

## ON THE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE PSALMS

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## PREFACE

*The entire purpose of the divinely inspired teachings (of the Psalms) is to lead our mind up to true blessedness.*

*The definition of human blessedness is likeness to God.*

Gregory of Nyssa

The list of the Fathers and ancient ecclesiastical authors, whose name has been associated with commentaries or exegetical works on the book of Psalms, is lengthy indeed. Even if we limit ourselves to the first five centuries AD, we certainly will end up with an impressive catalogue: Hippolytos of Rome, Origen, Eusebios of Caesarea, Athanasios the Great, Didymos the Blind, Hilary of Poitiers, Diodoros of Tarsus, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Kyrrhos, Hesychios of Jerusalem and Cassiodorus.

Within such an imposing exegetical output related to the Psalter, the treatise **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** by Gregory of Nyssa occupies a significant place. This is a work that offers inspiring aspects of biblical exegesis. Gregory's decision, for instance, to deal exclusively with the inscriptions of the Psalms reveals an exegete who is sensitive to the biblical text down to its minute details and specific features, which some theologians would perhaps consider secondary. He shows that every word of the Old Testament Psalms, their titles included, should draw the attention of the interpreter because it would yield rich theological material. Hence he dedicates an entire book just to the study of something very particular, namely the titles of the Psalms. His exegetical perceptiveness and sensitivity vis-à-vis the text he selected to work on, prompts him to examine thoroughly not only what is in it

but also what seems to be missing. As a result, he embarks on the interpretive venture to find out and explain why some of the Psalms have no inscription at all (2, 8-9). For Gregory even this phenomenon of absence of inscription is worth studying because it is indicative of theological points or tendencies.

The specificity of his exegetical task and the intense focusing on the details of the text, however, do not prevent Gregory from concurrently grasping the general ideas, the overall architecture, and the central religious messages of the Psalter. As he states in his introductory remarks “by devoting more careful attention to the entire book of Psalms, I deemed it necessary to begin not from examining the inscriptions themselves, but to set forth with regard to the psalms as a whole a certain means for accurately comprehending their main themes” (1, Introduction). In a sense, the title of his treatise **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** may be misleading. His book could very well have the title “On the Theological Essence and Purpose of the Psalms,” because this is exactly the content of the book. Gregory’s exegesis might appropriately be characterized as macroexegesis and microexegesis. By utilizing an insightful and subtle analysis of the particulars and the specifics, he offers basic hermeneutical keys for a deep and exciting understanding of the whole. Thus in his treatise we have an illuminating and stimulating guide for a theological, spiritual and dynamic reading, or rather re-reading (*relecture*) of the entire book of the Psalms.

The exegetical contribution of the bishop of Nyssa is decisive here because it presents, in a consistent and methodological way, the spiritual dimensions of the Old Testament Psalms. As it is expected, such an emphasis might imply the utilization of an allegorical exegesis. Nonetheless, the allegorical element is restraint in the work present. The spiritual dimension does not cause an eclipse of history. Gregory in his **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** offers extensive passages in which history is taken seriously and responsibly. His is an exegesis which focuses on the spiritual reality, but history, time and nature constitute a constant background ever present. Here we encounter the combination of breathtaking vistas of spirituality and of sober views of human history, of astonishing attention to the details and of absorbing preoccupation with the grand scale of theological schemes. It is this combination of microexegesis and macroexegesis, of historical reality and spiritual vision that make the book **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** a truly fascinating volume for biblical exegesis.

Beyond the immediate scope of biblical exegesis, Gregory’s work on the book of Psalms constitutes an outstanding text on Christian Spirituality. In this case the theological brilliance and the spiritual depth of the author shines forth in many ways. Starting, for instance, from Psalm One, he places a particular emphasis on the concept of *arete* (virtue) as central in any sound definition of spiritual life. In Gregory’s hands the word *arete* transcends the realm of ethics and becomes a term which conveys also the notion of the highest degree of spirituality. An important synthesis is evident here.

On the other hand his ingenious understanding of the fivefold division of the Psalter leads him to formulate the theory of the five basic phases in the spiritual development of the Christian. What is significant in this instance is the notion of development, of successive stages leading up from the elementary to the sublime, from the simple rejection of the evil to the *pros to theion homoiosis*. Spiritual life is viewed as being in a stage of an ongoing process, of dynamic movement. The concepts of change and transformation, of progress, of moving forwards and upwards (*agathe alloiosis, pros to kreiton metabole, prokope, anodos, poreia, anachoresis*) are constantly present. The final destination is the conquest of the true virtue, the likeness to God, the “being numbered in the angelic choir” (2, 6), and the attainment of the perfect good which is “the Only-begotten Son of God who, though being rich, emptied himself for our sakes” (2, 12). The ultimate end is a condition when “everyone will be conformed to Christ and will share one radiant form which had clothed our nature from the very beginning” (2, 8). This is the “summit of goodness, our great hope and goal of blessedness, when our human nature will no longer be troubled by evil...when we will enter that state which no words can ever express since as God testifies (Phil 4.7), it transcends sense and knowledge” (1, 8). The bishop of Nyssa reads the book of Psalms as the first book of prayer that simultaneously reveals the mysteries of an authentic Christian spirituality which leads us to the true communion with god, hence to an unchanging blessedness and bliss.

In addition to the significance for the history of exegesis and the history of spirituality, the book **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** has a particular importance for the history of Christian thought and philosophical theory. Gregory is a consistent and faithful exegete of the Psalms, and his concepts and language are similar, to a certain degree, to the ones encountered in other Patristic exegetical works on the Psalter. The bishop of Nyssa, however, is characterized by a masterful usage of concepts and terms that occur in the major philosophical works of antiquity, especially in the Platonic tradition. Beyond language, his dialectics sometimes is reminiscent of the philosophical thought processes. Here is an exegetical treatise displaying not only an exegetical but also a philosophical mind at work. His reference to music, for example, constitutes an outstanding piece of anthropology, esthetics and cosmology (1, 3). Furthermore, his usage of phrases like *methexis tou ontosontos, he tou pantos epekeikna phusis, homoiosis theo, to en to onti einai*, shows a thinker who could re-interpret and transform the philosophical terminology and make it fitting for expressing basic Christian ideas. The robust philosophical thinking of Gregory accompanied by his amazing learning surfaces on every page of his book. The biblical exegesis becomes simultaneously a splendid display of a creative, brilliant and inspiring thinker.

In view of the invaluable worth of Saint Gregory's book **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**, it is with great joy that we greet here its translation into English. Richard (Casimir) McCambly has offered an excellent service to English speaking readers by providing them with a fine translation of a masterpiece coming from a great Father, Saint and Teacher of the Church.

Metropolitan Demetrios of Vresthena

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Christianity the Psalter has enjoyed a central position in the Church's liturgical life, a fact well documented by many sources. The Church adopted the psalms, whose original homeland is the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>, to express her praise and longing for God. The Psalter consists of one-hundred and fifty individual units of religious poems permeated with the Hebrew national spirit and character. However, the early Church quickly made use of the Greek Septuagint translation in her effort to evangelize her Hellenistic neighbors. Some of these early translators of the second century B.C. experienced difficulty in understanding the inscriptions or titles added to many individual psalms<sup>2</sup>. Much clearer are some allusions in the inscriptions to certain events in David's life, such as Absalom's rebellion (Psalm Three) or the end of Saul's persecution (Psalm Eighteen). In addition to the Church's liturgical use of the Psalter, many of her Fathers found in them a plan to conduct one's life after the pattern of Jesus Christ. For example, St. Jerome remarked on the psalms' diversity, comparing them to a great house whose key is the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the abundance of commentaries on the Psalter, it was Gregory of Nyssa alone among the Church Fathers who devoted a sizable treatise not specifically to individual psalms but to their twenty inscriptions

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<sup>1</sup>“In short, the whole of the Old Testament is reflected in the psalms. There is no single experience of the soul of Israel that is not put into words there. The psalms are the fullest expression of God's revelation in the Old Testament.” Pius Drijvers, **The Psalms** (New York, 1965), p.5.

<sup>2</sup>The main difficulty is that Greek translators did not understand the inscriptions. For more information about this problem, cf. **The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible**, vol. 3 (New York, 1962), p.942 and **The Jerome Biblical Commentary** (New Jersey, 1968), p.570.

<sup>3</sup>**Tractus in Psalmorum, I** (edited by G.Morin, **Anecdota Maredsolana**, iii, 2, p. 1.

(*epigraphe*) or titles. His work, **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**<sup>4</sup>, seeks to penetrate the general intention of the Psalter, to explain their order (*taxis*), musical composition and to establish a division of the one-hundred and fifty psalms into five parts by which one may perceive a progressive teaching on virtue<sup>5</sup>. This treatise is divided into two books. At the beginning of the second book Gregory cites the guiding principle of his exegetical method:

We must first systematically treat a few inscriptions to get an idea (*theoria*) of the psalms for clearly realizing the aim (*skopos*) of their divinely inspired teachings, namely, to lead our mind to true blessedness (*to ontos makarion*), J.69.

Following an explanation of the inscriptions (or their absence in certain cases), Gregory asks why the psalms do not follow an historical order, and he comments in particular on certain psalms.

The psalms were originally meant to be accompanied by music and therefore to be sung. However, music for the Fathers in general was one of the most detestable aspects of pagan life. This aversion to music, associated with luxury and debauchery (*truphe*), was common among pagan mystery religions which served to provoke a superficial ecstasy rivaling the Christian mystical experience. However, music and singing is a common human practice which Gregory acknowledges: "Even here below banquets and joyous wedding ceremonies, since they contain a measure of earthly cheer, are a pledge of that holy pursuit of divine pleasure" (J.30)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>This treatise is one of Gregory's earliest compositions. G. May puts **On Virginité** as Gregory's earliest work, 370-380. **Inscriptions** was written around 379, the same time as **De Mortuis, De Oratione Dominica, De Beatitudinibus, De Sexto Psalmo, Ad Eustathium de Trinitate**. For a chronological list of his works, cf *Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa*, by G. May in **Actes du Colloque de Chevetogne**, (Leiden, 1971), p.51-66. According to two arguments, **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** is early: "L'absence, dans ce traite, de reflexion theorique sur l'exegese; la presence, au contraire, abondante de l'histoire de l'Ancien Testament comme figuration du Nouveau." Mariette Canevet, **Gregoire de Nyse et L'Hermeneutique Biblique** (Paris, 1983), p.10, footnote 19. We may also point out that the theme of darkness, one of the key teachings of Gregory's later, mature works, is absent in **Inscriptions**.

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<sup>6</sup>St Augustine, with his usual perception, notes how well a chanted psalm touches one's soul more profoundly than the recitation of words. He thus commends the signing of the psalms. Cf. **Confessions**, x, 33 (49-50).

Gregory states the need for a Christian to look for the significance (*epinoia*)<sup>7</sup> or cause for such divine pleasure (*theias hedones*). He then proceeds with caution to see how the psalms reveal their secret, philosophical meaning, that is, to point out a way to virtue: "You (the unknown friend of Gregory to whom this treatise is addressed) have requested us to examine the meaning (*dianoia*) of these inscriptions so that their ability to lead us to virtue (*arete*) might be clear to everyone" (J.24). It is this *arete*, the focus of Gregory's treatise, around which he "clearly sees the system of ideas set forth which the well-thought-out order of the psalms indicates for realizing their goal" (J.25). Chant or melody helps attain this goal; it was David himself, the traditional author of the Psalter, who associated chant with his true teacher, virtue. We encounter this wonderful capacity of music to calm passions in the incident where David soothes Saul's troubled mind (1Sam 19.9-10): "Thus history attributes to David the benefits of this divine music when Saul was afflicted...David cured him by disciplining his passions, so that he might be restored to his senses" (J.33).

Of all the ancient Christian works on the psalms, **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** is the most original, lying as it does in the classical tradition beginning with Hippolytos and Hilary. However, Gregory of Nyssa is not original in his desire to see the psalms' sapiential or spiritual meaning. This is evident enough from a reading of his treatise; rather, his originality lies in an extremely synthetic, unified and exclusive exegetical method and in the rigor with which he applies it. According to him, the Psalter in its entirety has a unique *skopos*, end or aim, the ascension of the soul by virtue to beatitude. The order (*taxis*) of the psalms functions in view of this *skopos*, that is to say, it constitutes a significant connection (*akolouthia*) by which we are conducted from Psalm One to Psalm One-hundred and Fifty or from the beginning of the spiritual life to its summit, participation in beatitude or God himself.

Gregory forged this notion of *akolouthia*<sup>8</sup> in his struggle against Eunomios who claimed to have knowledge of God's essence or *ousia*. He shows great respect for Scripture's logical sequence (*akolouthia*) which furnished him with a plan to his commentaries and arguments against Eunomios. The theological exposition's main task is to seek where this integral order lies, not so much as to know something about the incomprehensible divine nature, but to conduct the soul in its progress towards God. Two such typical references of *akolouthia* may be briefly stated as follows: "We will attempt to investigate the reason for 'canticle of pause' while guarding the order (*akolouthia*) in this part of scripture handed down to us" (J.114, **Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms**). And, "Let us return to the sequence (*akolouthia*) of the text" (J.42, **Life of Moses**). Here we have Gregory's profound, Christian respect for the text both in its historical and symbolic meanings. Because the bishop of Nyssa wrote not too long after Nikaia, he is less attached to the historical aspect of salvation prominent in second and third century theology and the prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New than he is with distinguishing and affirming the two natures of Christ and symbols of the Trinity<sup>9</sup>. In other words, his

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<sup>7</sup>This word, difficult to render into English, denotes reflection on a concept already formed opposed to direct conception or perception. Cf. **A Patristic Greek Lexicon**, edited by G. Lampe (Oxford), p. 528.

<sup>8</sup>For an explanation of the relationship between *akolouthia* and exegesis, cf. **L'Étre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse** by Jean Danielou (Leiden, 1970), pp. 37-42.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. the three lances in **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**, J.119. Compare this passage with its Trinitarian connotations with a passage from Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

The archer of these arrows is love who sends his own "chosen arrow," the only-begotten Son, to those who are saved,

speculative mind is free to unearth the deeper levels of Scripture which perhaps would not be as possible if Gregory had lived at an earlier time.

**On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**, early though it may be in Gregory's works, already shows in seminal fashion an inclination for things spiritual which are subsequently made available through his notion of *akolouthia*. We find a remarkably consistent use of *akolouthia* in **Inscriptions**, yet Gregory is not preoccupied to find an order as applied to an organic succession of the entire Psalter: "The divine book of the psalms wonderfully shows us the way to blessedness by a systematic, natural order demonstrating the various means for man to attain blessedness" (J.26). The formal design of the Psalter's division into five parts thus is a rigorous, logical progression towards beatitude, the *skopos* (aim) of all one-hundred and fifty psalms<sup>10</sup>. Gregory certainly must have had in mind Basil the Great's first homily **On the Psalms** where he views all the psalms in light of its first one which in turn stimulates the reader to pass through them all. For Basil, Psalm One holds out the promise of salvation attained after one experiences the vicissitudes eloquently expressed in the other psalms. However, Gregory differs from his brother with his insistence and precision regarding the initial theme of beatitude, the term of the virtuous life. Psalm One-hundred and fifty is therefore united to the *skopos* of Psalm One: "The first words of the first psalm are a gate or entrance into blessedness and opens up to us the destruction of evil...The meaning of the last psalm shows that once all sin has been blotted out, everything will be holy and united in one voice to praise God" (J.67-68).

The most remarkable fact is that after presenting his theme of blessedness and five steps or ascensions through the Psalter, Gregory does not explain why he follows such a division. It is simply there. Each section clearly does not constitute a homogeneous unity, yet Gregory's progress is not arbitrary, guided as it is by the concept of *akolouthia*. The modern reader is struck by such an artificial division, but it does serve to stress the theme of this treatise, blessedness as related to virtue: "Blessedness for men is participation in that which truly exists" (*makarion te methexei tou ontos ontos*, J.26). As David Balas points out<sup>11</sup>, only God is "blessed" in the true and primary sense while we are blessed by participation in him. Thus both the definition of human beatitude and the *telos* (end) of life according to virtue consists in assimilation to God. Not to be in God is not to exist at all, for Gregory understands it in the sense that a sinful life is simply non-existent (*anupostatos*), J.48, 62, 137. Thus to exist in a true, proper sense is not bare existence but communion with God, and it is practically

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dipping the triple-pointed tip of the arrow in the Spirit of life. The tip of the arrow is faith, and by it God introduces the archer into the heart along with the arrow. As the Lord says, "I and the Father are one; we will come and make our home with him." **Gregorii Nysseni in Canticum Canticorum**, edited by Hermann Langerbeck (Leiden, 1960), p.127.

<sup>10</sup>"Gregoire est le seul a avoir eu cette idee encore qu'on puisse discerner fugitivement quelque chose d'analogue chez Hilaire. En tout cas, it est le seul a l'avoir exploitee, et avec quelle constance systematique. Il l'exploite en recouvant en fait a un presuppose implicite, a savoir que le debut d'une oeuvre ou d'une section d'oeuvre a un caractere determinant, contenant en germe tout le developpement subsequent. L'idee est traditionnelle dans l'Antiquite. On la trouve dans les traites de rhetorique." Marie Rondeau, in an article entitled, "D'ou vient la technique exegetique utilisee par Gregoire de Nysse dans son traite 'Sur les Titres des Psaumes?'" **Melange d'Histoire des Religions** (Paris, 1974), p.282.

<sup>11</sup>David Balas, **Metousia tou Theou** (Rome, 1966), p. 153.

synonymous with the true life belonging to an intellectual nature. We can see then that Gregory applies the categories of participation to every virtue: "Flocks (of Ps 106) represent the soul's docile motions when they become a virtue at our service" (J.61-62). *Thumos* (the active, non-intellectual principle), when yoked to reason, becomes our servant, as Gregory continues to say. Another "flock" is *epithumia* (desire, longing) which raises us on high to God when directed by understanding. This role of desire plays an important role in Gregory's more mature works, especially his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**.

