evident in the rendering of due recompense, by which the deceiver was in turn deceived. The purpose of the action, on the other hand, testifies to the goodness of him who brought it about. For it is the mark of justice to render to everyone the results of what he originally planted, just as the earth yields fruits according to the types of seed sown. It is the mark of wisdom, however, by the way in which it returns like for like, not to exclude a higher aim. The conspirator and the one who cures the victim both mix a drug with the man's food. In the one case it is poison; in the other it is an antidote for poison. But the mode of healing in no way vitiates the kindly intention. In both instances a drug is mixed with the food; but when we catch sight of the aim, we applaud the one and are incensed at the other. So it is with the incarnation. By the principle of justice the deceiver reaps the harvest of the seeds he sowed with his own free will. For he who first deceived man by the bait of pleasure is himself deceived by the camouflage of human nature. But the purpose of the action changes it into something good. For the one practiced deceit to ruin our nature; but the other, being at once just and good and wise, made use of a deceitful device to save the one who had been ruined. And by so doing he benefited, not only the one who had perished, but also the very one who had brought us to ruin. For when death came into contact with life, darkness with light, corruption with incorruption, the worse of these things disappeared into a state of nonexistence, to the profit of him who was freed from these evils.

When a baser metal is mixed with gold, refiners restore the more precious metal to its natural brightness by consuming the alien and worthless substance with fire. The separation, indeed, does not occur without difficulty, for it takes time for the fire to consume the base element and effect its disappearance. Yet the melting away of the substance embedded in it, which detracts from its beauty, is a kind of healing of the gold. In the same way, when death, corruption, darkness, and the other offshoots of vice have attached themselves to the author of evil, contact with the divine power acts like fire and effects the
disappearance of what is contrary to nature. In this way the nature is purified and benefited, even though the process of separation is a painful one. Hence not even the adversary himself can question that what occurred was just and salutary—if, that is, he comes to recognize its benefit. In this present life patients whose cure involves surgery and cauterery grow incised at their physicians when they smart under the pain of the incision. But if by these means they are restored to health and the pain of the cauterery passes off, they will be grateful to those who effected their cure. It is the same with the evil which is now mingled with our nature and has become a part of it. When, over long periods of time, it has been removed and those now lying in sin have been restored to their original state, all creation will join in united thanksgiving, both those whose purification has involved punishment and those who never needed purification at all.

Why God Assumed Human Nature

This is the sort of teaching we derive from the mighty revelation of God's becoming man. By his intimate union with humanity, he shared all the marks of our nature. He was born, reared, grew up, and went so far as even to taste death. Thus he brought about all we have mentioned. He freed man from evil, and healed the very author of evil himself. For the healing of an infirmity involves doing away with the disease, even if the process is painful.

27. Certainly it was in keeping with his intimate union with our nature that he should be united with us in all our characteristics. Those who wash off dirt from garments do not leave some of the stains and remove others. But, from top to bottom, they cleanse the whole garment of the stains, to give it a consistent character and a uniform brightness from the washing. It is the same with our human life, which from beginning to end and throughout was stained with sin. The cleansing power had to penetrate it entirely. One part could not be healed by cleansing while another was overlooked and left uncured. That is why, in view of the fact that our life is bounded by two extremities (I mean its beginning and end), the power which amends our nature had to reach to both points. It had to touch the beginning and to extend to the end, covering all that lies between.

Now for every man there is only one way of entering life.

Whence, then, did he have to take up his abode in it who was coming to us? "From heaven," is perhaps the reply of one who despises the method of human birth as something shameful and disgraceful. But in heaven there was no human nature, nor was the disease of evil prevalent in that transcendent life. He who united himself with man did so with the aim of helping him. How, then, will anyone seek in that sphere where there was no evil and man did not live his life the particular human nature of which God assumed—or rather, not the human nature, but some imitation of it? For how could our nature be restored if it was some heavenly being, and not this sick creature of earth, which was united with the Divine? For a sick man cannot be healed unless the ailing part of him in particular receives the cure. If, then, the diseased member was on earth, and the divine power, to preserve its own dignity, did not come into contact with it, its concern with creatures with which we have nothing in common would not have benefited man.

Indeed, if it is permissible to conceive of anything, except evil, as unworthy of God, such a situation is as unworthy of him as any other. For to one who is so narrow-minded as to define God's majesty from its inability to share the properties of our nature, his union with a heavenly body rather than an earthly would not detract less from his dignity. For every created thing is equally inferior to the Most High who, by reason of his transcendent nature, is unapproachable. The whole universe is uniformly beneath his dignity. For what is totally inaccessible is not accessible to one thing and inaccessible to another. Rather does it transcend all existing things in equal degree. Earth is not more below his dignity, and heaven less. Nor do the creatures inhabiting each of these elements differ in this respect, that some have a direct contact with his inaccessible nature, while others are distant from it. Otherwise we could not conceive of the power that governs the universe as equally pervading all things. In some it would be unctly present, in others it would be lacking. Consequently, from these differences of more and less, the divine nature would appear to be composite and inconsistent with itself, were we to conceive of it in principle as remote from us while it was near some other creature and easily accessible by this proximity.