Gregory is alone among ancient exegetes to present a unique *skopos* with respect to all the psalms. Eusebios also employed the method of *akolouthia* not only between individual psalms but between consecutive psalms, yet he differs from Gregory in that he sees this *akolouthia* between psalms with a common inscription such as "Psalms of Core." He therefore lacks a global, unitive vision of the Psalter yet situates, good historian that he is, the reader in salvation history. On the other hand, Gregory perceives the *akolouthia* of the Psalter as a whole, that is, the necessary connection which leads to a unique *skopos*<sup>12</sup> or beatitude as the end of a virtuous life. We find that the very first psalm, by mentioning two voices, enjoins on us separation from evil and the fruit of pursuing the good. From Gregory's treatise **On the Incriptions of the Psalms** right up to the **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, we see a spiritual connection which develops from this psalm's opening words. Contrast two passages from these important works:

The first psalm calls blessedness a turning from evil, the beginning of an impulse to the good. Hence, these (divisions of the first psalm) bring about likeness to God for the perfect or blessedness as we have just said. An evergreen tree implies this fact, for it is compared to a life perfected through virtue. (**Inscriptions**, J.26)

The person who has his will in harmony with God's law and cares for it day and night (Ps 1.2) becomes a flourishing tree fed by streams of water (Ps 1.3), yielding its fruit in due season (Mt 2.41). Thus, too, the bridegroom's vine is rooted in Gadi, a fertile place, that is, in the depths of a mind watered by the divine teaching, and it bears that blossoming, fruitful cluster in which one can observe its vine dresser and husbandman. How happy is that orchard whose fruit resembles the bridegroom's beauty! (**Song of Songs**, J.97- 98)

An original notion of Gregory of Nyssa is his division of the Psalter into five sections. An utterance of praise determines the conclusion of each section: "The number of each division is as follows: the first has forty psalms, the second has thirty-one, the third and fourth have seventeen respectively, and the fifth part has forty-five psalms" (J.38). Such a systematic division (*technike diaskeue kai diairesis*, J.38) establishes the intelligibility of the psalms, and the five sections reveal the structure of ideas logically arranged in function of the subject. Perhaps the major advantage of these five division is that they allow us to perceive the steps<sup>13</sup> or progress at the heart of Gregory's teaching. Since **On the**

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<sup>12</sup>The Neo-Platonists of the school of Athens, as well as Jamblicos, used this method of *skopos* with regard to profane texts. Cf. *Exegese du Psautier et anabase Spirituelle chez Gregoire de Nysse* by Marie Rondeau from **Epektasis**, p.518.

<sup>13</sup>*Anabasis, bathmos, anados*. We do not find in **Inscriptions** the same account or order agreeing with the three terms established by Origen, practical philosophy, natural contemplation, and theology. "Pour Gregoire, contemplation physique et theologie forment ensemble la seconde voie, et la troisieme voie est un ordre nouveau, ou il introduit, et qu'Origene ne connait pas. C'est celui de la connaissance dans la tenebre, qui est le fruit de l'union." Jean Danielou, **Platonisme et**



**Inscriptions of the Psalms** is an early work, we find here a seminal doctrine of *epektasis*<sup>14</sup>, the stretching forward towards an ever deepening awareness of God.

Gregory's first step (Psalm One), which sets the tone of his entire treatise, is defined as separation from evil and meditation on the Law which engenders the good (God), J.26 & J.39. The second step (Psalm Forty-one) is a spiritual perception of created things and an ardent desire to participate in God's life (J.124). The third step (Psalm Seventy-two) emphasizes discernment of the true good. Denunciation of vanity characterizes the fourth step (Psalm Eighty-nine) where Gregory cites the example of a spider's web (J.49) which "appears to have substance and is immediately destroyed as soon as you touch it." Finally, the fifth step (Psalm One-hundred and six) is a recapitulation of the drama of salvation history. The relatively long exegesis on this psalm demonstrates the constant interplay between faith, where the soul seeks the incomprehensible God and salvation history which enables one to enter the movement of faith. Gregory's chief tool here is, of course, symbolism. This psalm "leads us to the loftiest peak and degree of contemplation...where (the sublime prophet, David) finds the fulfillment and restoration (*anakephalaiosis*) of human salvation" (J.32). Here creation sings God's praises<sup>15</sup>.

Gregory's theory of five steps rests on two elements, the ardent desire for God (Ps 41, the second step) and Israel as a seeing and knowing person (Ps 72, the third step):

The power and activity of overseeing things (*he epoptike ton onton dunamis te kai energeia*) is a characteristic of God. Therefore, he who has in himself what he desires (reference to the second step) becomes an overseer (*epoptikos*) as well as a discerner of the nature of things. (J.40).

It is this desire, so well documented in Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, that propels us on our forward journey. He insists on the visionary and luminous character of Moses whose name appears in the inscription to Psalm 89, the fourth step: "The prayer of Moses, a man of God" (J.43). Moses is great figure in Gregory's works and acts as a mediator in the transition from the third to the fourth stage. "The marks of divine beauty (on Moses' face) did not fade away, but he preserved the unchanging beauty in his

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**Theologie Mystique** (Paris, 1944), p.10. This last step is fully developed in Gregory's later works, **The Life of Moses** and **The Commentary on the Song of Songs**.

<sup>14</sup>A definition of *epektasis*: the stretching out or forward towards a goal, implying advancement. "But Gregory saw perfection in terms of constant progress. There is no limit to virtue; so perfection cannot be grasped or possessed. The race goes on forever; the ascent is never-ending. There is no danger of the soul becoming satiated and therefore being distracted from the pursuit of God, for every summit reached is a revelation of greater heights above." Frances Young, **From Nicaea to Chalcedon** (London, 1983), p.117.

<sup>15</sup>Gregory re-arranges Origen's scheme as pointed out by Rondeau (*Exegese du Psautier et Anabase Spirituelle chez Grgoire de Nysee*, p.520-21). If one compares the outline of **Inscriptions** to the **Song Commentary** which Gregory transcribes from Origen in the First Homily, the second degree of the Psalter (Ps 41) corresponds to the first stages of Proverbs. Both are characterized by a desire for virtue (**Inscriptions**, J.39 and **Song**, J.19-20). The third degree corresponds to the vanity and transitory nature of creation (**Inscriptions**, J.43 and **Song**, J.22), yet it offers two traits of the third stage, the Song of Songs, where one penetrates heaven's inner sanctuary and participates in God (**Inscriptions**, J.41 & J.43 and **Song**, J.22 & J.23).

mutable nature" (J.45)<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Moses acts to bring us from step four to step five, the last division of the Psalter. "Moses showed that by free will (reference to the fourth step), human nature rushes towards evil and returns to the good so that God's splendor may once more illumine our human existence...grace...variously deals with the circumstances into which we have fallen due to our inclination towards evil" (J.52-53).

Gregory then uses these words as an introduction to the fifth and final stage, Ps 106:

Scripture tells of different ways of how God fought on our behalf to attain the good so that we might have abundant occasions to thank him for his benefits. Psalm 106 immediately begins with 'Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, for his mercy endures forever.'" (J.53)

Thus man becomes immutable (*atreptos*), irreversibly directed towards the good much like an eagle "looking directly at the light's rays...while stretching forward (*sunteinon*) on high" (J.52)<sup>17</sup>. This "good movement" (*tes agathes alloioseos*, J.79) develops without ceasing and knows no rest<sup>18</sup>.

Here is a parallel passage from Gregory of Nyssa's **On Perfection**, a short but rich treatise composed towards the end of his life:

Therefore, what seems fearful (I mean our mutable nature) can serve as a wing for flight to better things, since it is to our disgrace if we cannot change for the better. Therefore, let not a person be grieved by the fact that his nature is mutable; rather, by always being changed to what is better and by being transformed from glory to glory, let him so be changed...For perfection truly consists in never stopping our growth towards the better nor to limit perfection with any boundary. (J.312-14)

Change had a pessimistic connotation in the ancient world, appearing as the expression of a radical instability. It is to Gregory's credit that he turned the negative implications of *trope* to an entirely positive, spiritual meaning. By this reversal, the world's instability appears stable and fixation in the good becomes the principal of true movement:

For he who ascends certainly does not stand still, and he who stands still does not move upwards. But here the ascent takes place by means of standing. I mean by this that the firmer and more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the

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<sup>16</sup>Stability in our orientation towards the good is a key element of Gregory's spiritual ascension. Cf. **Song Commentary**, J.123 & J.135; J.252-61). Jean Danielou develops this theme of human mutability in **L'Etre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse**, P.105-15.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, J.252: "The Word desires us who are changeable by nature not fall into evil, but by constant progress in perfection, we are to use our mutability as an ally in our ascent towards higher things, and by the changeability of our nature to establish it in immovability in the good."

<sup>18</sup>"La perfection de l'esprit sera concue comme participation a cette illimitation. Mais tandis que cette illimitation en Dieu est actuelle, elle se presente dans l'esprit cree, du faite meme que la mobilite est constitutive de son etre en tant que cree, comme une perpetuelle croissance." **L'Etre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse**, p.105.

course of virtue. **Life of Moses**<sup>19</sup>

Movement is a passage from non-being into being, the same relationship between what is uncreated and created. The created spirit cannot be conscious of a deficiency with respect to a greater good since it does not have the capacity to regard such a good or God. However, God's action effects in a created being the capacity to perceive something much better<sup>20</sup>. He fills the soul to its capacity yet leaves it open to always receive a greater good. Compare a passage from **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** with one from the **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

Anyone who comes upon this fountain with a raging thirst draws out as much water as he desires. He satisfies his cravings and the fulfillment of his longings. This fulfillment is not like the body's where what was once filled is again emptied. Neither does this drink remain inactive, but the divine fountain which contains this drink lays claim to the person who has grasped it and imparts something of its own power. (**Inscriptions**, J.40)

Moses sought God as if he had never seen him. So it is with all others in whom the desire for God is deeply imbedded: they never cease to desire, but every enjoyment of God they turn into the kindling of a still more intense desire. Even now the soul united to God never has its fill of enjoyment. The more it enjoys his beauty, the more its desire for him increases. (**Song of Songs**, J.32)

Psalm One-hundred and six for Gregory recapitulates the drama of human salvation, saying that this salvation is total and fully achieved: "The collective term 'every man' signifies this. That mouth, the cause of death for man, will be stopped. When everything contrary to the beautiful will be destroyed, we will enter that state which no words can ever express" (J.64). The term Gregory employs for such a state is *apokatastasis*. He speaks of it with reference to the fifth step of the Psalter: "If a troublesome, insubstantial root briefly sprouts up, it will pass away and disappear in the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all things to the good" (J.155)<sup>21</sup>. The essential point here, as Jean Danielou stresses<sup>22</sup>, is Gregory's opposition to the cyclic character of Stoic *apokatastasis* which has influenced Origen before him. Gregory implies a correction to Origen on this matter towards the very end of **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**. "For the person who goes about the city in impiety does not live in the city, nor does he retain his stamp of humanity; rather, he is changed into a beast by his own free will" (J.175). Punishment for evil is not glossed over in this passage in favor of a vague *apokatastasis*.

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<sup>19</sup>**The Life of Moses**, translated by A. Malherbe and F. Ferguson (New York, 1978), p. 117.

<sup>20</sup>"You must use your mutability (*trope*) for turning to the good and for returning to the place from which you have fallen. Thus man possesses by his free choice what he desires, whether it is good or base" (J.46). On this important doctrine of change and human nature, refer to Ronald Heine's remarks: "The novelty of Gregory's handling the problem of change does not lie, however, in his assertion that one can change from bad to the good, although the general usage of the term change was for movement to evil. The novelty lies rather in his showing that the opposing poles for a mutable nature does not have to be bad and good and that a mutable nature can achieve immutability in the good by continually changing from its present good to something better." **Perfection in the Virtuous Life** (Cambridge, 1975), p.56.

<sup>21</sup>*pros to agathon* ("to the good"). Note the direction intended by the preposition *pros*. This implies continual movement in a prescribed direction or *epektasis*.

<sup>22</sup>**L'Étre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse**, p. 222.

A small yet important treatise by Gregory of Nyssa proves that *apokatastasis* rests on Christ as composed of mankind as a whole:

Paul said that the pure and undefiled divinity of the Only-Begotten Son assumed man's mortal, perishable nature. However, from the entirety of human nature to which the divinity is mixed, the man constituted according to Christ is a kind of first fruits of the common dough. It is through this (divinized) man that all mankind is joined to the divinity. **When (the Father) Will Subject all Things to (the Son), then (the Son) Himself will be Subjected to Him (the Father) who Subjects all Things to Him (the Son)**--*A treatise on First Corinthians 15.28*, PG1313A-B<sup>23</sup>.

Compare this excerpt with two passages from **Inscriptions**:

This psalm (106) proclaimed the perfection and return to the good by humanity...no person may be left under death's dominion after everyone has been redeemed. (J.54)

Once every trace of evil has been abolished, everyone will be conformed to Christ and will share one radiant form which had clothed our nature from the very beginning. (J.101)

These three passages taken together show us that the theological unity of Christ's mystical body is nothing other than humanity as a whole<sup>24</sup>.

Gregory ties in his eschatological notion of the restoration of all things to God by the symbolic content of the inscription to psalms six and eleven, "For the eighth:"

Everyone who exercises diligence with regard to virtue has in mind the future life. Its beginning is called "the eighth," for it follows this perceptible time when the number seven is dissolved. Therefore, the inscription "for the eighth" advises us not to set our minds on this present age, but to look to the eighth. (J.83)

Gregory of Nyssa was so enthralled by the symbolism of the week and the octave that he wrote a little treatise, **On the Eighth**<sup>25</sup>. The eighth day recalls Christ's circumcision, "the first realization of creation" which is subject neither to growth nor to diminution. This special day, not subject to

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<sup>23</sup>On the unity of Christ's body, refer to Reinhold Hubner's remarks: "Die Tragweite der Leib-Christi Theologie Gregors hangt ab von der Tragweite der Theologie der Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen, denn der Leib Christi der Endzeit is die Vollzahl der in ihrer ursprunglichen Gottahnlichkeit Widerhergestellten, das Endstadium der Ruckfuhrung aller aus der Entfremdung in ihre natuerliche erkenntnismassige und willentliche Verhaftung im allein Seienden und Guten, das ihr Seinsgrung ist, die Zentrierung des Blickes aller auf das eine Zeil." **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), p.231.

<sup>24</sup>According to von Balthasar, "la preuve supreme et, pour Gregoire, evedente, sur laquelle il s'appuye constanment est celle de l'unite de la nature humaine." **Presence et Pensee**, p.59.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. **In Inscriptiones Psalmorum, In Sextum Psalmum, In Ecclesiasten Homiliae**, edited by J. McDonough (Leiden, 1962), p.187-93. This theme of the eighth day also occurs in Gregory's **Song Commentary**, J.463-67, where he examines the symbolism of eighty concubines in light of Psalm Six's inscription, "For the eighth." His exegesis occurs almost at the very end of the **Song Commentary** which climaxes with plentiful citations from St. John's Gospel regarding

measurement, is the full day of the age to come which "will not be obscured by the sun's setting" (J.84). We are at the summit of the spiritual life now, the beginning of eternal life which ties in with Gregory's treatise on the Son's subjection to his Father:

Christ is our unity...Subjection to God is our chief good when all creation sounds as one voice when everything in heaven, on earth and under the earth bends the knee to him, and when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Then when every creature has become one body and is joined in Christ through obedience to one another, he will bring into subjection his own body to the Father. (PG44.1320A)

As Roger Leys remarks<sup>26</sup> in his book on Gregory's theology of image, the bishop of Nyssa refuses to call man the image of the three divine Persons taken together, yet he develops the action of each Person in their common action outside themselves, that is, with regard to the economy of salvation. The Holy Spirit incorporates us in the Son who in turn unites us to the Father<sup>27</sup>. Refer to a passage from **Inscriptions** on this doctrine: "Thus by more subtle teachings of his intentions, the divine sculptor (Father) scrapes and polishes (action of the Holy Spirit) our mind and then forms Christ in us according to the pattern of virtue" (J.116).

The "angelic life"<sup>28</sup> is developed at greater lengths in other works by Gregory of Nyssa. The contemplative soul of man as described in this charming passage (J.86) belongs by right of birth with the angels. As Danielou points out<sup>29</sup>, *theoria* restores us not only to our angelic state but to the society composed of angels which the passage from **Inscriptions** just cited maintains. Gregory perceives it as a means of living in this temporal existence which imitates the angels' eternal praise and adoration of God. We especially find in **Inscriptions** the restoration between hypercosmos and cosmos in the one angelic praise through the total elimination of evil in the universe. Note how Gregory unites these two elements with regard to angelic praise through the means of cymbals:

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the Holy Spirit. Danielou devotes an entire chapter (16) to the theme of the eighth day in his book, **The Bible and the Liturgy** (Indiana, 1956).

<sup>26</sup>"L'ame n'est pas dite non plus a l'image d'une Personne en particulier. On comprend qu'elle ne soit pas image du Pere car c'est le privilege du Fils Monogene ni qu'elle soit image de l'Esprit car le mission de celui-ci est precisement de reveler a l'ame le Fils et de le former en elle." **L'Image de Dieu chez Gregoire de Nyse** (Paris, 1951), p.95. Leys then takes up the theme of Gregory's treatise on the Son's subjection to his Father where the Christ imprinted on our souls is not that of the *Logos* but that of perfect humanity, the first born. Thus we are made in the image of Christ's humanity.

<sup>27</sup>Also refer to Gregory's treatise **On Perfection** where the Holy Spirit reveals the Son in each person: "Christ became the image of the invisible God out of love so that in his own form which he assumed, he might be formed in you and that you again might be conformed through him to the stamp of archetypal beauty for becoming what he was from the beginning." (J.195)

<sup>28</sup>Cf. **Inscriptions**, J.86: "Sin brought about the fall of our first parents who had danced along with the angelic powers." Danielou devotes a chapter to the angelic life in **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** (Paris, 1944), p.152-82.

<sup>29</sup>**Platonisme**, p.161-62. Although Gregory subscribes to humanity's place in the *pleroma* of all things, each soul must individually realize this return substantially accomplished by the Word through his passion, death, and resurrection.