The true way, however, of regarding the transcendent dignity does not have in view comparisons in terms of "lower"

31 Anthrōpos: the particular instance of human nature.
and "higher." Everything is equally beneath the power that rules the universe. In consequence, if our opponents imagine that the earthly nature is unworthy of union with the Divine, they will never discover any other nature worthy of it. If, then, everything equally falls short of this dignity, the one thing which really befits God’s nature still remains, namely, to come to the aid of those in need. By acknowledging, therefore, that the healing power had recourse to the very place where the disease was, what conception unworthy of God does our faith entertain?

28. But our opponents ridicule human nature, and keep stressing the manner of our birth. They imagine, by so doing, that they hold our faith up to derision, as if it were unbecoming to God to share in, and to have contact with, human life by entering it in such a way. But we have already treated this point by our previous contention that evil, and what is akin to it, are alone essentially shameful. But the whole course of our nature has been arranged by God’s will and law, and hence it is far removed from the censure of evil. Otherwise the condemnation of our nature would reflect upon the Creator, if any aspect of it could be charged with being disgraceful or improper.

The only thing alien to the Divine is evil. Nature is not evil; and our religion teaches that God was incarnate in man, not that he entered a state of evil. There is only one way for a man to enter life, viz., to be begotten and brought into existence. Now our opponents acknowledge that it was right for the divine power to visit the nature which was weakened by evil, but they are offended at the means of the visitation. What other method, then, of entering life do they prescribe for God? They fail to realize that the whole anatomy of the body is uniformly to be valued, and that no factor which contributes to the maintenance of life can be charged with being dishonorable or evil. The whole organic structure of the body is devised for a single end, and that is to preserve the human race in existence. The other organs support man’s present life, and are distributed among different activities by which man exercises his faculties of perception and action. But the generative organs have the future in view, and it is by them that the succession of the race is maintained. If, then, we have in mind their usefulness, to which one of the organs we generally consider honorable can they be inferior? Indeed, to which of them should we not with good reason reckon them to be superior?

29. But taking a different line, they try to calumniate our teaching in another way. Granting, they say, that what occurred was good and worthy of God, why did he delay this act of his goodness? Why did he not cut short the further progress of evil at its very first appearance? We have a brief reply for this: viz., that it was wise and foreseeing to delay the benefit, for this served to the advantage of our nature. In the case of diseases of the body, when some corrupting humor spreads under the skin, the skillful physician does not bind the body up with drugs before the underlying trouble is brought completely to the surface. Rather does he wait until the hidden humor is altogether out, and so applies his remedy to the disease when it is uncovered. And so, when once the disease of wickedness had infiltrated human nature, the universal Physician waited until no form of evil remained concealed in our nature. In consequence, he did not apply his cure to man immediately on Cain’s jealousy and murder of his brother. For the wickedness of those destroyed in Noah’s time had not yet broken out. Nor had there come to light the terrible disease of Sodom’s transgression, or the battle of the Egyptians with God, or the arrogance of the Assyrians, or the murder of God’s saints by the Jews, or Herod’s iniquitous slaughter of the children, or all the other things which history records or which were wrought by successive generations and left unrecorded. For the root of wickedness produced in men’s wills a great variety of shoots. When, then, evil had reached its highest pitch and no form of wickedness had not been daringly attempted by man, he healed the disease. Not, indeed, at its onset but when it had fully developed, so that the healing might encompass the total ailment.

30. If anyone, furthermore, imagines he can refute our
argument because human life still continues to go astray through sin, even after the application of the remedy, he may be led to the truth by means of a familiar example. In the case of a snake, should it receive a deadly blow on the head, its coil is not at once killed with its head. While the latter is dead, the tail still remains pulsing with its own life, and is not deprived of vital movement. Similarly it is possible for evil to have been struck a mortal blow, and yet for life still to be harassed by its vestiges.

Why Do Not All Believe?

When, however, they give up reproaching our religious teaching on this point, they introduce another charge, viz., that our faith does not extend to all mankind. Why is it, they say, that the grace of the gospel has not reached all men? While some have attached themselves to its teaching, the remainder constitute no small number. Either God is unwilling to distribute his benefits ungrudgingly to everyone or else he is quite incapable of doing so. Both alternatives are open to censure. For it does not befit God’s nature to be defective either in willing what is good or in executing it. Why is it, then, they ask, that the grace of the gospel has not reached all men, seeing that faith is something good?