The virtues unite the cymbal's pleasing harmony with chords when the sound of cymbals arouses one's eagerness for the divine choir. To me this signifies the union of our nature with the angels. "Praise the Lord with the sound of cymbals." I take this as the union of the angelic (nature) with the human when our human nature attains its original state and gives forth that sweet sound in union with others in thanksgiving. (J.66)

It is interesting that later in the treatise Gregory explains the proper name "Maeleth" as "for a chorus" (inscription to Psalm 52), *chorostasia*. "There was a time when only one choir with a spiritual nature existed which looked to one leader of the song...Afterwards sin crept in and dissolved the divine harmony (*sunodia*) of the chorus" (J.86). We also find *chorostasia* earlier in the treatise where it means the same thing as *apokatastasis*. "When all creation above and below will join to form one dance (*chorostasis*), the pleasant sound from our symphony will complete what has been sundered...Then every spirit will praise God's grace forever" (J.68). A little earlier, Gregory compares these two parts (J.66) to one cymbal, an indication of creations' bipartite nature. Each part has its own respective dignity and needs the other part to effect "the common unity of victory" (J.67).

Music, Gregory claims, is the first true archetype (J.32). The world is a kind of musical harmony with man as a microcosm or imitator of this larger world. Gregory limits the idea of man as microcosm strictly to the human body (J.30 & J.32) to proclaim man in his totality, not an image of the world after the Stoic affiliation with nature, but of God. This parallel is significant, for it shows that the natural dwelling of the microcosm is the world into which the Holy Spirit is poured. Gregory is opposed to any doctrine which may fuse the nature of God with that of man, yet he keeps human nature dynamic and open. As von Balthasar<sup>30</sup> states, the nature of a created spirit consists in becoming or movement not by displacement but by change, for the change which defines human nature is nothing other than assimilation to God: "Therefore the definition (*horos*) of human blessedness is likeness to God" (J.26).

The example of microcosm/macrocosm parallels the above-mentioned one of the two cymbals. Gregory of Nyssa calls to mind "certain wise persons"<sup>31</sup> (J.30) who have considered this analogy, or pagan philosophers such as Heraclitus and the first Pythagoreans up to Plato and the Stoics. In fact, he cites a Stoic principle in J.33: "everything natural is compatible with nature." Here Gregory transcribes Aristotelian wisdom. "There is no need for disharmony, being out of tune, any dissonance in persons with virtuous habits, nor for an over-stretched chord because the harmony is broken when the chord is overtaut." An historical example of such disharmony is king Saul whose passions David soothed with a harp (J.33).

Music also has a mysterious effect on Christians who must calm themselves for prayer and bring about an order in themselves. "The structure of our body's organs follows this example (microcosm/macrocosm), for nature has skillfully constructed it to produce music<sup>32</sup>. Observe the tube-like structure of the windpipe and the harp of the palate where the tongue and mouth resemble a lyre with chord and a plectrum" (J.33). Music is associated with our effort as a means to re-establish in ourselves

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<sup>30</sup>**Presence et Pensee** (Paris, 1943), p. 87.

<sup>31</sup>Refer to the article by Henri Marrou, *Une Theologie de la Musique chez Gregoire de Nysse?*, **Epektasis** (Paris, 1972), p.504-5.

<sup>32</sup>Refer to St. Augustine's **De Musica** I. vi and **Confessions** xi, 28(38) regarding the interior man. Here he presents a hierarchical role where thought gathers a "musical judgment" transcending time in a mysterious silence. Also, refer to **Inscriptions**, J.68: "when the mind's capacity for hope is put to rest, there follows the unutterable, incomprehensible (reality of God), a better state of full understanding."

the lost purity of God's image or *eikon*. By chanting the psalms, they contribute to this reconstitution of harmony, for "your life should be a psalm...a pure, audible sound coming from heaven above" (J.75).

Despite sin's ravages both in man and in the cosmos, Gregory of Nyssa's outlook is positive. The "conspiration" (*sumpnoia*), essential to his cosmology, is constituted by movement (*kinesis*) and rest (*stasis*) spoken of above. They both form a boundary (*methorios*)<sup>33</sup> between night and day (J.83). This "conspiration" expresses for Gregory the kinship of all the domains within the material universe where motion and stability (*kinesis* and *stasis*) are integrally united. Not only do they form the structure of our world, but they provide a valuable analogy of our spiritual life when applied to music. "We are considering these matters so that our way of life may always be melodious and in good rhythm, neither unduly lax nor strained beyond our capacity" (J.33)<sup>34</sup> 34. Thus both musical and biological images are one and the same for Gregory, a theme borrowed from the Stoics.

Rondeau<sup>35</sup> calls Gregory's treatise **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** neither exegesis properly so-called nor spiritual theology, for Gregory presents a personal spiritual interpretation of the Psalter. It is the directive force of the psalms' quality united to the spiritual life which bestows merit on the treatise and makes it unique among ancient commentaries. We find here in seminal form all the basic ingredients of Gregory's theology which he develops in later works.

The critical edition to **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms** was prepared by James McDonough and may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni: In Inscriptiones Psalmorum, In Sextum Psalmum, In Ecclesiasten Homiliae**, vol. 5, published by E.J. Brill (Leiden, 1962), P.24-175. The edition by J.P. Migne may be found in *Patrologia Graecae*, (Paris, 1858) vol. 44.432-608.

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<sup>33</sup>Refer to Gregory's **Song Commentary**, J.333-34. Here he uses *methorios* to designate the double make-up of the human soul, the spiritual and animal components: "The human soul has two natures: the incorporeal, intellectual, and pure on the one hand; the bodily, material, and irrational on the other. When the soul is purged of the gross habits of earthly life, it looks up through virtue to what is connatural and divine." Regarding *methorios*, Danielou says: "Enfin il est notable que l'evocation de l'appartenance de l'homme au monde sensible et au monde intelligible n'est pas presentee ice en relation avec le dessein de Dieu sous son aspect positif, mais en rapport avec l'option que ceci propose a la liberte, qui peut se tourner vers le sensible et l'intelligible. L'emploi meme du term *methorios* parait donc deja designer non le seul fait que l'homme appartienne a deux spheres de realite, mais celui que sa liberte peut incliner vers l'une ou vers l'autre...la liberte est envisage essentiellement en fonction de sa possibilite de se tourner plutot vers le sensible ou vers l'intelligible." **L'Être et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse**, p.119.

<sup>34</sup>For a passage of "conspiration" (*sumpnoia*) as applied to the Church, refer to Gregory's treatise **On Perfection**, J.197: "The entire head has the same nature and substance as the body under subjection, and the individual members as a whole partake of a single unity (*sumpnoia*) effecting a co-operation among the limbs with one accord in every activity." Here the body (Church) participates in the properties proper to the head (Christ) in virtue of the consubstantiality existing between the two parts.

<sup>35</sup>**Exegese du Psalter et Anabase Spirituelle chez Gregoire de Nysse**, p.531.

## THE TEXT

### PART ONE

#### PREFACE (by Gregory of Nyssa)

**M.432 & J.24** I have eagerly received your injunction, O man of God, and have been pleased just as much as you about devoting myself to the inscriptions of the psalms. You have requested us to examine the meaning of these inscriptions so that their ability to lead us to virtue might be clear to everyone. By devoting more careful attention to the entire Psalter, I have deemed it necessary to begin not from examining the inscriptions themselves but to set forth with regard to the psalms as a whole a certain means for accurately comprehending their main themes. In this way, our treatise on the psalm's inscriptions will become clear. One must first consider the end which this book [of scripture] **J.25** has in view; then you may clearly see the system of ideas set forth which the well-thought-out order of the psalms indicates for realizing their goal. **M.433** The divisions of the entire book [of psalms] are defined by their own contents, and prophecy in the psalms is divided into five sections. The advantage obtained from our first observations of the [psalm] inscriptions will, in due time, become clearer by considering what we examined earlier. Therefore, our introductory remarks should suffice for now.

### CHAPTER ONE

The goal of a life in accord with virtue is happiness. Anything earnestly pursued is related to something else: just as medicine pertains to health and the farmer provides food necessary for living, so does the acquisition of virtue belong to blessedness and desires that one may live according to its nature, for virtue is the beginning and end of everything considered with respect to the good. Hence, anything which this lofty concept [of blessedness] perceives and comprehends as true and right may pertain to the divine nature. The great Paul therefore calls God "blessed" along with other names in one of his epistles:



"[Jesus Christ] who is the blessed and only ruler, the king of kings, and lord of lords; he alone has immortality, dwells in the light which no one **J.26** can approach. No one has seen him, nor can see him. To him be honor and power forever" (1Tm 6.15-16).

Every sublime notion pertaining to God may, in my opinion, define blessedness. Should anyone inquire about blessedness, he would dutifully comply with Paul and say that blessedness is rightly claimed as primary and takes precedence before everything else. Blessedness for men is participation in that which truly exists. Anything which is and can be expressed by quantitative terms has the nature of what it participates in. Therefore, the definition of human blessedness is likeness to God. Since the true good transcends every other good, it alone is blessed and longed after by [our human] nature, for everything participating in it is blessed.

The divine book of the psalms wonderfully shows us the way [to blessedness] by a systematic, natural order presenting the various means for man to attain blessedness both by a simplicity which is evident and a teaching which is plain. The first psalm presents us with an outline of the task before us. It divides virtue into three parts with each part testifying to blessedness by a turning away from evil, the beginning of **M.436** an impulse to the good followed by a study of sublime, divine realities which enable us to possess the good. Hence, these [divisions of the first psalm] bring about likeness to God for the perfect or blessedness as we have just said. An evergreen tree implies this fact, for it is compared to a life perfected through virtue (Ps 1.3).

## CHAPTER TWO

**J.27** In order to have a more accurate understanding of the doctrine concerning the virtues as indicated throughout the entire psalter, it would be profitable to first enumerate them for presenting a systematic, orderly plan of how a lover of this way of life may live in virtue. We would then know how important is the teaching of the psalter. In our consideration of virtue it is first necessary to distinguish between the noble and ignoble kinds of life. Once each life has manifested its respective properties, nothing unclean cannot then defile or sully reason. The signs of each characteristic and others like them are, in my opinion, more general than others such as the distinction between sense and mind. On one hand, evil entertains the senses while on the other, virtue delights the soul. As a result, a correct understanding between a blessing and a curse might make our listeners shy away from evil and pursue the good; dislike for a wicked life condemns evil, whereas praise of noble life excites us for better things. To make praise of a good life more desirable and to make censure of evil conduct more effective, it befits us to mention persons admired for virtue and others condemned for wickedness. These two kinds of lives demonstrate a tension and constancy in our souls **J.28** by drawing us to the most noble things hoped for, to train us to flee the censure proper to blameworthy actions and to shy away from similar deeds. Each example offers us a concise lesson about choosing the good and rejecting evil as well as persuasive words of counsel about staying clear of evil.

**M.437** We have carefully explained these matters since human nature has difficulty in accepting any aversion to pleasure (I call pleasure love of one's body. The soul's happiness does not partake of anything unreasonable and is not slavishly devoted to pleasure). We are able to recognize the particular manifestations of each kind of life, that is, of good and evil, because evil seduces our sense perceptions, whereas virtue gladdens our souls by directing them aright. Sense perception still seems to be a criterion for persons recently initiated into a more sublime life. Their souls are not yet worthy to see the good, for they are untrained and unaccustomed for such a comprehension. Our desire remains unmoved with respect to any unknown quantity even though it is especially attractive; neither does desire pre-exist, nor does any pleasure arise apart from anything not longed for. The road to pleasure is longing itself. We must understand this with regard to persons who have not yet tasted the pure, divine pleasure with which

they also receive the teachings of virtue and by which the sense perceptions are sweetened. This is similar to a doctor who sweetens a sharp, painful **J.29** remedy for a sick person by seasoning it with honey's pleasant taste.

If our words effectively present an introduction for a life according to virtue and first distinguish between two ways of life, then each life can be discerned by its own signs. Scripture distinguishes between a noble manner of life and another which is to be avoided because it arises from enmity. Both afford us noteworthy examples and point out the path leading to the good and the avoidance of evil. Scripture softens manly virtue for infants by offering agreeable words to gladden our sense. It is now time to consider how every teaching of the psalms systematically offers us the means to avoid evil and to pursue virtue.

### CHAPTER THREE

Beginning our exegesis of the psalms from what we just said, let us first examine the means by which a difficult, arduous way of life according to virtue makes the obscure, hidden teachings of divine mysteries comprehensible and pleasant as well as the ineffable teaching about God hidden under difficult precepts. In this way not only can men with their sense perceptions **M.437** already perfected and cleansed pursue this teaching [on virtue], but even women. [This teaching] resembles a enjoyable toy for infants and acts like a staff **J.30** to afford rest for old persons who consider it invigorating, and the person saddened by life's vicissitudes regards it as bestowed by God. Travelers by land or by sea, or persons engaged in day to day affairs not to mention men and women in every occupation, be they healthy or sick, bring condemnation upon themselves for not having virtue's sublime doctrine in their mouths. Even here below banquets and joyous wedding ceremonies, since they contain a measure of earthly cheer, are a pledge of that holy pursuit of divine pleasures so that through them, we might pass on to the inspired hymns of the psalms during the vigil service and to their teaching as followed by the Churches.

What is the reason for this ineffable, divine pleasure which the great David poured out as lessons to make the psalms' teaching palpable for mankind? Perhaps it is appropriate to give the reason for our pleasure obtained from meditating upon the psalms, for should anyone claim that the singing of their words cause such pleasure, we should indeed consider them. If this is true, I believe that we should not pass the matter by without consideration. The psalms' teaching seems to be expressed through the understanding of many persons. What do I mean? I have heard that certain wise persons who have carefully examined our human nature say that man is a microcosm containing everything in the world at large. The order of the universe resembles a musical harmony of varied shapes and colors with a certain order and rhythm which is correct, proper and never dissonant, even if **J.31** different parts differ greatly.

In a similar manner, a skilled musician plucks the strings of his instrument and brings forth music by the interweaving of sounds. But if the musical voice were simple and unchanging, there would never be any melody. Thus the blending into a whole from various, separate elements in the universe through an ordered, constant rhythm results. It harmonizes all the parts and sings in all of them this supremely consonant melody. The mind becomes a hearer though in no way is it limited to this voice; rather, by surpassing corporeal senses and becoming heavenly, it perceives the celestial hymns. It seems to me that the great David perceived these things when he beheld the graceful, subtle **M.441** of heavenly bodies and exclaimed that they proclaim the glory of God (Ps 18.2).

The song of God's glory produced by such a rhythm and composed of every creature with different qualities is indeed transcendent. Stability and motion are opposites yet they are united in the nature of things. Any unity of contrary elements in them seems impossible and appears as stability in

motion and perpetual movement in stability. Everything in the heavens is in constant motion, turns around a fixed point or has a reverse motion influenced by the planets. These bodies always have a connection based on identical elements; neither is anything new substituted for something else, **J.32** but each body always remains the same and on its proper course. Hence, stability agrees with movement in an established order which is always a well-arranged musical harmony effecting a unified, ineffable hymn of God's power embracing the universe. To me, a similar example is when the great David as an attentive listener said in one of his psalms (Ps 148.1) that all the other celestial powers praise God: the stars, sun and moon, the highest heavens and the waters above the heavens. David says that water is always present there, including everything else in creation.

The first true archetype is music, for harmony and concord adapts all things with respect to each other through an order, arrangement and system. The Maker of the universe works skillfully through his ineffable word of wisdom by those things which were always rooted in wisdom. If the entire world order is a kind of musical harmony whose artisan and creator is God as the Apostle says (Heb 11.10), then man is a microcosm, an imitator of him who made the world. The divine plan for the world at large sees this image in what is small, for the part is indeed the same as the whole. Similarly, a piece of small, transparent stone reflects like a mirror the entire sun in the same way a small object reflects God's light. Thus I say that in the microcosm, man's nature, all the music of the universe is analogously seen in the whole through **J.33** the particular inasmuch as the whole is contained by the particular. The structure **M.444** of our body's organs follows this example, for nature has skillfully constructed it to produce music. Observe the tube-like structure of the windpipe and the harp of the palate where the tongue and mouth resemble a lyre with chord and plectrum.

Since everything natural is compatible with nature, music too is in accord with our human nature. For this reason the great David combined his singing with his teaching on the virtues and sprinkled his lofty teachings with honey's sweetness by which he carefully examines himself and cures our human nature. This cure is a harmonious life which to me the singing suggests through symbols. It appears as an exhortation to a higher state of life. There is no need for disharmony, being out of tune, any dissonance in persons with virtuous habits nor for an over-stretched chord because the harmony is broken when the chord is overtaut. On the other hand, the tone does not slacken into disharmony due to pleasure, for the soul which is puffed up with such affections as these becomes blunt and speechless. Likewise, all the other passions become strained with time and their tension slackens. We are considering these matters so that our way of life may always be melodious and in good rhythm, neither unduly lax nor strained beyond our capacity.

Thus history attributes to David the benefits of this divine music when Saul was afflicted, suffered seizures and was out of his mind. David cured him by disciplining his passions that he might be restored to his senses. It is clear from these examples that whoever considers the mysterious properties of singing observes a restraint of passions which **J.34** excite us in life's various circumstances. However, we must not let pass unnoticed the fact that the composition of lyric poems and songs does not lie beyond our wisdom. A song does not consist in the sound of its words as if the words themselves gave substance to the song and as if the rhythm is produced by the arrangement of the sung words, whether they be low, sharp, short or drawn out. But the song woven together with divine words has a plan and order, for its melody wishes to explain the sense of its words. By employing the voice's intensity, the sense lying within the [song's] words reveals as much as it can. The song thus resembles something edible, that is, a condiment or a seasoning to sweeten the nourishment of the [psalms'] teachings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

M.445 We will now systematically consider the banquet of the virtues in scripture as mentioned earlier. First we must discover how virtue differs from evil in obvious cases that the difference between these contradictory elements may remain distinct. The gladness we obtain from these elements has two distinctive characteristics: the body's sense perceptions are prone to evil, whereas virtue delights the soul. These two manifestations present a true, clear idea of each property. **J.35** This can be found in many psalms, especially in the fourth psalm which says that obstinate hearts cannot discern falsehood and vanity from truth; rather, they love what lacks substance and neglect that which is stable and worthy of love. Holiness alone is worthy of admiration while men pursue everything instead of the good according to their own fancy, yet out of vanity they think it has substance.