Now had we, in the course of our argument, contended that the divine will allot faith to men in such a way that some are called, while others fail to share in the calling, there would be occasion to prefer such a charge against our religion. But all are equally called without respect to rank, age, or nationality. It was, indeed, for this reason that from the very first when the gospel was preached the ministers of the Word were at once divinely inspired to speak every language,32 so that no one might fail to share in the blessings of their teaching. In the light of this, how can anyone rightly charge God with responsibility for the fact that the Word has not prevailed with all men? Out of his high regard for man, the Sovereign of the universe left something under our own control and of which each of us is the sole master. I mean the will, a faculty which is free from bondage and independent, and is grounded in the freedom of the mind. Such a charge, then, might with greater justice be transferred to those who have not attached themselves to the faith rather than be brought against him who solicited their assent to it. When Peter first preached the gospel before a large gathering of Jews, three thousand at once embraced the faith. But the unbelievers, who were more numerous than those who believed, did not blame the apostle for their lack of conviction. For, seeing the grace of the gospel had been offered to all, it was not reasonable that those who held aloof of their own free choice should put the blame for their hard luck on another, rather than on themselves.

31. Our opponents, however, are not at a loss for a captious reply to such arguments. For they contend that, had God wanted to, he could have compelled those who were stubborn to accept the gospel preaching. What freedom of choice would they then have had? Wherein would virtue lie? Wherein the praise for those who triumphed? It is a mark only of inanimate or irrational creatures to be induced by another’s will to do his bidding. But were a reasonable and intelligent nature to abandon its freedom of choice, it would at the same time lose the boon of intelligence. For what use would such a one’s mind be, if his power of free choice were at the disposal of another? If the will is inactive, virtue of necessity vanishes, being precluded by the inertness of the will. With the absence of virtue, life loses its honor, the praise of the victorious is done away, sin is no longer a peril, and different ways of life are indistinguishable. For who any longer could reasonably censure the dissolute, or praise the self-controlled? For everyone would be ready with this answer: that nothing we intend is in our power, but the wills of men are induced by a higher power to do its bidding. The fact, then, that the faith has not taken root in all men is not to be charged against God’s goodness, but against the disposition of those to whom the gospel is preached.

Why Did God Die?

32. What further objection do our opponents bring forward? In its extreme form this: that the transcendent nature ought never to have experienced death. Rather could He, with his excessive power, have easily accomplished his purpose without this. But even if, for some ineffable reason, this actually had to happen, he at least did not have to be humiliated by a shameful manner of death. For, they urge, what death could be more shameful than that on a cross?

What do we reply to this? That the birth makes the death necessary. He who had once decided to share our humanity
It is the mark of Deity to pervade everything and to extend to every part of the nature of existing things. Nothing, indeed, could continue in existence did it not have its being in that which exists. Now that which is essential and primary being is the divine nature; and the continuance of existing things compels us to believe that it pervades all that is. We learn this from the cross. In shape it is divided into four parts in such a way that the four arms converge in the middle. Now He who was extended upon it at the time God's plan was fulfilled in his death is the one who binds all things to himself and makes them one. Through himself he brings the diverse natures of existing things into one accord and harmony. For we conceive of things as either above or below, or else we think of them as extended sideways. If, then, you consider the constitution of things in heaven or beneath the earth or at either limit of the universe, everywhere the Godhead anticipates your thought. It alone is observed in every part of existence and maintains the universe in a state of being. Whether we should call this nature Godhead or Word or Power or Wisdom, or any other sublime term that better expresses transcendence, makes no difference to our argument. We shall not quibble about a name or title or mode of expression.

The eyes of all creation are set on Him and he is its center, and it finds its harmony in him. Through him the things above are united with those below, and the things at one extremity with those at the other. In consequence it was right that we should not be brought to a knowledge of the Godhead by hearing alone; but that sight too should be our teacher in these sublime matters. This was also the starting point of the great Paul when he initiated the people of Ephesus [into the Christian mysteries]. By his teaching he implanted in them the power to know what is “the depth and height and breadth and length.” In fact he designates each projection of the cross by its proper term, calling the top one “height,” the bottom one “depth,” and the side arms “breadth” and “length.” It seems to me, moreover, that he brings out this idea still more clearly when he writes to the Philippians and says to them, “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” There he uses a single term to refer to the crossbar, designating by “on earth” everything in between the things in heaven and the things under the earth.

Such, then, is the mystical meaning of the cross as we have


34 Ἰδ περὶ ἀνθρωπος. By ἀνθρωπος Gregory means the concrete instance of human nature, which the Word assumed.

35 Eph. 3:18.

36 Phil. 2:10.
been taught it. The succeeding events, moreover, in the gospel account are consistently of such a kind that even unbelievers would admit they involve no unfitness of conception of God. He did not remain dead; and the wounds the spear inflicted on his body did not prevent his living. After the resurrection he appeared at will to the disciples. Whenever he wished, he was present with them, though unobserved. He came into their midst without needing doors to give him entrance. He strengthened the disciples by breathing on them the Spirit. He promised to be with them and that nothing would separate him from them. Visibly he ascended to heaven, but to their minds he was everywhere present. These facts, and whatever the gospel story contains of a similar nature, need no supporting arguments to prove their divine quality and their connection with sublime and transcendent power. I do not think it necessary to dwell upon them in detail. The mere mention of them at once indicates their supernatural character. But since a part of our revealed teaching concerns God’s plan regarding washing (whether we call this baptism or enlightenment or regeneration—we will not quibble about the word), we may as well briefly discuss this too. For our opponents are incredulous when they hear us speak about it in the following way.

Baptism

For the mortal creature to pass to life, another birth had to be devised, since the first birth led only to a mortal existence. This second birth could neither begin nor end in corruption, but had to bring the one who was born to immortal life. Its purpose was this: just as one born by mortal generation is of necessity mortal, so the creature begotten by an incorruptible birth might be superior to the corruption of death. Now when our opponents hear this sort of thing and learn that the way this mystery of new birth is brought about is by prayer to God and invocation of heavenly grace, and water and faith, they are incredulous. For they look only at outward appearances, and claim that the exterior act does not correspond to the divine promise. For how, they ask, can prayer and the invocation of divine power over the water become a source of life to those initiated?

Unless they prove very stubborn, a simple rejoinder will suffice to bring them round to our position. Seeing that the manner of human generation is plain to everybody, let us ask them in turn how it is that the initial seed of a living creature becomes a man. No conjecture on this point can surely, by any kind of reasoning, devise a plausible explanation. For, when we compare them, what has a man by definition in common with the outward appearance of the seed? Man is a creature of reason and intelligence, with a capacity for thought and knowledge. But the seed is seen to have a certain moist quality; and apart from this observation it makes by the senses, the mind cannot penetrate the matter farther.

The reply, then, that people are likely to make when asked how a man can conceivably be derived from that seed, is the very one we make when asked about the new birth by water. In the former case they have a ready reply, viz., that the seed becomes a man by divine power, and without it the seed remains inert and ineffective. The underlying substance does not produce the man; but the power of God changes the visible material into the nature of a man. In the light of this it would be the height of stupidity for those who acknowledge God’s power to be so great in the one instance, to imagine he is too feeble to work his purpose in the other. What, they ask, has water in common with life? But what, we retort to them, has a moist substance in common with the image of God? In the latter case we do not think it incredible if a moist substance is changed into the most precious living creature by the will of God. Equally we contend there is nothing marvelous if the presence of divine power transforms what is born in a corruptible nature into a state of incorruption.

But they require proof that the Divine is present when he is invoked to sanctify the procedure. He who makes this request should review our previous researches. For the proof which we gave that the power revealed to us by means of flesh is genuinely divine confirms our line of argument here. For when we proved that he who was revealed in the flesh was God, since he disclosed his nature by the miracles he did, we also established that he is present at every procedure where he is invoked. Just as everything has a certain characteristic by which its nature is indicated, so the divine nature is characterized by truth. Well, then, he has promised always to be present with those who call upon him, to be among believers, to abide with them all and to be intimate with each of them. In the light of this we can need no further proof that the divine is present in the rite of baptism. His very miracles have
convinced us of his deity. We realize that what characterizes the Godhead is its freedom from falsehood; and we do not doubt the presence of what he has promised, because his promise is true.

The fact, moreover, that the prayer of invocation anticipates the divine intention is abundant proof that what is done is brought to effect by God. For in the other type of procuration the impulses of the parents, even when God is not invoked by them in prayer, form the newborn child (as we have already said) by God's power. And without this power their effort is useless and unavailing. How much more, then, in the case of the spiritual kind of procuration, will not the object be accomplished, if we rightly solicit the help that comes by prayer? For God has promised to be present in the rite. He has (so we believe) endowed the act with his power; and our own will is directed toward the end in view.

Those who pray to God that the sun may shine on them in no way alter the fact that it will happen anyway. Yet no one will say that the zeal of those who pray is useless, if they ask God for what will occur in any case. It is the same with those who are altogether persuaded by the truthfulness of his promise that his grace is present in those who are born again through this sacramental act. [By their prayers] they either effect an increase of the grace or at any rate they do not stand in its way. For we are convinced that grace accompanies the rite in any case, since he who made the promise is God, and his deity is attested by the miracles. As a result there is no doubt whatever that the Divine is present [in baptism].

35. Now the descent into the water and the triple immersion contain another mystery. The manner of our salvation owes its efficacy less to instruction by teaching than to what He who entered into fellowship with man actually did. In him life became a reality, so that by means of the flesh which he assumed and thereby deified salvation might come to all that was akin to it. Hence it was necessary to devise some way by which, in the baptismal procedure, there might be an affinity and likeness between disciple and master. We must therefore note what characterized the Author of our life, in order that (as the apostle says 37) those who follow may pattern themselves after the Pioneer of our salvation.