To understand this better, [one of the psalms] says that many persons claim the good lies in appearances as perceived by our senses. "Many say, 'Who will show us good things'" (Ps 4.6)? A person considering virtue disregards this coarse judgment of the beautiful; instead, he looks at the beautiful in the light and becomes aware of the divine heavenly joy. The psalm speaks of that light shining from God's face which sense perceptions cannot grasp. "The light of your face, O Lord, is signed upon us." God's face is seen with certain characteristics which to me the prophet understands as something other than the virtues, for the divine form is indicated by such characteristics.

The psalm next speaks of the perfect mark of virtue. "You have put gladness into my heart." It mentions the heart instead of the soul and mind, for the mind cannot be enticed by evil's allurements. Psalm Four contrasts the heart's gladness with respect to material, corporeal well-being and says that persons concerned only with present matters take their stomach as a criterion of the beautiful. Concern for **J.36** material things multiplies wheat and wine and contains in part every pleasure related to the stomach and banquets. They lie at the root of every material preoccupation and do not profit us at all. **M.448** The enjoyment [of pleasure] does not arise at once nor is it found stored up in human nature as when men lay up the pleasure they zealously strive after; rather, when certain deceptive illusions lay hold of our judgment by our love of pleasure, they immediately disappear into nothing. One trace of such a phantasm remains after pleasure disappears and that is shame, a deep, indelible sign from one's experiences. This resembles a skilled hunter who recognizes an animal by its tracks; even though the tracks do not reveal the animal, they make it known.

If we recognize a boar or lion by their respective tracks, it follows that we indeed can recognize pleasure by its own tracks. However, the track of pleasure is shame. It either marks the soul with its sign, is shame itself or is its cause. But we have earlier dealt with this matter when we indicated the goal of a life according to virtue and evil in the Psalter. Therefore in the psalm [four] spoken of above, the end of virtue is peace, tranquillity, simplicity and separation from passion's indwelling which constitutes the hope of communion with God. The opposite **J.37** is indicated by silence. Often the psalmist cries out, "The unjust shall be destroyed, and the seed of the wicked shall be blotted out" (Ps 36.38). And, "He who loves injustice hates his own soul and shall rain down snares upon sinners" (10.6).

Many such examples are offered in other places. The entire Psalter is full of praise for virtue and of condemnation for persons living in evil. Historical accounts have two objects: they make known the virtue of distinguished men which is worthy of imitation, and they put evil to flight by means of condemnations. When the psalms excite you to virtue through examples it says, "Moses and Aaron were his priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon him. They called upon the Lord, and he answered them. He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud" (Ps 98.6). When wickedness manifests the extent of evil, the passions are recounted in the wickedness of condemned persons. "The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the clan of Abiram. A flame burned up sinners" (Ps 105.17). And, "Make them like Midian, like Sisera" (Ps 77.10). Also, "Make them **M.449** like Oreb, Zeba and Zalmuna, each one of their princes" (Ps 77.12). The psalter gives many other similar examples which are particular

instances crying out to you from the beginning to the end [of the psalter]. Nowhere does it let pass unheeded an exhortation to the beautiful and the means to avoid evil. All these examples assist in pointing to the good, **J.38** for the acquisition of the good consists in the banishment and destruction of its contrary. There is no need to carefully speak of each example; they are clear to anyone attentive to the text.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The Psalter is systematically divided into five parts. The outline of these five sections is clear, for each one concludes with similar doxologies to God making it possible to recognize a division in the psalms we have indicated. The number of each division is as follows: the first has forty psalms, the second has thirty-one, the third and fourth have seventeen respectively and the fifth part has forty-five psalms. Thus the first division terminates with Psalm Forty whose ending is "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, forever and ever. Let it be, let it be." The second part concludes with Psalm Seventy-one: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone makes wonders, and may the name of his glory be blessed forever and ever. May the earth be filled with his glory, let it be, let it be." The third part terminates with Psalm Eighty-eight and has a similar verse: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, let it be, let it be." The fourth part ends with Psalm One-Hundred and five whose ending is like the others: "Blessed be the Lord, **J.39** the God of Israel, forever and ever, and let all the people say 'Let it be, let it be.'" The fifth part which brings the Psalter to a close has as its ending, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

We see in these five divisions [of the Psalter] a systematic order about which we will now briefly speak. The first division represents persons living in evil due to falsehood. On the other hand, there are persons who chose the good. No longer do they pursue the error of ungodly persons, nor remain in sin's way nor are they firmly established in an evil manner of life. Instead, these persons attach themselves to God's law by diligently amending their erroneous lives. In this way they become rooted in a better manner of life like a plant **M.452** irrigated by divine teachings. Thus our first entry to the good rejects contrary elements and allows us to participate in what is better.

The person who had already tasted virtue and has understood by personal experience that the good is no longer wicked because constraint and admonition have lured him away from inclinations toward evil; he now looks to virtue and thirsts after the good. Psalm Forty-one compares unrestrained, excessive desire to thirst. It speaks of an especially thirsty animal which represents vehement desire. This animal is a deer which can feed upon poisonous animals. It consumes **J.40** the hot, fiery humors of these animals and experiences thirst since it has been poisoned by their humor. Hence, the deer desires water more ardently to slake its thirst.

The first division of the Psalter offers by way of preface a life of virtue and a sweetness for the person who both longs for virtue and consumes every image of a reptile-like desire in himself by the teeth of temperance which devours the passions instead of beasts. This person thirsts more for union with God than the deer desiring springs of water. Anyone who comes upon this fountain with a raging thirst draws out as much water as he desires; he satisfies his cravings and the fulfillment of his longings. This fullness is not like the body's where what was once filled is again emptied. Neither does this drink remain inactive, but the divine fountain which contains this drink lays claim to the person who has grasped it and imparts something of its own power.

## CHAPTER SIX

The power and activity of overseeing things is a characteristic of God. Therefore, he who has in himself what he desires becomes an overseer as well as a discerner of the nature of things. Because of this the third part of the Psalter begins with a careful examination of how the justice of the divine judgment is maintained in life's inequalities. Happiness in the life of many persons does not come from the worthiness of their choices. Quite often **J.41** we see two extremes, excess in evil and an abundance of prosperity. No matter which one we consider, the mind is troubled because **M.453** the evil is counted as good. If justice is praised, he who eagerly practices it lives miserably. On the other hand, if evil is discredited and all its activity provides enjoyments for persons striving after it, how can the choice of virtue over evil, the laudable over the despicable, be considered more worthwhile? A person with a noble mind looks out from a tower, as it were, at distant objects and sees the difference between good and evil because he judges from the future, not present circumstances. The soul's sharp, penetrating eye can comprehend as present that which hope stores up for virtuous persons and transcends all appearances. Once admitted to the heavenly sanctuary, this person condemns the unjust judgment of the good by petty minds inclined to things perceived by the senses. Therefore David says, "What is there for me in heaven? Apart from you, what have I desired on earth" (Ps 72.25)?

In the same context David wonderfully extols and praises heaven while uncomprehending eyes strive after earthly realities which he holds in utter contempt. This is as if a person born in prison had thought the gloom in which he was raised was a great benefit. Then partaking of the open air **J.42**, he scorns his first impressions and exclaims how spectacular are the sun, stars and every heavenly beauty, for he preferred his accustomed darkness due to not having experienced something better. Because of this he repudiates his first lack of judgment about the good, claiming that he was a beast while he delighted in such base things. But when he approaches God himself and comes to his right hand, reason, influenced by counsel, becomes the right path for him, and he sees glory in virtue which becomes an ascent to heaven for those who hold it in esteem. He sees the good in heaven as something wonderful, while he detests vain, futile things pursued in this life. The psalm reads, "I am made like a beast before you" (Ps 72.23), signifying our human nature's irrational inclinations.

The psalm again says, "Yet I am always with you," suggesting union with God so that we might learn how our first beast-like condition is later united with God. "You have held me," it says, "by my right hand." This verse speaks of God's help which directs our minds to what is right. "And by your counsel you have led me," for our journey to the beautiful is assisted by God. "And after this you will receive me in glory." Here **M.456** the psalmist wisely exchanges glory for shame, for the divine hand offered to him resembles a chariot and wing in exchange for shameful deeds. The psalmist adds, "What **J.43** else is there for me in heaven; apart from you, what have I desired upon earth?" No matter what the multitude of men may do, they have abundant help in heaven. Nevertheless, they ask God in prayer to grant their erroneous fantasies such as power, honor, wealth or that miserable, petty glory which excites our human nature. As for the person concerned with divine realities, the psalm [seventy-two] adds, "For me it is good to cling to God and to place my hope in the Lord." These words show us that the person who unites himself to God clings to him in hope and is one with him.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

This third section [of the Psalter] concerns our upward journey. The person who raises his mind to this lofty height once again receives a superior position and is more exalted. In the fourth part of the Psalter we go, like Paul (2Cor 11.2), beyond the third heaven and are raised higher than the other heights previously attained. Such a person makes these ascents no longer as a mere man, but he now clings to God. The psalm begins with, "The prayer of Moses, the man of God" (Ps 89.1). This verse shows that a person is no longer to be taught by the Law but has become a teacher of the Law to others. Such was that

noble Moses of whom we have heard. He willingly shook off his royal dignity as though he had removed dust from his feet. For forty years Moses withdrew **J.44** from the company of men. Keeping himself along for the Alone, he gazed at unseen realities through silent, concentrated contemplation. An ineffable light illumined Moses after which he washed the foot of his soul from its coverings of dead skin. Moses destroyed the Egyptian army and ruler by succession of plagues and freed Israel from their tyranny by light and water. The entire duration of Israel's stay in Egypt seemed as one day, for they were no longer obscured by the gloom of night. After a day's journey, Moses was illumined by rays of light, that is, a different light produced anew from the cloud. Just as the sun overshadowed by the night is symbolized by these rays, so does this everlasting light abide and constantly shine from a luminous pillar, for it always has beams of sun-like rays.

Moses sweetened the bitter, unpotable water by wood and changed **M.457** the rock into water for the thirsty people. He exchanged earthly food for heavenly food; he gazed into the divine darkness with a keen mind and beheld the invisible God. Moses described the tent not made by human hands and reverently contemplated the priestly ornaments; he received tablets fashioned by God which he later broke and fashioned anew. The divine power appeared to Moses who bore its marks upon his face, and the people who were unworthy of them turned their faces away due to his splendor which resembled shining rays. God punished the rebellious priests by fire and by a chasm and utterly destroyed those who committed outrageous deeds against his goodness. Moses transformed the sorcery of Balaam into true worship, and his death recounts his life's noble accomplishments. He advanced to the mountain's very summit **J.45** and lack any trace or remembrance of earthly grief. The marks of divine beauty [on Moses' face] did not fade away, but he preserved the unchangeable beauty in his mutable nature. This is the man who guides us in the fourth ascent and who elevates himself above the people by the three preceding ascents. The person who has attained this lofty height now stands midway between the mutable and immutable natures and intercedes for both extremes. He offers prayers to God for persons alienated by sin and transmits the mercy of God's transcendent authority to those in need. From this example we learn that the person guarding himself from lowly, earthly things draws near to a great [divine] nature transcending every human thought; he imitates God by good deeds and associates himself with God's own nature. What I mean to say is that God imparts his benevolence to all those in need.

Such is the insight we have obtained from that psalm whose inscription is "The prayer of Moses, the man of God." Since the evil of sin oppressed human nature and prevented it to be united with the good, it fell among hostile passions. [Human nature] needed an advocate, and the man of God became an intercessor with the ability to ward off destruction. Moses defended before God the fallen of his own tribe, winning over God's mercy for those who had been lost. Right away Moses justified such obedient persons and said that God alone is steadfast in **J.46** every good since he is unmoved and ever the same. But movement and change are proper to human nature which never stays the same even if attracted to the good or deprived of it. Therefore God, who is not changed by deception, is worthy of being a saving refuge in every generation.

**M.460** The first words of Psalm Eighty-nine read, "Lord, you have been a refuge for us from one generation to the next." What does this mean? That you [God], the origin and end of time, exist before creation and embrace every period of time, for infinity is an end without bounds. "Before the mountains were born and the earth formed, and even from age to age, you are." Because human nature is mutable, it was pulled down from the heavenly good and cast into the error of sin. Therefore, God, extend your unfailing hands to our fallen human nature. What you are by nature you have imparted to us. Do not let [human nature] return from its loftiness in your presence to the humility of sin. Then the messenger of God's lordly voice offers his living words, "Because you have said, 'Turn back, sons of men.'" This exhortation to our human nature suggests a healing of our evils. Since the psalmist says that mutable human beings have turned aside from the good, you must use your mutability for turning to the good and

for returning to the place from the place from which you have fallen. Thus man possesses by his free choice **J.47** what he desires, whether it is good or base.

We find another lesson in Psalm Eighty-nine. "Because a thousand years in your sight, Lord, are as yesterday, which has passed; years have been nothing for them." What can we learn here? The person who turns to the good is set free, even if his life is marred by a multitude of mistakes and the sum of his evil deeds seems like a thousand years. It is nothing as far as turning to God is concerned, for his eye always considers the present, not the past. God judges what has passed and gone as if it were one day or a night watch. The present time lies in evil's grasp; even if despised by sinners, God views this time as a great number of years. The psalm says, "years have been nothing for them." The psalmist rightly calls errors "nothing," because the person who commits evil deeds considers wrongdoing as "nothing" and invents excuses for each of his deeds. This person thus claims that lust, anger, or anything else are of no account since they are movements of our human nature, and nature is God's creation. **M.461** None of these passions are censured as bringing evil upon human nature. Therefore the psalmist says that God's eye considers each of these vanities as a multitude of years when a person freely continues doing evil.

Once again Psalm Eighty-nine describes the impermanence of our human nature in order to win over God's mercy. It clearly teaches us to be mindful **J.48** of the afflictions of our nature both in the morning and in the evening, that is to say, in our youth and in our old age. Grass and flowers which are alive in the morning have passed away [by evening]. Next, the plant's moisture which exists at the prime of life dries up and loses its blossom once its innate beauty has evaporated while the rest of the plant dries up and withers away. The psalm describes our human nature by saying, "In the morning let it flower and pass away; in the evening let it droop; let it be withered and dried up." Such is our human nature.

Next the text laments our mortal condition saying that the wrath of God consumes man's life much like the assault of a furious, stormy wind. The wrath and fury [of this psalm] clearly designates man's rebellious actions which bring his life to an end, for his tumultuous behavior has at last been quieted. As the text says, "for we have perished in your anger, and in your wrath we have been troubled." The psalm adds that God is not pleased with this spectacle of human wickedness, nor should our constant defilements by sin appear before his unblemished face. The sense of these words follows as, "You have placed our iniquities before you." If anyone adds the words "for which reason" to clarify the verse, the sense of the text runs, "It befits you, God, to behold beauty in your sight. You have created man to be deserving of your providential care, for our life is worthy of your sight." The psalmist refers to the present moment: "all our days have passed away," for what does not exist in you does not exist at all. God's wrath **J.49** will prevail while our life lacks substance and resembles a shadow or spider's web. Although the web appears to have substance, it is immediately destroyed upon touching it. Such is human existence with its transitory endeavors; it weaves insubstantial vanity like a web held together by light strings.

If anyone pays close attention to this example, he will elude vanity's grasp and bring it to naught. Everything pursued in this life **M.464** is reckoned as conceit and without substance: honor, dignity, a noble birth, pride, arrogance, wealth and all the other things with which the webs of this life are concerned. Because of this God's healing power is needed as implied in the words, "For the days of our years are as seventy years; and if there is any strength, eighty years, and what is more than these is labor and trouble." Our troublesome life does not extend beyond this span [of years], but the greater part of our short life consists in labor and trouble. Labor represents infancy and toil youth, whereas the greater part of middle age is consumed by troubles. Old age is variously manifested by gray hair, wrinkles and an abundance of sufferings. Psalm Eighty-nine can be understood in another way so that man may propitiate God. The bulk of our sins has pulled down our great dignity; our nature has become good-for-nothing, incapable of rightly bearing God's wrath for its sin. But if we are submissive [to the punishment] brought



upon us, we become worthy of [God's training]. If **J.50** our meekness suffices as exchange for such training and punishment, who can bear the strength of God' wrath or who can measure the fear of his wrath?

If God's wrath cannot be endured, its action can be borne with love. "Thus make known to us your right hand" that we may be wise, not punished, by your teaching. Having earlier clarified these words, we may now attend to their divinely inspired content. "For weakness overtakes us, and we shall be chastened. Who knows the power of your wrath, and who knows how to number his days because of the fear of your wrath? So manifest your right hand, and those who are instructed in wisdom and in the heart" (Ps 89.10). This passage is welcome in relation to the grievous words which follow. We are incapable of enduring the force of God's wrath due to the weakness of our human nature against which sin militates, so we stand in need of instruction. Let salvation instruct us through conversion rather than by the punishment due to our sins. "Therefore, turn back to us, Lord; do not withdraw your grace, for 'how long' signifies the swiftness of grace." "And have pity upon your servant" does not pertain to strangers but to the reconciliation of [God's] own servants.