Those who learn military rhythms by observing others acquire their skill in arms from men versed in such disciplines;

37 Heb. 2:10.

and if they fail to do what is shown to them, they remain lacking in such skill. In the same way those who have an equal zeal for the good must thoroughly imitate and follow the Pioneer of our salvation, and must put into practice what he has shown them. For the same goal cannot be reached unless similar paths are followed. People who get lost in labyrinths, if they fall in with an experienced person, extricate themselves from the various misleading passages by following from behind. And they could not, indeed, get out if they did not follow in their guide's footsteps. In the same way I bid you think of this life as a labyrinth which human nature cannot thread, unless a man takes the same course as He did who entered it and yet extricated himself from its confines.

I use the word "labyrinth" figuratively for the prison house of death, which has no way of escape and in which the wretched race of mankind was confined. What, then, did we see in the case of the Pioneer of our salvation? Death for three days, and then a return to life. For this reason something similar had to be devised in our case too. What, then, is this device by means of which we imitate his experience?

Everything dead finds its appropriate and natural place in the earth, where it is laid and hidden away. Now there is a close affinity between earth and water. They are the only elements which have weight and gravitate downwards, penetrating one another and being absorbed in each other. Seeing, then, that the Pioneer of our life died and was buried under the earth in common with our nature, the imitation we make of his death is represented in the allied element. Now after the Man from above 38 had assumed a state of death and had been buried under the earth, on the third day he returned to life once more. In the same way everyone who by his bodily nature is united to him and looks to the same successful issue —I mean the goal of life—has water instead of earth poured on him, and by being immersed three separate times reproduces the grace of the resurrection which occurred on the third day.

In our previous discussion we have already given some indication that divine providence had a purpose in bringing death upon human nature. It was this: to refashion man once more by means of the resurrection into a sound creature, free from passion, pure and with no admixture of evil, after this had been eliminated by the dissolution of body and soul. Now

38 Cf. John 3:31; 1 Cor. 15:47.
in the case of the Pioneer of our salvation this design of death was fully accomplished and its essential aim completely realized. For by means of death elements previously united were separated, and then once more brought together. Thereby our nature was purified by the dissolution of elements naturally united—I refer to the soul and the body; and the reunion of the separated elements was free from any alien admixture. In the case, however, of those who follow the Pioneer, their nature does not admit of an exact imitation at every point. It receives now only as much as it is able to. The rest is stored up for the future.

Wherein, then, does the imitation consist? In bringing this about: that the evil mingled with our nature is destroyed by the representation of death in the water. It is not, indeed, completely destroyed; but there is a kind of break in the continuity of evil. Two things contribute to this destruction of evil, the repentance of the sinner and the imitation of death. By them man is released in some degree from his connection with evil. By his repentance he comes to hate sin and to avoid it, while death brings about the destruction of evil.

Now were it possible for one undergoing this imitation to die completely, what would be involved is not imitation but identity. Evil would then have totally disappeared from our nature, and we should have “died unto sin once and for all,” as the apostle says. But, as we have indicated, we imitate the transcendent power only to the extent that the poverty of our nature permits. Water is poured on us three times and we emerge again from the water, thus representing the saving burial and the resurrection which occurred three days later. And what we have in mind is this: that just as it is within our power to be immersed in water and to emerge again, so it was within the power of Him who is Sovereign of all, to go down into death, as we into the water, and to return again to his natural and blessed state.

If, then, we take a reasonable attitude and judge results by the inherent capacity in each case, we shall find no essential difference in these actions. Each accomplishes what he can in terms of his nature. Man can safely come into contact with water when he so desires. It is infinitely more easy for the divine power to come into contact with death, and, while being overcome by it, to suffer no injury. Thus the reason we have to enact in advance and by water the grace of the resurrection is to assure us that it is just as easy to be baptized in water as it is to rise again from the dead.

In the ordinary events of life there are some things that are of more primary importance than others, and without which a given result could not be attained. Yet when one contrasts the beginning of such matters with the final end, the former appears insignificant by comparison. For instance, what parity is there between a human being and the seed from which he is constituted? And yet, if the one is absent, the other does not come into being. It is the same with what happens at the great resurrection. Though essentially superior [to baptism], it has its source and origin here; and, indeed, it could not occur, did not baptism precede it. It is not possible, I contend, for a man to attain to the resurrection apart from the regeneration by washing.

I am not thinking here of the remodeling and refashioning of our composite nature. For in any case, driven by inherent necessity, our nature must reach that end in accordance with the Creator’s plan for it, and independent of its receiving the grace of baptism or of its failing to share in that initiation. Rather am I thinking of the restoration of our nature to a blessed and divine state, free from all sorrow and shame.