Having already received grace and having seen that light which enlightens the darkness of persons who have been deceived, the day according to virtue then begins. "We have been filled in the morning with your mercy, and we exulted and rejoiced." Your grace **M.465** has succeeded the time we spent in the humility of **J.51** sin and in the years of malice which have now passed. In this light we understand the words, "in return for the days when you afflicted us, the years when we saw misfortune." The psalm gives us courage, for children created by God are enlightened by their return to him. "Look upon your servants and upon your works," that is, upon the children of the patriarch [Abraham] who are truly God's own work. "And direct their sons." They do the works of Abraham and become the children of the patriarchs, having partaken of the same stock through virtue. At last our humanity is joined to God through purity when we beseech his splendor to shine upon your life through the purity of our lives. "Let the splendor of the Lord our God be upon us" that all our lives may bear fruit and salvation and have one goal. Therefore, the psalm speaks of a multitude: "prosper the works of our hands upon us." This multitude of works is brought together to form one: "prosper the works of our hands." For the varied, multiform pursuit of the virtues form one work and salvation for persons who put these virtues into practice. In the fourth stage of the Psalter's ascension, the prophet [David] elevates the minds of those who accompany him. He has transcended every misdirected human pursuit and shows that an insubstantial, deceptive spider's web in this life represents a dead end for persons preoccupied with vain pursuits.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**J.52** The fifth section [of the Psalter] then leads us to the loftiest peak and degree of contemplation if we are capable to reach such a height and to fly with strong wings beyond the weavings of this life's webs. Persons with downy-like, thin wings who are weak and unsuited for flight resemble flies; they become thoroughly entangled by the nets of such threads. I mean that such spider webs snare people by delights, honors, glories and various desires, and they become prey and food for that beast [the devil] on the hunt. If any bird resembling an eagle looks directly at the light's rays by not turning away the eye of its soul and has fallen in among these spider webs while stretching forward on high, the air alone from the rushing motion of the bird's flight scatters everything by the power of its wings. The sublime prophet now raises himself and advances **M.468** to the summits of this fifth ascent [of the Psalter] where he finds the fulfillment and restoration of human salvation.

Earlier in our treatise we spoke much about the mutable and immutable philosophy through

Moses' words. One always existed while the other had always lacked existence (for anything mutable is in transition from its present state to non-existence). Moses showed that **J.53** by free will human nature rushes towards evil and returns to the good so that God's splendor may once more illumine our human existence. Now everything from God reveals grace to us and brings it by different means to those who contemplate the divine wonders on high. Grace is not manifested by one means only, but it variously deals with the circumstances into which we have fallen due to our inclination toward evil.

Scripture tells of different ways of how God has fought on our behalf to attain the good so that we might have abundant occasions to thank him for his benefits. Psalm One-hundred and six immediately begins with "Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, for his mercy endures forever." This verse is an acknowledgment of thanksgiving; they are not merely words, for we are bidden to glorify God for his goodness only. Both the good and salvation for mankind come from God because all things come through his grace and goodness. We are not the cause of this goodness; on the contrary, we have committed every kind of evil, whereas God has never been divested of his nature and acts according to this nature. Indeed, he who is good by nature does nothing except good. "Let them say, those who have been redeemed by the Lord, whom he redeemed from the enemy's hand, and gathered them from east and west, north and south." This psalm **J.54** proclaimed the perfection and return to the good by humanity. Our redemption is explained here as a summons from captivity. God has given himself as a ransom for those in death's sway, "that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death" (Heb 2.14). Since all men were in the power of death, Christ indeed bought them by ransoming himself so that no person may be left under death's dominion after everyone has been redeemed. Neither can anyone be subject to death once it is abolished.

For this reason the psalm divides the earth into four parts, **M.469** each of which shares in the divine redemption. It says "from east and west, north and south." The term "sea" [east] signifies rain. This psalm briefly states God's benevolent activity for all mankind. The text then elaborates upon man's head-on-rush to evil and the guidance God offers each person to attain the good. It states, "they erred in the desert and in the wastes," forsaking, as the text says, the road (the road is the Lord himself). In the desert men wandered from God's providential care; this erring was barren, lacked moisture and did not share in the spiritual dew. The people could not find the city of God in which the just dwell, for they have wandered off the road. "They (**J.55**) did not find a city for living; they were hungry and thirsty." Their strength failed from lack of food and the inflictions of evil. How was there food in the desert and barren land? Where did the cure for the people's thirst in the wasteland come from? The psalm clearly did not prophesy about bread as their food, nor about water as their drink; rather, their nourishment was the true food (Jn 6.55) and their drink was the spiritual drink (1Cor 10.4). The Lord accomplished these two things and appropriately offered himself to those in need: food for the hungry and a fountain [of water] for the thirsty.

What solution can be found for their distress, wanderings, desolation or despondency arising from hunger in the wasteland? Oh, what a marvel occurs here! One word of correction from God changed everything to good. "They cried to the Lord in their distress, and he led them from their needs. He guided them in a right way, to reach a city they could dwell in." This text says that the Lord himself was the way from which the people had turned. This way is mentioned in the Gospel. "No one can come to me unless my Father wishes to draw him" (Jn 6.44). God leads those who have erred upon the road. He has become that city to dwell in. As the Apostle says, "In him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17.28). Rightly does the psalmist compel his people to give thanks because God has done such things. "Give thanks to the Lord for his mercies and his wonders **J.56** for the sons of men." That is to say, the people should not conceal his good work by hard-hearted silence but should cry out in thanks for his grace because he filled the hungry soul with good things. "He satisfied the empty soul and fills it with good things."

In another place God brings under his scrutiny the misfortunes to which **M.472** human nature is subject, and the psalm recounts his divine love which transforms human nature. That is to say, mankind fell from the light and cohabited with sin; no longer did man possess his proper state, for he was indeed alienated from life. "They sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, fettered in poverty and in iron." They were unable to extricate themselves from evil because their feet were held fast and weighed down. Poverty fetters the good and makes an impression like iron upon the heart. Disobedience to the divine law and contempt for the counsel of the Most High causes all these misfortunes which the psalmist signifies by saying, "Because they embittered the utterances of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High." As a consequence, trouble and humiliation entered their lives. Trouble, because they sought pleasure; humiliation, because they did not wish to remain with the Most High.

"Their heart was brought low through troubles." Separation from virtue is nothing else than weakness, for who can find help without virtue? For this reason it says, "They were weak and their was no helper." "They cried to the Lord in **J.57** their affliction and he saved them from their distresses." God dispels darkness, dissolves death and breaks their bonds." He led them from darkness and the shadow of death and broke asunder their bonds." Let [God's] grace be loudly proclaimed because he loosed the unavoidable grip of death held fast by firm bronze gates and iron bars, as the prophet says. Such was the power of death until the presence of true life destroyed it, for everything lay inescapably under death's sway and was held, as it were, by iron bars and firm gates. But the text says, "He broke the bronze gates and crushed the iron bars." That is, God took away the people's wicked behavior and changed their lives into true worship of him. The destruction of these gates represents a change of their lives to righteousness. "He lifted them out of the way of their iniquity."

Once again we are presented with a different view of human life. Abasement is seen as a transgression and rightly so, for in this matter the psalm agrees with another prophet who says, "A talent of lead is their iniquity" (Zach 5.7). Here evil resembles a suspended weight which drags down what belongs on high with the image of God. **M.473 & J.58** It says, "Because of their iniquities they were humbled." The people rejected that all-powerful nourishment, the same food given to our first parents. "From every tree in the garden you may eat" (Gen 2.16). God calls each tree [in paradise] the fullness of every good; thus the psalm calls the true, all-powerful food every kind of nourishment whose rejection causes our weak human nature to terminate in death. "Their soul abhorred every kind of good, and they came near to the gates of death." Yet again their cries turned a calamitous situation into a cause for rejoicing. "They cried to the Lord in their affliction and he saved them from their distress." The means of salvation is the Gospel itself. "He sent his word and healed them and snatched them from their destruction." You can see the Word full of life sent to save the lost and to rescue those subject to corruption. What bearer of good tidings clearly proclaims the mystery of salvation? As the psalmist says, let this person loudly proclaim [God's] grace for persons grievously afflicted, and let the people utter a hymn and praise for his good deeds. "Let them offer a sacrifice of praise and tell of his good deeds with rejoicing."

Psalm One-hundred and six next recounts the people's afflictions and offers God's grace after such experiences. The text describes man's thoughtlessness because the people have forsaken stability, a life free from the tossing of waves, and have become sailors by their own choice. "They went down to the sea in ships" and instead of cultivating paradise [a garden], the place **J.59** in which they were first set, they made their livelihood from the sea. The psalm calls "sea" this earthly life troubled by every wind of temptation, seething as it does with one passion after another. "They conducted their work in many waters and have seen the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." Having been immersed in the evils of life and having suffered frequent afflictions of soul by shipwreck, they beheld the actions of God's loving kindness on their behalf who raises us up from the depths. "He spoke and the stormy wind arose."

These words do not refer to God but to the hostile force ranged against him, for the adversary's cry causes the stormy wind. A tempest is a violent wind which does not rush along on a straight path, but it furiously resolves in a circular motion whenever it violently falls upon the water **M.476** like a big rock. The sea sinks under its own weight and the wind tears into it whenever a storm strikes with full force, and the weight of the sea's fall heaps up water on all sides.

These awesome events are clearly described in Psalm One-hundred and six. By a similar onrush of the tempest's wind, the sea's waves are lifted up, ascend to the heavens and go down to the depths. I call these waves rising on high the swelling of the passions whose root lies in the abyss. We have learned that scripture often calls the abyss the habitation of demons. Persons tossed about by this tempest and waves are made senseless by the darkness **J.60** just as if drunkenness has weighed them down due to their great shame. "They are troubled, they stagger as a drunkard." Once such persons have lost their senses, they lack the will to reach salvation; their wisdom is shipwrecked and brought to ruin. The psalm says that "all their wisdom is swallowed up." Yet again they found themselves in the midst of evils, and their cry to God rescued them from their powerless situation. "They cried to the Lord in their distress and he brought them out of their affliction." The tempest immediately changed into a breeze enabling them to travel and the sea became fit for sailing; the surging sea was calmed and the waves were quieted. "He commanded the storm, and it is calmed into a gentle breeze, and its waves are stilled." The term "silence" may signify the [quieting] of the "swellings" of man's free choice. Regarding this symbol of our rebellious nature, the Lord says in the Gospel, "Quiet, be silenced" (Mk 4.39).

The psalm calls the breeze a benign wind which brings the soul to the divine harbor by "spiritual sails" while reason directs the voyage. "He guided them to their desired haven." Once again the people and Church have an occasion to praise God's grace; not only is the present condition of the Churches described, but God's wonders are proclaimed in the seat of the elders and strengthen faith. "Let them exalt him in the congregation of the people and let them praise him in the seat of the elders." The psalmist adds a further reason **J.61** for thanksgiving because rivers come from God which both give birth and cause destruction. Rivers are utterly destroyed while rivers of virtues water parched lands. "He turned rivers into a desert and streams of water into a thirsty land."

Psalm One-hundred and six says that rivers **M.477** are the floods of passions and streams of waters are the fruits of evil. When men keep on accumulating wicked deeds they resemble a flood which had made a stream of evil. "He turned a fruitful land into salt." A soul full of evil which has been converted experiences thirst after the teaching represented by the divine salt has prepared it. The evil of the inhabitants of this land which the wicked floods of water had earlier nourished no longer abounds. Blessedness now claims possession of the salty, thirsty soul, while the stagnant pond becomes a sea through the exercise of virtues. "He turned the desert into pools of water and a dry land into streams of waters." This is the city inhabited by those thirsting after righteousness; no longer do inhabitants near such stagnant ponds experience nausea and a lack of appetite because their souls have come close to evil. "They sowed fields and planted vineyards." These symbols represent the divine precepts and virtuous manner of living, for [God's] commandment is the seed of future fruits. Virtue is the vine which pours the wine of wisdom into a cup through the "spiritual clusters" of grapes, and these are simply an abundance of God's blessings.

"He blessed them and they greatly increased, and their flocks did not decrease." Flocks represent the soul's docile motions when they become a virtue **J.62** at our service. The good flock is *thumos* [the active, non-intellectual principal in the soul] when yoked to reason. Another such flock is *epithumia* [desire, longing] which bears the soul and leads it on high when directed by the reins of understanding. A blessing multiplies all the other flocks when their help enables us to attain such great things.

The text which now follows sums up Psalm One-hundred and six, and in many ways it both recounts the passions and brings before our eyes God's deeds. The few words which condense this psalm read "They became few and were brought low by the tribulation of evils and pain." The people's diminishment signifies their fall from a lofty, great state into a humble condition. Smallness denotes deficiency, whereas their misfortune comes from association with evil. The psalmist says that affliction and pain are indeed their final end or fall from the good. As another psalm says, "The pangs of death have surrounded me. The dangers of hell found me. I found affliction and sorrow" (Ps 17.5 & 114.3). The pangs of death and hell's dangers are called sin which brings only affliction and pain. The Gospel shows this by "weeping and gnashing **M.480** of teeth" (Mt 8.12). The psalm adds by way of sequence, "And he poured contempt upon princes."

These verses from Psalm One-hundred and six teach us that whatever truly exists has **J.63** its existence in God. If anyone falls away from being, he lacks being. To remain in evil means a lack of true existence, since evil does not exist by itself but is a deficiency of the beautiful. Just as a person has existence in him who exists, the one who lacks being (that is to say, evil), is destroyed, as the psalm says. This text can be used in three ways. Just as food in the body becomes flesh, poured wine becomes diluted with water and iron placed in fire becomes fire, so anything which falls out of existence is reduced to nothing. Therefore this bringing to naught does not participate in the good. Such are the origin of evil which befell the first human beings; it resembled a flood of wickedness poured out and passed on to their descendants. This creation became impoverished of life itself; a thief [Satan] rendered man destitute and despoiled him of divine blessings. The psalmist says, "He helped the poor out of their poverty," for by his [Christ's] poverty we were made rich. Instead of wild beasts, the good shepherd made them "flocks of a family." He names "family" the body of persons assembled in the divine register. Paul testifies to this by saying, "From whom every family in heaven and upon the earth is named" (Eph 3.15).

The psalm next adds "the upright shall see and shall fear." These words teach us that the just man considering [God's] love will have fear, for it will certainly safeguard the good by remembrance of the past in view of the future and will help him control his passions. As master of himself, a person can eliminate any proneness **J.64** to evil caused by laxity. The psalm says, "All iniquity will stop its mouth." How blessed is that life when iniquity's mouth, that fountain of filth, will be sealed forever! No longer will its foul odor defile one's life. Such is the summit of goodness, our great hope and goal of blessedness when our human nature will no longer be troubled by evil, but iniquity will be banished. This [destruction] will surely be the fate for the inventor of iniquity. The collective term "every" signifies this; that mouth, the cause of death for man, will be stopped. When everything contrary to the beautiful **M.481** will be destroyed, we will enter that state which no words can ever express since, as God testifies (Phil 4.7), it transcends sense and knowledge.

Following these remarks we find something like a seal at the end of Psalm One-hundred and six. "Who is wise and will heed these things, and will consider the mercies of the Lord?" Wisdom has two activities: one searches out useful things and the other guards what was already found. One action of wisdom, I mean its investigative aspect, will then cease. What use is our seeking once our sought-after object is present? Once important point stands out, the necessity for us to safeguard the good attained, a task within our reach with wisdom's help. What then is wisdom, the keeping of the good? It consists in being mindful of God's love for mankind. The person who appreciates what he has gained should not be presumptuous of the good of which he is deemed worthy. On the other hand, the person failing to comprehend [God's] grace is blind. After receiving a pearl **J.65**, he throws it away as a common pebble, thereby freely depriving himself of its possession by his ignorance of the beautiful.

## CHAPTER NINE

We understand the five divisions of the Psalter as steps leading to further higher [steps] which are distinguished by the word order. The terminating words of each section form a step to understand the text and sum up the preceding words by a doxology and thanksgiving. "May the Lord be blessed forever, let it be, let it be." These words are an uninterrupted act of thanksgiving. Since this verse does not have single "let it be," its two-fold utterance designates praise in the act of thanksgiving. In each of these five divisions [of the Psalter] the text considers the good which enables us to obtain God's blessedness with respect to a certain order; the soul is always committed to a higher state until it attains the summit of goodness.

The praise of God fulfilled in all the saints is summed up in the last psalm, "Praise the Lord in his saints" (Ps 150.1). The "firmament of his power" signifies [God's] immutable goodness, and the "mighty acts of God" indicate that evil no longer dominates **M.484** human nature. When human nature praises God's greatness, **J.66** it does so not with a small utterance but praises him like a trumpet's loud sound. "Praise the Lord with the sound of the trumpet" because the varied, multiform virtues imitate the harmony of the universe while human nature acts as an instrument in rhythm with God's melody. The psalm designates this by the figurative symbols of a psaltery and a harp. Everything considered earthly, dumb and speechless joins the sound of its own chords to the great voice of the heavenly choruses. The stretched chords in such an instrument are steadfastness and immovability before evil in every virtue. The virtues unite the cymbal's pleasing harmony with chords when the sound of cymbals arouses our eagerness for the divine choir. To me this signifies the union of our nature with the angels. "Praise the Lord with the sound of cymbals." I understand this as the union of the angelic [nature] with the human when our human nature attains its original state and gives forth that sweet sound in union with others in thanksgiving.

Through one another and with one another thanksgiving will always be rendered to God for his love. This is signified by the union of one cymbal with another cymbal. One cymbal is the transcendent nature of the angels, while the other is the rational creation of man. However, sin has separated them; when God's love unites them, praise will sound forth. As the great Apostle [Paul] says, "Every tongue will confess--in heaven, upon earth and under the earth--that Jesus Christ is Lord **J.67** to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2.10). Once this is effected, the sound of these cymbals will speak with the common unity of victory at the enemy's destruction. After the enemy has been completely destroyed and brought to nothing, a common praise to God from every spirit will fill all eternity. Since there is "no fitting praise in a sinner's mouth" (Ecc 15.9), there will no longer be any sinner; when sin is destroyed, every spirit will praise the Lord forever.

The psalms' sublime teaching points out to us a way to **M.485** blessedness which constantly leads persons progressing in the exalted life of virtue until they attain that measure of blessedness where the mind subjects transcendental reality neither to circumstantial evidence nor to opinions; neither can reason discover anything further about this reality. But the movement of desire based upon hope always outstrips us and when desire reaches the limit of its capacity, it comes to rest. Beyond this lies a better hope to which the psalm testifies by a careful order of words. The first words of the [first] psalm are a gate or entrance into blessedness and open up to us the destruction of evil. These first words **J.68** call the beginning of blessedness an alienation from evil.