For not all who are granted a renewed existence by the resurrection will enter upon the same new life. Rather will there be a great difference between those who are purified and those who lack purification. Those who in their lifetime here have already been purified by baptism will be restored to a state akin to this. Now purity is closely related to freedom from passion, and it is not to be doubted that blessedness consists in this freedom from passion. But those, on the other hand, who have become inured to passion, and to whom nothing has been applied to cleanse the stain—neither the sacramental water nor the invocation of divine power, nor the amendment of repentance—must necessarily find their appropriate place. Now just as the appropriate place for debased gold is the furnace, so the evil mingled with these natures must be melted away in order that, after long ages, they may be restored to God in their purity. Since, then, both fire and water have a capacity to cleanse, those who have washed off the stain of sin in the sacramental water do not need the other means of purification. But those who have not been initiated into this purification must of necessity be purified by fire.

39 Rom. 6:10.
...has entirely washed away all stains of sin. Though a small thing in itself, this is the origin and foundation of great blessings. I call it a small thing because of the easiness with which it is accomplished. For what is there difficult about this, to believe that God is everywhere, and that, present as he is in all things, he is also present to those who invoke his life-giving power, and that being present, he acts in character? Now the salvation of those in need is characteristic of God’s activity; and this is effected through the purification by water. He who is purified will share in purity, and that which is truly pure is the Godhead itself. You observe how small a thing it is to begin with and how easily accomplished—just faith and water: faith which is a matter of our own choice, and water which is natural to man’s life. But what a blessing springs from these things—no less than kinship with God himself!

**The Eucharist**

37. Owing to man’s twofold nature, composed as it is of soul and body, those who come to salvation must be united with the Author of their life by means of both. In consequence, the soul, which has union with him by faith derives from this the means of salvation; for being united with life implies having a share in it. But it is in a different way that the body comes into intimate union with its Saviour. Those who have been tricked into taking poison offset its harmful effect by another drug. The remedy, moreover, just like the poison, has to enter the system, so that its remedial effect may thereby spread through the whole body. Similarly, having tasted the poison that dissolved our nature, we were necessarily in need of something to reunite it. Such a remedy had to enter into us, so that it might, by its counteraction, undo the harm the body had already encountered from the poison.

And what is this remedy? Nothing else than the body which proved itself superior to death and became the source of our life. For, as the apostle observes, a little yeast makes a whole lump of dough like itself. In the same way, when the body which God made immortal enters ours, it entirely transforms it into itself. When a poison is combined with something wholesome, the whole admixture is rendered as useless as the poison. Conversely, the immortal body, by entering the one who receives it, transforms his entire being into its own nature.

40 The reference is to Gen. 3:6. 41 I Cor. 5:6.

Now nothing can enter the body unless it is assimilated in the system by eating and drinking. Hence the body must receive the life-giving power in the natural way. Now only that body in which God dwelt, acquired such life-giving grace; and we have already shown that our body cannot become immortal unless it shares in immortality by its association with what is immortal. We must, therefore, inquire how that one body can be perpetually distributed to so many thousands of the faithful throughout the world, and yet be received in its entirety in the portion each gets, and still remain whole in itself. In consequence, we must turn aside for a moment to discuss the physiology of the body, so that our faith, in its concern for what is reasonable, may entertain no doubts on this question.

Now who does not realize that our bodily nature does not owe its life to its own subsistence? It maintains itself and continues in existence by a power that enters it from outside. It perpetually appropriates what it needs and disposes of what is superfluous. When a skin is full of a liquid and this leaks out of the bottom, it fails to retain its shape unless something else is poured in to fill up the vacuum. In consequence, anyone seeing the outward shape of the skin recognizes that this is not a property of the skin itself, but that it is the inflowing liquid that gives it its shape. In the same way the constitution of our body possesses nothing we recognize as its own by which to maintain itself. Rather does its existence depend on a power from outside. This power is food, as we call it. It is not the same for all bodies that need nourishment; but each has been granted its appropriate food by Him who is responsible for its nature. Some animals feed on roots that they dig up; others feed on grass; others, again, on flesh. Man, however, is principally nourished by bread. Moreover, to preserve the body’s moisture there is drink; not, indeed, of water only, but often of water sweetened with wine to further the body’s heat. When we look at these things, then, we are looking at the potential materials of our body. In me they become blood and flesh, since in each case the food is changed by the power of assimilation into the form of the body.