The first psalm offers the Law's guidance for those who have strayed, comparing it to a tree always in blossom, an example of this present life. This psalm shows the way for persons characterized by a deep-seated anger who have gone contrary to it, leading them by successive steps to the supreme height of blessedness. The meaning of the last psalm shows that once all sin has been blotted out, everything will be holy and united in one voice to praise God. A person's virtue is now unmoved by evil, and he raises to [God's] majesty a pleasant sound like a loud trumpet. When all creation above and below

will join to form one dance, the pleasant sound from our symphony will complete what has been sundered, for sin now divides the spiritual creation which resembles a cymbal. When our humanity will be united to the angels and when the divine battle-order lifts it out of the present turmoil, it will sing a victorious song of triumph at the bloody defeat of the enemy. Then every spirit will praise God's grace forever, continually magnifying his blessedness by further graces. This I call true blessedness. When the mind's capacity for speculation becomes inactive, our faculty for hope is also put to rest. There follows the **J.69** unutterable, incomprehensible [reality of God], a better state of full understanding "which neither eye has seen, nor ear has heard" (1 Cor 2.9), nor has the human heart received. The divine Apostle [Paul] has defined in these words the benefits of this most holy state.

## BOOK TWO

### CHAPTER ONE

**M.488** Having explained the matters contained in [Part One], we should now more closely examine the psalms' inscriptions. They provide us with no small means to live in accord with virtue, for the significance of these inscriptions enables us to enhance our knowledge. We must first systematically treat a few inscriptions to get an idea of the psalms for clearly realizing the aim of their divinely inspired teachings, namely, to lead our mind to true blessedness. Some psalms lack inscriptions altogether; others have received from us [that is, the Septuagint tradition] an inscription of the prophet [David] which the Hebrew version lacks. This inscription is simply "David." Other psalms have different names such as "Praise" (*ansos*), "Canticle," "Praise" (*anesis*), "Psalm," "Intellect," "Prayer," "Tent of departure," "Dedication," "Ecstasy," Remembrance," "Confession," "For the servant of the Lord," "For **J.70** Idithoum" and "For Eman the Israelite."

In other psalms, some of these above-mentioned names or words are joined with other expressions resulting in the following inscriptions: "Song of psalm," "Psalm of song," "Song," "Psalm," "For a psalm with hymns," "For hymns of understanding," "Prayer of David," "Prayer of a poor man," "Praise of a song" or any such examples associated with David's name to form an inscription. As for other psalms, there is often added another inscription, "For the end." Various inscriptions are written with this phrase or the following is added: "For those who have changed," "For hidden [secret] matters," "For the inheritance," "For the eighth," "For the wine vats," "For the claim of early morning," "For Maeleth," "For the people who have strayed far from the saints," "Do not cause ruin," "For the titular inscription" or both of these together; "For Solomon," "A hymn for the beloved," "For the secrets of the son," "For confession," Some inscriptions derive from historical circumstances such as "When in the desert," **M.489**, "When Saul sent men to kill him [David]," "When Doeg the Idumean came and announced to Saul," "In the days when the Lord rescued him [David] from the hands of all his enemies, **J.71** and from the hands of Saul," "When Joab returned and struck the twelve thousand in the valley of salt," "When Nathan the prophet came to him [David], because he went in with Bersabee [Bathsheba]."

Certain psalms have inscriptions belonging to the Hebrew text such as "Alleluia" inscribed once or twice. Other psalms have this term linked with the name of certain prophets in the inscription: "The alleluia of Haggai, Zachariah, and the alleluia of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel." Another inscription is "To the sons of Kore," "To Idithum," "To Asaph," but once special inscription stands out, "Prayer of Moses, the man of God" (Ps 89). Inscriptions used by the Church are lacking in the Hebrew text. We find this difference with regard to certain numbers pertaining to the seven days: "First day of the week," "Fourth day of the week," "On the Sabbath day," "before the Sabbath." Other examples have a different understanding of the inscriptions, a matter about which the Hebrew version is generally silent.

## CHAPTER TWO

Having clarified the variety of psalm inscriptions, it may be helpful to first give a more general explanation of them together and to then investigate their differences. Generally speaking, a psalm inscription has two purposes: first, to indicate the object [of the psalm] which presents us with a better understanding through its words; second, the inscription itself often instructs the listener. The sense of its words presents us with virtuous actions, and the purpose of considering each inscription is to direct a person to the good, even though something historical seems to be manifested either by the words or by the mere name of a person or a place. Not only is divine scripture employed for knowledge of historical events that we may learn the deeds and misfortunes of former times; it also gives us a teaching on virtuous living once we have obtained a loftier understanding of these historical considerations. Having agreed on the necessity for this understanding of the psalm inscriptions, it would follow, as we have just mentioned, to present **M.492** a more general purpose of those inscriptions which are similar, whereas those which differ will come under special investigation.

Because the inscription “For the end” is prefixed to many psalms, I think we should know something about its meaning. In this way other persons interpreting scripture may have a clear understanding of the inscription. In certain places “For the end” pertains to the phrase “For the victor,” while another psalm has “Victorious” or “For the victory.” Since victory is the end of all strife which those preparing for battle have in mind, it seems to me that the text with the brief word “end” stimulates persons training through virtue in the stadium of this life. By keeping an eye on the end, that is, victory, their labors might be **J.73** lightened by the prospect of a crown.

Let us now turn our attention to the [athletes’] struggles. A crown is shown to those gathered in the stadium both to stimulate their eagerness for victory and to mitigate their toils by the glory they hope to obtain. Once the stadium has been opened for the contest (man’s everyday life is this stadium), one rival is wickedness which prevails against its contenders by various treacherous means. For this reason the good trainer of souls first shows you the end of your labors, the beauty of the victory’s crown and the acclamation of victory. By so fixing your attention on the goal, you might urge yourself on to victory and prepare yourself for the proclamation of victory. Such considerations as these suggest a lesson pertaining to virtue which is evident for those who have their eyes fixed on the consequences from the start.

Some of the soul’s passions are clearly the enemies’ forces and tricks against us. They often dislocate the digressive faculty of the soul which resembles a bodily limb unless by careful preparation one has conducted himself without faltering and without being shaken in the struggles of the prescribed victory, the end of all his labors.

The remaining psalms with the inscription “For the end” are suggestions and counsels for victory which serve **J.74** to direct our efforts in the contest. The phrase “For those who have changed” suggests a change of the soul for the better. The expression “For Maeleth” urges the athlete on to a greater **M.493** desire [for obtaining victory]. “After the end of troubles” shows us the meaning of choirs, a phrase clarified by the other inscriptions signifying the chorus of Maelth. “To look for the secrets,” “For the beloved, a hymn,” “To sing for the return of dawn,” “To have the eighth before one’s eyes,” “To regard the inheritance,” “So that we might be of the race of Kore,” “That great voice of David” and “Do not destroy” which [David] uttered to Saul’s shield-bearer who urged him to kill Saul, are examples of patience which Scripture gives us to be engraved upon each person’s soul. Anyone can discover all these examples by careful examination because trainers exhort contestants to become champions to attain victory’s goal. Likewise, if the phrase “For the end” is added to a pertinent historical context, we will be



especially strengthened for our struggles. Such is the understanding of the inscription “For the end.”

### CHAPTER THREE

A psalm, canticle, praise, hymn and prayer differ from each other as follows: a psalm is a choral chant with a musical instrument; **J.75** a canticle produced by the mouth is a prayer said aloud; a prayer is supplication to God for benefits; a hymn is a song of praise rendered to God for graces bestowed upon us; praise [*ainos*] or acclaim [*ainesis*] (for this is the significance of both terms) contains praise for God’s wonders. The only kind of praise is when it is intense. Often the above mentioned terms are joined to others in the psalm inscriptions so that one term becomes two as in the following examples: “Praise of canticle,” “canticle of psalm,” “Regarding the psalms of hymns” as we have learned from Habacuc (3.1) and “Prayer with canticle.” The intention of these inscriptions is to direct us to virtue: the harp is a musical instrument which renders sound by the superior elements of its construction. The music of this instrument is called a psalm. Therefore the form of its construction provides us with a means of instruction to manifest virtue. Your life should be a psalm not resounding with earthly utterances—thoughts are these utterances—but you should be a pure, audible sound coming from heaven above.

When hearing a canticle, we symbolically learn about the well ordered conduct of one’s life. Just as the sound of the melody from musical instruments alone reaches its hearers, so the sung words themselves do not differ from the sound. In a canticle, however, both the rhythm of the song **M.496** and the power of the words are completely pervaded by music which must be recognized as when the melody comes from musical instruments alone. Similarly, virtue **J.76** comes about for those who apply themselves to it. As for those persons applying themselves to a philosophy which considers and investigates reality, it is uncertain that they can pursue virtue since they restrict the good in their consciences. On the other hand, persons with a dignified bearing conduct themselves carefully just as the gracefulness of their lives is visible to us all. Thus when the good is attained by union of moral philosophy and contemplation, we have the inscription becoming “A canticle of psalm” or “A psalm of canticle.” However, when another term appears pertaining to praise, either the good done with respect to the mind is signified by “psalm” or custom and elegance with respect to appearance is explained by the word “canticle.”

A hymn or song of praise joined to a canticle forms a precept saying that we should not dare to think of God unless we make our lives worthy of such boldness. “Praise is not becoming in a sinner’s mouth” (Sir 15.19). And God says to a sinner, “Why do you declare my ordinances” (Ps 49.16)? Similarly, we are offered a “Prayer with a canticle” that we might watch our lives and not be negligent and unbecoming in our conduct; only then can we approach God through prayer. It seems to me that the Lord hands down this insight regarding prayer to those who ask him, “Teach us how to pray” (Lk 11.1). This is a prayer not simply in words but a conduct of one’s life when Christ says “If you forgive men their offenses, the heavenly Father will forgive your sins” (Mt 6.14).

Whenever the word “praise” is found alone it testifies **J.77** to praise offered to God. Praise to God is none other than “Praise of David.” We learn from this inscription that if we live according to its meaning, we will obtain confidence to praise God.

The inscription “Praise in the hymns” (Pss 6, 53, 54, 60, 66, 75) leads us to a higher plane. The divine Apostle [Paul] knew this when he said to the Corinthians that he sings with his own spirit and mind (1Cor 14.15). Therefore **M.497** psalmody united to one’s mind interprets our earlier words, that is, our external life must be worthy to reveal what is hidden to signify our understanding of the canticle. Psalmody from the Spirit alone demonstrates the excellence of holy things when our offering to God

transcends appearances. In certain canticles the psalm does not describe in detail its full content but speaks “in hymns.” In my judgment we must know what hymns signify. We learn that the exalted life and that which is on high requires our musical instrument [the soul] to become a hymn of God with heavenly, transcendent thoughts. This is accomplished not by words but by directing our life to this excellent state. When we find the word “intellect” ascribed to hymns, it seems to me that we are advised not to be ignorant of words used for God’s glory, lest we become unmindful of what does not befit the **J.78** divine majesty by an impulse devoid of inquiry and understanding. Our words, then, are meant for persons who live according to God. He rewards them in this life and judges well, a fact indeed obvious to our sense perception. Persons of little intelligence have many opinions about God such as these, but you must comprehend those things pertaining to him which are not subject to reproach.

That which truly gives praise to God transcends our human efforts. “Praise of David” to us means anything which alone befits God. This seems to consist of our knowledge about prayer as contained in the inscription “Prayer of David.” Our life must be in accord with this inscription, “Prayer of a poor man when discouraged; he pours out his entreaty to the Lord” (Ps 101). We certainly need to rise up to God in order to comprehend our deficiencies, and we will not desire truly beneficial things unless we grasp our own lack of them. Our intensity of prayer will be animated and spontaneous when we recognize our poverty and our indifference about persisting in our desires. Thus we will pour out our petition with **M.500** & **J.79** tears instead of with words. The inscription “Prayer of Moses, the man of God” (Ps 89) teaches us that we cannot approach God in prayer unless we reject the world and become men devoted to God alone.

## CHAPTER FOUR

To me the inscription “For those who will be changed” (Pss 44, 59, 68, 79) seems to say that only the divine nature is better than change and alteration. Incapable of evil, it lacks need to change. Neither can the divine nature change for the better since such change is alien to it, nor can anything better be found to which it may so pass. On the other hand, man’s nature is subject to change and alternation. According to both these principles, we become either worse or better: worse when we reject participation in the good and stronger when we change for the better. When we experience evil through change, we need good movement so that it may transform us into something good. The inscription, “For those who will be changed” clearly brings this point out. Not only does it recommend a need for change, but it suggests a certain mutability which, if correctly put into action, demonstrates a transformation for the good.

The reading of the inscription of Psalm Fifty-nine **J.80** has “For the end, on behalf of those who will change; a titular inscription of David as a teaching when he burned Mesopotamia of Syria (2Sam 8.3+), Syria of Soba, and when Joab turned and smote twelve thousand men in the valley of salt.” These words clearly teach and advise us when the text says “For the titular inscription of David as a teaching.” This teaching would not be added unless it offered a lesson. “For a titular inscription” shows that an indelible impression must be made upon us like a monument in our memory, a faculty of our soul. The engravings upon this monument are examples of good works. These are the noble deeds of the commander-in-chief [Joab] of David’s army who inflicted a double calamity upon the enemy, consumed them by fire and with blows [from the sword]. Syria, located between rivers, is consumed by fire and its adjoining regions are likewise devastated along with twelve-thousand men in the valley of salt.

**M.501** I wish to accurately follow the historical sequence of events which might seem long and irrelevant, for what is more useful for us than to learn from such events? I also think it is helpful to briefly mention the significance of the historical events so that the phrase “Titular inscription” might offer us guidance. What do I wish to say? The text mentions the entire nation of Syria and divides it into two

parts. Each part has its own characteristics: one is called **J.81** Mesopotamia of Syria and the other, Syria of Soba. Both are destroyed by fire. Next is mentioned the valley of salt when twelve thousand men were condemned to death upon the return of the commander-in-chief [Joab]. Thus we have two images of Syria. Water surrounds people located in the middle of rivers, that is, passions, which swirl about on all sides. They are subject to Soba, a name signifying the tyrant's oppressive power. Therefore this example should serve as a change for the better if the cleansing fire destroys the enemy's two natures. Just as virtue stamps our life and mind, so can we observe evil in these two examples. Life's disorders grasp the soul in a circle of rushing passions whose midst is called rivers, a reference to the prince of the world and his evil teachings. Soba of Syria is his name. The burning and cleansing word consumes his teachings, resulting in a sterile, salty land whose hostile forces the commander-in-chief strikes down. There would be no victory over the enemy unless the army's leader has extended his hand. Peace, the fruit of victory, follows the enemy's destruction. This inscription ["For those who will be changed"] inscribes on our memory our deliverance from passions and serves a guide for change by employing historical examples.

Such lessons as these clearly refer to change if we follow **J.82** the other inscriptions, "For the flowers," "For the lilies" which take the place of the word "change." A flower indicates transformation from winter into spring, that is, a change from evil to a life of virtue. The sight of lilies indicates this need for change. Their bright color resulting from change clearly shows a transformation from a dark, shadowy form **M.504** into one which is luminous and bright as snow. Therefore I think that every inscription with the phrase "For those who will be changed" advises us to always pray and be diligent about changing for the better.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The inscription "Concerning the secrets" [of the son, Pss 9 & 45] suggests a correct, accurate knowledge of God. Because the profound fall of the soul resulted from a false conception of God (for how can anyone be deprived of the good when he does not have it?), this inscription serves as a light in your search for the hidden knowledge of God whose source [head] is faith in the son [Christ]. Thus the psalm inscription says, "Concerning the secrets of the son." Indeed this inscription is secret, hidden, incomprehensible, invisible **J.83** and beyond the mind's comprehension for the person drawing near to the goal of victory by faith.

The reason for the inscription "For her who inherits" (Ps 5) is clear. The soul has fallen from its own inheritance when the sun has set due to transgression of God's commandment. The prophet petitions God that the early morning might appear once darkness has past, and that we might be worthy of that sweet voice saying to those worthy of it, "Come, chosen of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25.34).

The inscription "Concerning the morning aid" (Ps 21) provides us with a similar idea of what we have just said. Scripture usually calls the dawn "early morning." Dawn is the boundary between night and day, the passing away of night and the beginning of day. Scripture often uses the symbol of darkness for evil when God's assistance is a rising in accord with a life of virtue. Then we will attain the victory, "taking off the works of darkness and walking about becomingly and as in the day," as the Apostle says (Rom 13.12).

Closely related to what we have just explained is the inscription, "For the eighth" (Pss 6 & 11). Everyone who exercises diligence with regard to virtue has in mind the future life. Its beginning is called "the eighth" (Cf. *PG44.608-616 and pp. 177-93 of Werner Jaeger's critical edition, vol. 5, for Gregory of Nyssa's treatise on this psalm*), for it follows this perceptible time when the number seven is dissolved.

Therefore the inscription “For the eighth” advises us not to set our minds on this present age but to look to the eighth. When this passing, transient time comes to a close in which **J.84** some things are born and others are destroyed, the need to be born will pass away; nothing will be destroyed because the expected resurrection will transform our human nature. **M.505** The transitory nature of time will cease because it is no longer subject to the effects of birth and corruption. The present time of the seventh number which is subject to measurement will remain; the eighth will succeed it, the full day of the age to come. Some prophets name the expected life [of the resurrection] “that great day” (Mal 4.5, Jer 30.7, Jl 2.11). The physical sun does not illumine that day but the true light, the son of righteousness (Mal 4.2) which prophecy calls “rising” (Zach 6.12). It will not be obscured by the sun’s setting.

We understand the same mysteries spoken above as pertaining to those psalms with the inscription, “For the wine vats” (Pss 8, 80, 83). A wine vat produces wine by squeezing grape clusters. However, if wine flows out from putrid, unripe clusters of grapes, it immediately becomes sour and unpotable; the wine takes on a foul odor and becomes corrupt, resulting in worms. On the other hand, if a cluster of worthy, lovely grapes is placed in the wine vats, its sweet, flower-like scent yields a pleasant fragrance after much time. What, then, does this symbol of grape clusters prompt us to consider carefully? That the storehouse of our human mind might be fertile. Hope is this storehouse containing every provision for our lives.

The meaning of this grape cluster would become clearer for us **J.85** if the branches of the vine and its twigs are made evident. Our Lord’s words serve to clarify this imagery: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15.5). if we are truly in him, that is, rooted in him and bearing fruit, as the Apostle says (Eph 3.17, Col 2.7), we understand that we are created in him without whom we are unworthy of his nourishing moisture. We ask him for the cluster of good works which do not bear unripe, soul grapes; neither does our pleasure in rotten things corrupt nor destroy them. The clusters of good works lays up wine for the future life in the wine vat of each soul (the wine vat is our conscience). Every person in his own way must fill his vat by his own labors. Blessed are those husbandmen whose wine gladdens the hearts of men! On the other hand, those persons are to be pitied and lamented whose wine, according to Moses, “is the rage of serpents” (Dt 32.32-3). They change the quality of their wine into a harmful drink which bears the fruit of destruction from the branch of Sodom. **M.508** If you look to the “eighth,” remember, says the psalmist, that according to book of Proverbs (3.10), your storehouses will overflow with sweet, scented wine from good works.

## CHAPTER SIX

The inscription “For Maeleth” (Ps 52) becomes clear when **J.86** expressed in the Greek language. It inculcates an ardent desire in persons striving through virtue by showing the goal [of victory] to contestants. Choruses and persons cheering victors in contests help explain this psalm’s inscription. The term “Maeleth” contains the meaning “for a chorus.” We know about this from the historical account of David’s victory who, as a youth, fought Goliath single-handedly, and the young maidens went out in choruses to meet him after his strenuous contest (1Kg 17). Once David achieved complete victory through his own effort against the foe, the psalm inscription referring to Maeleth speaks of gladness. It presents a choir composed of spiritual creatures in a unison of voices which blends with the victors.

There was a time when only one choir with a spiritual nature existed which looked to one leader of the song and executed this song in accord with the harmony given by his command. Afterwards sin crept in and dissolved the divine harmony of the chorus. It brought about the fall of our first parents who had danced along with the angelic powers by tripping their feet by the slip of deception. Hence, man was deprived of unity with the angels because his fall had dissolved this unity. Fallen man needs to exert

much toil and labor. By struggling against his fall, he might again rise to receive his rewards, the divine choir, the fruit of victory against his foe.

**J.87** Whenever you hear the inscription, “For Maeleth” joined to “For the end,” you then know the advice symbolically offered to you and do not succumb to temptations in conflict; instead, you keep in mind the goal of your victory. This victory consists in being numbered with the angelic choir and to have your soul cleaned from the assault of temptations. The Lord tells us something similar with regard to Lazarus (Lk 16.19+) who kept himself safe from falling by exercising patience in calamities. Once his tent [life] **M.509** was loosed, and having overcome the adversary, he immediately entered the angels’ presence. “The poor man [Lazarus] died and was carried away by the angels” (Lk 16.22). This is the chorus, the journey with the angels and the bosom of the patriarch [Abraham] who received Lazarus in the radiant joy of the chorus’ harmony. When hearing of the patriarch’s bosom embracing the fullness of all things like a vast sea, you should understand it as the dwelling place of Lazarus. Those persons engaged in similar struggles have no possessions of their own; rather, the good belongs to everyone who strives through virtue for the same good.

The inscription “Solemn exodus of the tabernacle” (Ps 28) and “For the dedication of the house of David” (Ps 29) are closely related with respect to their position and meaning in the Psalter, for the context of the twenty-eighth psalm lies in the one right after it. Each inscription runs as follows: **J.88** the first is “A psalm of David, on the occasion of the exodus of the tabernacle,” and the second, “A psalm of a song at the dedication of the house of David.” If we do not exit this physical tent, our true dwelling place cannot be dedicated. Such is the meaning of the two psalm inscriptions. Human nature has two aspects, one life (*zoe*) of the flesh operating through the senses and the spiritual, immaterial aspect guided by the intellectual, incorporeal life (*bios*) of the soul. However, one cannot be joined to the other, for the cultivation of one means the privation of the other. If we wish to make our soul God’s dwelling, it is fitting that we exit this fleshly tent. Our house cannot otherwise be dedicated by him who renews us by his dwelling in us unless we exit our [fleshly] tent through an aversion for this bodily existence.

The psalm of “ecstasy” (Ps 30) following the one about the house’s dedication has the inscription, “For the end. A psalm of David, of ecstasy.” This latter inscription is in harmony with the preceding one, for it warns us not to be attached to anything harmful.

Closely following the above-mentioned psalm inscription is “In remembrance” (Pss 37 & 69) which suggests a brief lesson about our salvation. Since transgression of the divine commandment is a road leading to ruin for mankind (we will not perish provided that we keep in mind the divine **M.512** commandment), the text offers us a remembrance of this commandment as a remedy against our forgetfulness of the calamities mentioned in these two psalms.

The inscription of Psalm Ninety-nine contains a confession **J.89** with the following lesson. Confession in scripture has two definitions: one presents us with an admission [of guilt] and the other, thanksgiving [to God]. Thus both meanings provide us with insights proper to a virtuous life. Confession effects our withdrawal from evil and heightens the desire to thank our Benefactor for the grace of his blessings bestowed upon those who are ready for it. Thus the psalm offers [the inscription] “For confession” to advise a change of heart through purification in case any remembrance of sin consumes us. If you aim for the good, it will make your choice firm and stable through thanksgiving to God.

The inscriptions “Writing” (Ps 15) and “Do not destroy” (Ps 56) advise us about virtue’s long-suffering characteristics, whether such inscriptions are joined with one another or are found separately. “Do not destroy” represents David hindering his armor bearer from striking Saul (1Sam 26.8-10). The sense of the inscription “Writing” shows that we must have David’s words upon the monument of our

soul in case something similar happens to us. If our anger is aroused and our temper is aggravated to take Vengeance, we may recognize the preventative order with regard to murder and lull to sleep our wrath with patience. Later on we will take this matter up more carefully when we return to consider the remaining psalm inscriptions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

We now turn attention to the significance of “Alleluia,” an inscription **J.90** prefixed to many psalms. “Alleluia” is a mystical exhortation exciting its listeners to praise God in the same manner as the inscription “Praise the Lord.” The Hebrew scriptures represent “Praise the Lord” by “Alleluia,” an underlying theme of the Psalter. Quite often the divine nature is manifested in Hebrew words by different symbolic senses. **M.513** One such name manifesting God common among the Hebrews has the ending “-ia.” “Alleluia” by itself means praise. Do not be astonished if [the divine nature] expressed by this term takes on such a form, for Hebrew words are not formed according to our [Greek] usage but have one different from ours. For example, we render the word “prophet” in Greek by “Elias,” although the Hebrew language expresses it as “Haliou” when wishing to demonstrate praise of God. Therefore this word in a psalm inscription makes us realize that it refers to praise of God. As a result, **J.91** these and many such inscriptions are usually found at the end of the Psalter. They pertain now to the end of a life of virtue and arrange the praise of God according to our purified understanding of the preceding sections of the Psalter. Such psalms of praise are believed to constitute the nature of angels, for we have learned that their sole preoccupation is praise of God. The best occupation for perfect souls is to make one’s life a praise of God. Since the psalms bearing the inscription “Alleluia” are all found near the end of the last section of the Psalter, it clearly suggests a lofty ascent demonstrated by all the psalms. It contains the best praise of God or an exhortation to praise him.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Insofar as it is possible there remains for us the task to understand those psalms lacking inscriptions. In this chapter let us offer to the reader’s judgment the choice either to accept our understanding or to offer something better. We have already considered the difference between psalms lacking inscriptions. The reason for this is common both among the Hebrews and us, for an inscription is lacking when the words alone lend clarity to the sense of the psalm. Other inscriptions pertain to the church and have a mystical significance symbolically pertaining to our religion. However, these inscriptions are not in the Hebrew text, **M.516 & J.92** a fact in accord with the Gospel’s accusation against [the Jews]. “Because they held this opinion, that anyone should confess him to be the Christ, let him be put out of the synagogue” (Jn 9.22). Therefore the inscriptions manifest the mystery of God which [the Jews] did not accept. For this reason the words carefully prefixed to the inscriptions which refer to the Church show the lack of such inscriptions among the Jews.

Now that we have mentioned the psalms lacking inscriptions, it seems appropriate to examine the content of these psalms. The very first psalm lacks an inscription, however, its intention is clear because it serves to introduce [the Psalter’s] teaching. It consists in ejecting evil, persevering in the need for rejecting impiety at the threshold of blessedness, whereas the second psalm suggests a foreshadowing of the Gospel that we may desist from such impiety. It says that today (for the measure of time is today) there is born for us in the flesh him who is always Son and God from the Father and who is in the Father. Those persons numbered among the nations and who do not serve God belong to the kingdom without a ruler; they live according to their own laws, that is, they have no laws nor do they accept the divine law but refuse its yoke. The psalm calls God’s commandments a yoke. However, the kingdom [of God] transcends creation and is present to all mankind. Those who did not have God as their master share in

his inheritance [of the kingdom] **J.93** through faith in whom was begotten “today.” I say that this kingdom is established over them; having experienced rebirth, they become kings. A rod of iron is upon them, that is, an immutable power which smashes earthen vessels made of clay. It has made them incorruptible and teaches us that blessedness alone consists in having faith in God. Such is the sense of the [second] psalm. One may examine our opinion with regard to these divine words and see whether or not they agree with the divinely inspired scripture.

The remaining psalms without inscriptions as explained earlier refer to the synagogue of the Jews, not to the Church. In all we can find some inscription which **M.517** the Jew does not accept because of his religion and does not acknowledge due to his unbelief. Psalms of this kind are twelve in number, for a more careful examination reveals their sequence. The Thirty-second and Forty-second Psalm are followed by the Seventieth, Seventy-third and Ninetieth Psalm. Then comes the psalms between Ninety-two and Ninety-six plus the Ninety-eighth psalm. Among the last psalms without an inscription is the One-hundred and third. Such is the order of psalms lacking inscriptions in the Hebrew text. The reason for this is none other than what I mentioned above and becomes clear by examining a few **J.94** psalms lacking inscriptions to confirm the charge of the Jews’ arrogance.

The [Thirty-second] psalm proclaims him [Christ] who comes upon earth from heaven. “Rejoice, you just, in the Lord.” He is the one who oversees creation, causes everything to come into being and sustains them in being. His precept is their very substance. Such is the sense of the divine words, for “He spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created.” Here God makes blessed the nation established in his name. This nation upon which the hope of salvation rests is the name of Christ borne by believers. “Because the Lord looked down from heaven and saw all the sons of men from his abode.” This psalm calls his ever existing dwelling “father.” It always exists, is not begotten from anything else but is established forever. We are not surprised that God, who comes from there, joined himself to the sons of men. He became the Son of Man, and through him we are persuaded that he is the one “who fashioned their hearts singularly.”

What new lesson can we learn from the mystery of Christ who molds our human nature? The Lord of [human] nature came to his own people, but the Jews did not accept him. Because of this a psalm inscription is not attributed to them just as there is no sun for the blind. We have judged unsuitable for salvation the law according to the flesh, and this psalm calls a “vain horse” every corporeal understanding of the divine commandments (We may call this horse **M.520 & J.95** a “giant”). The psalmist symbolically reproaches such things by saying, “A horse is vain for salvation; a giant shall not be delivered by the greatness of his strength.” By becoming attentive to him who rescues our souls from death by heavenly nourishment (as the prophet says, “The eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, and those who hope in his mercy; to deliver their souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine”), we say that “our soul waits on the Lord, for he looks down upon us from heaven,” and “May your mercy be upon us, Lord, as we have hoped in you.” Because of what we have just stated, the Jews do not accept the inscription of psalm [twenty-two]. The forty-second psalm also lacks an inscription, showing, I believe, that the mystery it contains was unfavorable to the Jews, for it proclaims that we are to approach the altar with renewed youth. This was not the case with the Jews who could not receive the mystery of salvation by a rebirth from above.

The Church’s version of the inscription for Psalm Seventy is “For the sons of Jonadab and the first captives.” The Hebrew text lacks an inscription because prophecy about the Lord [Jesus Christ] is more evident here. The Jews’ infidelity is condemned since they could not receive the obvious teaching of this mystery. They resemble persons with poor eyes or those who fear water. They cannot bear the sun’s rays nor the sight of water; rather, they have shut their eyes, for their passions block the vision of the sun’s rays. **J.96** Those fearing the sight of water do the same thing. Similarly, the Jews in their

wickedness silently despise the truth because they do not acknowledge the preaching of God's glory. The seventieth psalm has a symbol of prophecy whose inscription pertaining to a captive person reads "Regarding the first captives." However, it befits a suppliant by saying, "Rescue me from the hand of the sinner, from the hand of the transgressor and unjust person." Such words as these show that our life is one of captivity.

The words which follow this verse have many consoling elements in describing the return from captivity. "How many and sore afflictions have you showed me, yet you **M.521** turned and enlivened me and brought me again from the depths of the earth. You multiplied righteousness and turned and comforted me." The great Paul clarifies these verses when he tells us about how he who had descended for us has led us out of the depths from the weight of sin. "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?', that is, to bring Christ down. Or, 'Who will descend into the depths?', that is, to raise Christ from the dead" (Rom 10.6-7). Death entered the world and was then cast out; by man sin entered, and by man it was ejected. The first man opened a way for death; by the second life returned and brought about death's destruction. Christ therefore **J.97** descended into death's abyss by his passion and bound the captive under death's sway in order to restore on high him who had laid in the abyss. The great Apostle made these things very clear and said much more. "As in Adam we have all died, so in Christ we all shall be made alive" (1Cor 15.22). Hence, the inscription "For the first persons who were made captive" (Ps 70) becomes the dispensation of our Lord by his flesh. It cries out and stops the ears of the Jews who did not accept this reality.

Psalm Ninety gives the reason for the Jews' refusal of the inscription manifesting Christ's theophany. We have already mentioned the psalm which is a "Praise of a canticle," for every praise refers to God. The Jews were silent about this praise and ordered those praising the Lord to be silent (Mt 21.15-16). The Gospel clearly shows their arrogance when they attempted to hinder the children in the temple from praising the Lord for his good deeds. The inscription "Praise of a canticle" needs no consideration with reference to the Lord once its meaning has become clear.

The inscription of Psalm Ninety-two which the Jews did not accept becomes even clearer. It reads, "Praise of **J.98** a canticle of David for the Sabbath day when the earth was inhabited." What person familiar with his religion does not know that on the Sabbath day the mystery against death was accomplished? It prevailed against the law of immovability in the tomb containing [our Lord's] body. Who also does not know about that day when our Lord created **M.524** the earth? He destroyed the curse against our dwelling and restored that which fell into ruin. Our destroyer, death, was then destroyed, and it seemed that we were granted a Sabbath's rest while death remained inactive. However, God broke death's power and made a way for all who had died through his own person from death to resurrection.

The enemy of Christ's cross did not accept the mystery of the Sabbath which is why this psalm of praise lacks an inscription. [The Jews] failed to acknowledge Christ as the Lord who conformed himself to our human nature, clothed himself with our shame in a servant's form, took us his reign, clothed himself with his own beauty and girded himself with power. The power and beauty of the Son is the Father. Christ again strengthened human nature which sin ruined so that it would no longer fall back into evil nor into sin's turmoil. Many other great benefits symbolically proclaiming God's grace are indicated by the sound of rivers which, I think, indicate the words of the Gospel. Why should we be attentive to everything written in the Psalter? No doubt the divine words agree with the singing of praise which ascends to God in jubilation. A good confession confirms this meaning, and **J.99** the sanctification effected by the Spirit is appropriate to God's own house, the Church.

Similarly, the Jews denied an inscription for the ninety-third psalm which reads "For David, on the fourth day of the Sabbath; lacking an inscription among the Hebrews." The mystery of this



inscription foretells the dispensation of the passion. On the fifth day of the Sabbath Judas betrayed the Lord, the day before Christ redeemed the entire world. The prophet Jeremiah says of the one who committed this deed, “And they took thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set” (Mt 27.9 & Jer 32.6-15; cf. Zech 11.12-13). I think Christ is sold because by this deed he might purchase those who were sold into sin. Because the psalmist saw into the future, he became incensed at this deed and called [God] a God of vengeance. He exhorted God to exalt himself because he was humbled for us, and he urged that a just charge be leveled against arrogant men so that sinners may not boast in their evil. The psalmist cried out to such people, calling them stupid and without understanding because they did not accept the Divinity when they saw it.

**M.525** As the psalmist says in another place, it is typical for the foolish to claim that the true God does not exist. He cried out to them, “Understand, foolish among the people; fools, when will you comprehend” (Ps 93.8)? Who planted the ear? Who formed the eye? Who trains nations? Who knows the thoughts of men? I think that all these exclamations of **J.100** the prophet signify marvels wrought by cures. Christ healed eyes with spittle by making a clay paste out of the earth, and he inserted his fingers into the ears of persons deprived of hearing. He also revealed hidden thoughts by looking at what lies within the human heart. Since the psalmist was ignored by those persons to whom he cried out, he turned to the Lord and said, “Blessed is the man whom you train, Lord, and teach by your Law” (Ps 93.12). By itself the Law is worthless unless the divine teachings within it do not clarify its mystery. As the prophet says, “Open my eyes that I may understand the wonders of your Law” (Ps 118.18). The psalmist then calls that person blessed who was taken out from the nations and who believed in the spiritual Law. A short while before he was given over to the flesh and resembled animals, but having been instructed in the divine law, any curses against him are changed into blessings, and he becomes blessed. The wrath which once belonged to his wicked days is done away while a pit is dug for someone else. A little further on the psalmist speaks of the Lord’s dispensation for mankind: “If the Lord had not helped me, my soul would have almost dwelt in hell.” The Lord with his assistance does not permit us to dwell in hell.