Now that we have discussed these matters, we must turn our thoughts back to the issue before us. We inquired how the one body of Christ could give life to all mankind—to all, that is, who have faith—and while being distributed to them all, suffer no reduction in size. Perhaps we are close to a reasonable explanation.
All bodies derive their subsistence from nourishment, that is, from food and drink. Now bread is food, and water sweetened with wine is drink. Moreover, God’s Word, as we explained at the beginning, is both God and Word and was united with human nature. When he entered this body of ours, he did not innovate on human nature, but maintained his body in the usual and appropriate way, providing for its subsistence by food and drink, the food being bread. In our case, then, as we have frequently observed, when we see bread we see, in a way, the human body, for that is what bread, by passing into it, becomes. It was the same in his case. The body in which God dwelt, by receiving bread as nourishment, was in a sense identical with it. For, as we have said, the food was changed into the nature of the body. What is recognized as a universal characteristic applied to his flesh too, i.e., that his body was maintained by bread. But by the indwelling of God the Word, that body was raised to divine dignity.

We have good reason, then, to believe that now too the bread which is consecrated by God’s Word is changed into the body of God the Word. For that body as well was once virtually bread, though it was sanctified by the indwelling of the Word in the flesh. Therefore the means whereby the bread was changed in that body, and was converted into divine power, are identical with those which produce a similar result now. For, in the former case, the grace of the Word sanctified the body which derived its subsistence from bread, and which, in a way, was itself bread. In the latter case, similarly, the bread (as the apostle says) is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer. It is not, however, by being eaten that it gradually becomes the body of the Word. Rather is it immediately changed by the Word into the body, as the Word himself declares: “This is my body.”

But all flesh is nourished by the element of moisture as well; for the earthly part in us could not continue to live unless it were combined with this. Just as we sustain the solid mass of the body by firm and solid food, so we supplement its moisture from what is akin to this. By entering us it is changed into blood by assimilation; and this is especially the case if it derives from wine the capacity of being changed into heat. Now the flesh in which God dwelt used this element too to

42 Cf. I Tim. 4:3.
43 In the sense that bread could be converted into it.
44 Mark 14:22.
45 I.e., the consecration prayer.
46 Metastasieis, by which Gregory means that the elements, of which the bread and wine are composed, are rearranged in a new form. This “transformation” parallels the change that food undergoes when its elements are rearranged by assimilation to constitute a human body.
47 The reference is to his great work Against Eunomius, and to the oration On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.
immutable, while what is created is subject to change. Of what, then, will one who considers his own interest carefully choose to be the child: of a nature observed to be mutable or of one which is unchanged and stable and consistently good?

We are taught in the gospel that there are three Persons and Names through whom believers come to be born. He who is born of the Trinity is born equally of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For this is how the gospel speaks about the Spirit: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” 50 Paul, moreover, gives birth “in Christ,” 51 and the Father is the “Father of all.” 52 And here I ask the reader to judge soberly, lest he make himself the offspring of an unstable nature, when he could have that which is unchangeable as the source of his life. For what happens in the sacrament of Baptism 53 depends upon the disposition of the heart of him who approaches it. If he confesses that the holy Trinity is uncreated he enters on the life which is unchanging. But if, on a false supposition, he sees a created nature in the Trinity and then is baptized into that, he is born once more to a life which is subject to change. For offspring and parents necessarily share the same nature. Which, then, is more advantageous: to enter upon the life which is unchanging or to be tossed about once more in a life of instability and fluctuation?

Everyone with any intelligence at all recognizes that what is stable is far preferable to what is unstable, that the perfect is to be preferred to the defective, what is in need of nothing to what is in need, what can advance no farther but is permanently and perfectly good to what progresses gradually. In consequence an intelligent person is surely faced with this choice. Either he must believe that the nature of the holy Trinity is uncreated, and so, by spiritual birth, make it the source of his own life, or else, if he imagines the Son or the Holy Spirit is excluded from the nature of the primal, real, and good God (by which I mean the Father), 54 he should not include them in the confession of faith he makes at the time of his new birth. Otherwise he may inadvertently make himself the child of a nature which is defective and needs someone to better it; and so, by withdrawing his faith from the transcendent nature, put himself back, as it were, in the same

49 Cf. Matt. 28:19. 50 John 3:6. 51 1 Cor. 4:15. 52 Cf. Eph. 4:6. 53 Οἰκονομία. 54 The reference is to the extreme Arian position represented by Eunomius, whom Gregory attacks in his elaborate work, Against Eunomius.

position in which he already is. For a person who brings himself under the yoke of anything created unwittingly puts his hope of salvation in that and not in God.

All created things, by virtue of the fact that they equally proceed from nonbeing into being, are essentially akin. In the structure of the body all the members are closely allied, even though some happen to have a lower, others a higher, position. In the same way there is an essential uniformity in the world of created things, because they are all created; and this basic kinship is in no way broken by differences of excellence and deficiency among us. Even if in other respects things we conceive of as equally arising out of nonbeing have their differences, we can discover no dissimilarity in their nature on this point.

If, then, man is a created being and he thinks of the Spirit and the only-begotten God as similarly created, he would be foolish to hope for a change for the better, when he is only reverting to his own nature. His situation resembles what Nicodemus surmised. 55 When he learned from the Lord of the need to be born again, he was dragged back in his thoughts to his mother’s womb, because he had not yet grasped the meaning of the revelation. And so, if a man does not ally himself with the uncreated nature, but with the creation which is akin to him and shares his bondage, his is not the birth from above. But the gospel 56 says that the birth of those who are saved is from above.

Yet it appears to me that the instruction we have so far given is insufficient in what it teaches. We have, I think, to consider what follows baptism. It is a point which many of those who approach its grace neglect, deluding themselves and being born in appearance only and not in reality. For the change our life undergoes through rebirth would not be a change were we to continue in our present state. I do not, indeed, see how a man who continues the same can be reckoned to have become different, when there is no noticeable alteration in him. For it is patent to everyone that we receive the saving birth for the purpose of renewing and changing our nature. Yet baptism produces no essential change in human nature. Neither reason nor understanding, nor capacity for knowledge, nor anything else that marks human nature, undergoes a change. For the change would certainly be for the worse, were any of these characteristics of our nature to be altered. If, then, 55 Cf. John 3:4. 56 Cf. John 3:3.
these faculties are not changed, and yet the birth from above does in some way refashion man, we must inquire what that change is which the grace of rebirth brings about.

Now it is clear that when the evil characteristics of our nature are done away, there is a change for the better. If, then, as the prophet says, when we undergo this sacramental “washing” we become “clean” in our wills and wash away “the iniquities” of our souls, we become better and are changed for the better. But if the washing has only affected the body, and the soul has failed to wash off the stains of passion, and the life after initiation is identical with that before, despite the boldness of my assertion I will say without shrinking that in such a case the water is only water, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is nowhere evident in the action. [That is true] not only when anger deform and dishonors the image of God, or covetous passion or unbridled and shameful thoughts and pride, envy, and arrogance, but also when a man keeps the profits of injustice, and the woman he has acquired by adultery continues to serve his lusts. If this sort of thing characterizes a man’s life as much after baptism as before, I cannot see that he has undergone any change, since he appears just the same person as before. Those who are wronged, defrauded, and deprived of their property, observe, for their part, no change when a man like this is baptized. They do not hear him saying what Zachaeus said: “If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will restore him fourfold.” What they said of him before baptism, they continue to say of him now. They call him by the same names — a covetous person, greedy for others’ property, and feeding on men’s misfortunes.

A man, then, who remains the same and yet prattles to himself about the change for the better he has undergone in baptism, should attend to what Paul says: “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” For you are not what you have not become; whereas the gospel says of the regenerate that “He gave all those who received him the power to become God’s children.” Now the child born of someone certainly shares his parent’s nature. If, then, you have received God and become his child, let your way of life testify to the God within you; make it clear who your Father is! The marks by which we recognize God are the very ones by which a son of his must show his relation to him: “he opens his hand and fills everything living with joy” “he overlooks iniquity” “he relents of his evil purpose” “the Lord is kind to all, and is not angry with us every day” “God is straightforward and there is no unrighteousness in him” — and the similar sayings scattered through Scripture for our instruction. If you are like this, you have genuinely become a child of God. But if you persist in displaying the marks of evil, it is useless to prattle to yourself about the birth from above. Prophecy will tell you: “You are a son of man, not a son of the Most High. You love vanity, and seek lies. You fail to realize that the only way man is magnified is by becoming holy.”

To this we must add the further point that the promised blessings, held out to those who have lived a good life, defy description. For how can we describe “what the eye has not seen, or the ear heard, or what the heart of man has not entertained?” Nor, too, does anything which afflicts the senses here equal in torment the future life of sinners. Even if we denote some of those torments by terms familiar to us here, the difference is not slight. When you hear the word “fire,” you have been taught to think of it differently from ordinary fire, since a new factor is added. For that fire is not quenched, while experience has devised many ways to quench the fire we know. And there is a great difference between fire which is quenched and that which admits of no quenching. They are, therefore, different, and not the same.

Then again, when a person hears the word “worm,” the identity of expression must not divert his mind to the creature of earth. For the addition of the phrase “that does not die” suggests the thought that it is a different creature from the one we know.

These, then, are the things we are given to expect in the life to come; and by God’s righteous judgment they are the appropriate outcome of the way of life each chooses. Those, therefore, who are wise should set their eyes, not on this present life, but on that to come. In this short and fleeting existence they should lay the foundations of untold blessedness. By choosing a good way of life they should avoid all experience of evil, now in this life and afterwards when they win their eternal reward.

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61 Ps. 145:16.  
62 Micah 7:18 (LXX).  
63 Joel 2:13.  
64 Ps. 145:9; 7:12 (LXX).  
65 Ps. 92:15.  
66 Cf. Ps. 4:3; 4 (LXX); 82:6.  
67 I Cor. 2:9.  
69 Cf. Mark 9:43.