The physician’s cure counters the many evils of our sin, a fact which the psalmist uses to teach us something greater, namely, that evil does not exist from all eternity. “The throne of iniquity which frames mischief by statute shall not have **J.101** fellowship with you.” That is to say, sin’s origin is not attributed to you, but it is the throne which creates sin through a command. These examples show us that evil does not exist from eternity, nor does it last forever. The psalm speaks of evil’s destruction by the Jews who murdered the Lord and foretells the disappearance of wickedness. “They will hunt for the soul of the righteous and condemn innocent blood.” Their infamous deed becomes a cause of salvation, for the Lord condemned to death becomes a refuge for me. This same God provides hope to believers, repays each person with just judgment and destroys the wickedness of sinners, not their [human] nature. The text says, “The **M.528** Lord will repay them for their iniquity; the Lord God will destroy their wickedness.” These words show that persons now conformed to sin will be destroyed. Once every trace of evil has been abolished, everyone will be conformed to Christ and will share one radiant form which had clothed our nature from the very beginning.

## CHAPTER NINE

**J.102** Next we have a psalm lacking the accompaniment of musical organs; instead, it praises God with a canticle: “A praise of a canticle by David” (Ps 94). The Hebrew text lacks this inscription. We are offered an exultation and shout of victory done in unison: “Come, let us exult in the Lord; let us shout to God our savior” (Ps 95.1). The end of this psalm contains a more vehement threat against the [Jews’] unbelief. It shows their perversity when they aggravated their Benefactor during forty years’ wandering in the desert after which they refused forgiveness of sin offered by the Gospel. The words, “If

today you hear his voice” come to us today from God’s eternal greatness when he descended into a temporal birth to bring his people rest. However, the people always took error and unbelief as their guide both in former and later times and were excluded from entering God’s rest by oath. How, then, can persons who willingly alienate themselves from God’s blessing enter his rest?

Psalm-Ninety-five also lacks an inscription in the Hebrew text and in a canticle offered to God after our return from **J.103** captivity and upon the restoration of our ruined nature. The inscription says, “A praise of a canticle when the house [temple] was rebuilt after captivity; an inscription lacking among the Jews” (Ps 95). The psalm’s first words immediately announce the mystery of the New Testament: “Sing to the Lord a new song.” The Jews are correct to remain silent about this inscription because after the Gospel’s words foretold in Psalm Ninety-five’s first verse it prophecies about those **M.529** gathered from the nations: “Bring to the Lord, you families of nations; bring to the Lord glory and honor. Adore the Lord in his holy court. Take offerings and enter his courts.” Next follows a blessing proclaimed to the nations: “Say among the nations that the Lord has reigned” and has averted the eternal destruction destined for the world. The psalm says of this, “Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad; let the sea be moved with the fullness of its waters.” These words symbolically represent the enemy’s power which troubles and destabilizes our life when we become like the heavens telling God’s glory or the earth blessed by the fruitfulness of virtues. “Let the sea be shaken and its fullness.” The psalm says that the fields rejoice, a symbol of stability in virtue which Isaiah mentions when he orders the ravines to be filled and the hills and the mountains to be set up [Is 40.4] **J.104**. To me this seems nothing other than a defect and excess in our behavior with regard to virtue. The text wishes us to be attentive here so that we may not fabricate [literally, “hollow out”] a reason for virtue through a defect of the good or cause unevenness by excess. “Let the fields and all that is in them rejoice.”

The Hebrew text also lacks an inscription for the next psalm [ninety-six] while our [Greek] version speaks about the condition of our land. The inscription attributed to David reads, “To David, when his land was established.” The word “his” signifies not David’s land but God’s. Indeed, all of us who were first unstable in the good and again have attained stability in the good are God’s land. The beginning of Psalm Ninety-six immediately states that “The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice.” If anyone maintains that the sun illumines the earth, the joy of the Lord’s kingdom prevails in us. The psalm reads, “The Lord has reigned; let the earth rejoice. Let the many islands be glad.” This verse gives a good description of our souls in temptation whose firmness and stability are called “islands.” At all times the sea of evil encompasses them but cannot prevail because the islands are made firm in virtue against the tossing of waves.

**M.532** Cloud and darkness symbolize God’s invisible nature. **J.105** “Cloud and darkness are found about him.” Here we have a fearful example of God’s retributive power such as “Fire went before him and burned up his foes on every side.” This verse demonstrates the Gospel’s illumination, saying that its words are stars of the divine preaching which enlighten the entire world. “His stars lighten up the world.” The following words show the loftiness of the Gospel’s mysteries: “The heavens proclaim his righteousness; many people saw his glory.” Purification from idols and the destruction of their deceptive power is predicted by the following words: “Let those who worship graven images be put to shame, those boasting of their idols.” The text then offers a seal of goodness by adding the Lord’s manifestation to men: “Light shined for the just man, and joy for the upright of heart.”

It is fitting that the beginning of Psalm Ninety-eight which lacks an inscription be joined to the end of Psalm Seventy-two which consists in light and joy for the just and wrath for unbelievers. “The Lord has reigned, let the people rage.” Who is this Lord who reigns, seated above the angels and the heavens? The image of cherubim shows the excellency of God’s transcendent power (His kingdom dissolves the very fabric of evil. The earthly element in us **J.106** is shaken, not the heavenly) by the

words, “He is seated upon the cherubim; let the earth be shaken.” I omit the rest of this text not to weary you by the fruit of our examination because everything has one goal, the very end of the Psalter. Psalm Ninety-eight testifies that the Lord reigns; he has not appeared to us first, but he manifested himself through the prophets. Thus we have the outstanding examples of Moses, Aaron and Samuel who put their trust in God. Added to this is the pillar of cloud in which God spoke, teaching, I think, that the faithless should not be shocked at God’s converse through man for our sakes. God spoke in a pillar of cloud and later manifested himself in the flesh. Thus if anyone should claim the flesh was an unworthy vehicle by which God speaks to us, the pillar of cloud would also not be a suitable testimony. What thing in itself can be judged worthy of God’s magnificence? If the Jews believed that God spoke in a pillar of cloud, it would not be inconsistent that he spoke in human flesh. In another way the prophet Isaiah understands the cloud through the flesh: **M.533** “Behold, the Lord is seated upon a lofty cloud” (Is 19.1). Later on the same prophet speaks of a cloud: “Who are these that fly along like clouds” (Is 60.8)? These “clouds” show our Lord’s birth in the flesh with the rest of mankind. Further in Psalm Ninety-nine David says to this God who first appeared in a cloud and afterwards spoke to man through human flesh, “Lord, our God, you heard them. Oh God, you became propitious to them and took vengeance upon all their devices.”

**J.107** Should anyone in his consideration of the divine dispensation see the human indignities into which God has stooped, we have this verse at the end of the psalm: “Praise the Lord our God and worship at this footstool, for he is holy.” We believe that this verse pertains to you, oh people, inasmuch as you can grasp the divine mysteries which lead you to a reverent knowledge of God insofar as your minds can comprehend them. Extol God’s glory, knowing that when you have elevated your mind and have transcended every noble idea with regard to knowledge of him, what we discover and worship is not the greatness of him we seek, but the footstool of his feet. For us this signifies the submission and poverty of our minds in comparison to him who is incomprehensible.

After Psalm Ninety-eight we pass a good many psalms until we reach the One-hundred and third which lacks an inscription in the Hebrew text for a special reason. It clearly shows that the Only-begotten God brought this world into existence. This psalm of David lacking an inscription in the Hebrew speaks of the world’s creation and signifies the [Jews’] refusal of its prophecy: “Of David; regarding the creation of the world; lacking an inscription among the Hebrews.” **J.108** We will consider this psalm in due time, but it is sufficient to mention the rebuke against the Jews’ unbelief who did not accept the psalm’s inscription.

## CHAPTER TEN

We must not proceed further without considering the term *diapsalma* (*This term means a pause. It is equivalent to the Hebrew selah, a musical or liturgical direction marking a division of the psalm*). Our predecessors take it either as a change in understanding, appearance or activity. We do not reject the opinion of the Fathers, nor refuse the significance of this term as they understood it. We accept the meaning of *diapsalma* occurring in the following psalms provided **M.536** that it is another illumination of the Holy Spirit in David’s prophecy and an occasion of grace with respect to knowledge for the benefit of persons amenable to prophecy. *Diapsalma* contains [David’s] own voice and gives an occasion for us to understand the content of his thoughts through God’s enlightenment. It often happens to person on a journey, at feasts or gatherings that if a sound reaches their ears, they cease to pay attention and resume their conversation. Thus the great David acted as the Spirit’s mouthpiece, expressed what he had been taught and explained it **J.109** through singing [of the psalms]. When David taught in the midst of his discourse, he yielded his attentive soul to listen to the Spirit, silenced his physical ear to be filled with [divine] thoughts and again explained his experience by combining his words with singing.

Such is the significance of *diapsalma* as a sudden pause in the midst of psalmody for introducing

an inspiration as a hidden teaching of the Spirit given to the soul; the frequent interruptions in the psalms' chanting makes us attentive to his instruction. To prevent many persons from understanding the meaning of the silence [of the term *diapsalma*] as a failure of the Holy Spirit to prophesy, certain interpreters insert the term "always" for these pauses in place of *diapsalma* that we may learn of the Holy Spirit's teaching which is always present in the soul. This word [*diapsalma*] explaining something of God's purposes impressed in the soul was not always present in the text, yet it both eloquently speaks of its designs and explains them. To the extent that God's designs are impressed on our minds, the psalmody progresses accordingly; however, if any words with a fuller meaning of God resound in the soul, we become fully attentive and stop singing.

The Psalter provides us with an interval when the Holy Spirit speaks at such times for silence (interpreters call this interval *diapsalma*). As we see it, the Psalter is divided into five sections. This order is valid because each division marks a kind of advancement to a higher step for a person under the Psalter's guidance. Only the last division from beginning to end is a constant, unceasing song of praise with no intervening pause. Each step is a canticle with the inscription "Alleluia."

Close observation shows, I believe, that other psalms, despite **M.537** their inferiority, have a role to teach us about loftier ideas. By the insertion of *diapsalma* in the middle of such psalms, they can lead to a more sublime understanding of the good. The perfection [of the good] signified by "ascents" and "alleluia" (Pss 119-133) requires no additional words because it is the fulfillment of our notions about the ultimate good. Thus these inscriptions fully contain the perfection of the good. The sense of the inscription "Alleluia" testifies to this and speaks of God's surpassing praise. Just as the body's growth with its various stages has a determined end established by nature after which it cannot grow further but remains the same for the rest of its natural life, so are the divine teachings stable and subject to growth. These teachings pertain to infants and persons not fully matured. They require appropriate nourishment by milk and growth **J.111** by similar nourishment, whereas solid food is for those who have trained the sense faculties of their souls by other teachings.

The last section of the Psalter has no need for *diapsalma* when the Holy Spirit, acting as interpreter, imparts loftier teachings. This fact becomes clear if we add those parts of the Psalter interpreted by *diapsalma*. The third psalm speaks of distress and helplessness caused by the revolt of our enemies. It then interrupts this section by a pause so that a voice uttering salvation may secretly encourage a person by resounding within him: "You, Lord, are my help, my glory exulting my head" (Ps 3.4). Once again we have a pause in the singing with a voice of thanksgiving: "I cried to the Lord with my voice, and he heard me from the mountain of his sanctuary." This verse teaches us about our release from hardships common to human misfortunes.

Our Lord's passion teaches us a mystery when a sudden enlightenment of the Spirit clothed him: "I lay down and slept; I woke because the Lord was my help." Each word requires a more careful examination, but this would delay us because the Psalter moves on to other matters. Our understanding of *diapsalma* receives its validity from contact with the psalm's words. The *diapsalma* of Psalm Four teaches **J.112** us the same thing. It cries out to humanity the vanity of its pursuits and calls the sons of men slow of heart, for they love vanity and insubstantial things. Another pause demonstrates the truth in the same way: "Know that the Lord has done wondrous things for his holy one." This verse shows, I think, the Lord through his holy one. Moses says, **M.540** "Because the Lord is just and holy" (Dt 32.4). The psalmist then advises a person desiring to conduct his life in purity; having become a judge and arbiter of his soul's thoughts, the psalmist says, "For what you say in your hearts, feel compunction upon your beds."

By turning inward, the psalmist heard about the abolition of legal animal sacrifice and cries out to

his listeners that no trust should be put in sacrificial victims or irrational beasts which cannot purify the soul; rather, we should recognize the sacrifices pleasing to God. For this reason the psalmist says, “Make a sacrifice of righteousness and hope in the Lord.” The seventh psalm first has an entreaty where the psalmist pleads before his just judge that evil done by the enemy is not to suffer retribution but only the authors of wickedness; they will be repaid in proportion to their sins together with persons committing evil acts for the first time and those already making retribution through a sacrifice.

After these words the psalmist again explains a great mystery of faith, the Lord’s vengeance against his true enemies. The adversary’s opposition could not be destroyed unless **J.113** the Lord rose for us, but death must precede resurrection. Therefore the Lord’s resurrection signifies that which is intimately joined to it, I mean the mystery of his passion. For this reason the psalmist, filled with the divine indwelling of the Holy Spirit says, “Arise, Lord, in your anger and be exalted in the utmost boundaries of my enemies” (Ps 7.7). The term “wrath” indicates the retributive power of the just Judge and the destruction of evil. Only the enemy hostile to human nature is considered because its end lies in destruction and dissolves into nothingness. Thus the psalm says, “Be exalted in the utmost bounds of my enemies.” The psalmist first indicates that the enemies’ wickedness must come to an end so that evil may no longer enter our life. The opposite of sickness is health just as the opposite of sleep is being awake (neither does a sleeping person wake up **J.114** nor does a sick person recover from illness, but if an ill person recovers and a sleeping person wakes up, we claim that each of these persons finds himself in a condition opposite to his previous state). We understand the destruction of enemies as the change of human nature into blessedness. We find only one different use of *diapsalma* in the entire Psalter, and that is in the ninth psalm. It does not simply read “Pause” but “Canticle of pause.” Due to a fault in the text we may change the reading to “Pause of a canticle” instead of “Canticle of a pause.”

**M.541** While keeping before our eyes the judgment in the Apocalypse of John against those who change the divine words either by addition or by subtraction (22.19), we will attempt to investigate the reason for “Canticle of pause” while guarding the order in this part of Scripture handed down to us. We take into account that from this inscription to the following pause there is only one pause in accord with the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of David’s prophetic thoughts but the use is different here. We do not have this inscription in the other psalms, nor is there instruction about hidden things which the Holy Spirit communicates to the soul nor a statement of knowledge given to David; rather, the text is silent about what his innermost heart had learned. Therefore, two elements [David’s instruction and knowledge] belong together. The teaching of the Spirit’s more lofty insights are present in David’s prophesying without interrupting singing. However, the Holy Spirit implants the organ of prophecy and moves his utterances voluntarily so that David does not stop singing nor hinders **J.115** the psalm’s teaching by any sound. Symmachos calls this teaching of the Spirit a song. Since many parts of this Psalter have this interruption, our words should suffice without going into a detailed examination of all the pauses. However, it would be unnecessary and superfluous to extend our inquiry by dwelling on facts of common agreement.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

For anyone who may wish to examine the Psalter, its order seems to differ from the course of historical events. Should a person consider the time in which David lived and the sequence of his deeds, he would not find the distribution of the psalms to agree with historical events. We respond to this by returning to the underlying principle of our treatise, namely, that our teaching is not necessarily concerned with history. I think we ought to call the Holy Spirit our teacher; as the Lord says, “He will teach you all things” (Jn 14.26). Everything else seems incidental in comparison with this guide and teacher of our souls who zealously protects those deceived by life’s vanity and draws them to true life.

Anything under taken with a purpose has a certain natural, necessary order which brings about the end one strives after. Similarly, a sculptor's goal is to conform stone to some kind of image. He does not immediately begin from a completed form, **J.116** but his art of fashioning stone must proceed with order and care, otherwise he could accomplish nothing. The grosser parts of useless stone must first be stripped away to **M.544** bring out the intended form, and so the sculptor laboriously prunes away those parts of stone. Once they are removed, the remaining stone begins to take on the form of a living subject on which the artisan exerts his talent. The sculptor next removes the rough parts of the stone with more subtle, precise instruments and then imposes upon the stone the likeness of the model's form. He polishes and smoothes the stone's surface, actions which will enhance his work. Similarly, when earthly inclinations have turned our human nature to stone, God's chiseling us to his divine likeness proceeds to a certain method and order to complete his goal.

I say that we must first separate ourselves from connatural evils to which we were habitually attached. Then he [the divine sculptor] cuts away superficial material and begins to form his subject matter to the likeness of his final goal by removing anything which hinders the representation. Thus by more subtle teachings of his intentions, the divine sculptor scrapes and polishes our minds and then forms Christ in us according to the pattern of virtue. We had Christ's image from the very beginning and are now restored to this state. What is the process of sculpturing our souls? The first section of the Psalter presents an imitation [of Christ] according to a certain order. **J.117** This order is consistent with the Spirit; he does not teach us mere history but how to conform our souls through virtue to God. He seeks consistency in the psalms' words while disregarding the historical sequence of events.

According to the example just mentioned, many instruments are needed to skillfully create a piece of sculpture (Such instruments differ with respect to their form. One has a curved blade, another is two-fold, while yet other knives are semi-circular in shape. The artisan uses these instruments and others like them at the appropriate time). Hence, our true stewards are the psalms which resemble sculptor's tools and skillfully fashion our souls to God's likeness. Each instrument is used according to the need at hand. The artisan is not worried about which instrument is used either first or second, for the need determines the use [of the tool]. It does not matter which is first or last, the deeds of Goliath or Saul, those of Absalom, Uriah, the words of Chusi or the incident concerning Bathseba. None of these examples pertains to the formation of our hearts, yet we must see how each one might help us attain the good.

**J.118** This order salvation has in view, and the excellent order of these examples contributes to this end. For example, the first psalm turns man away from his inveterate kinship with evil. The second psalm shows how we must cling to our Lord's manifestation in the flesh mentioned earlier and indicates the blessedness for those believing in him. The third psalm speaks of the enemy's impending temptation. Although you have already been anointed into [God's] kingdom by faith and reign with the true Christ, the enemy lays his hands on you in order to eject you from your dignity. He does this not from outside but from within you. The enemy lacks strength from outside us; we are not cast down from our own dignity by someone else unless we become the fathers of evil through the birth pangs of malice. The enemy rises up against our kingdom and revolts against us by seizing power when he defiles [the virtues] within us and has exposed our guilt, that is, when he brings to full view the corruption of our virtues which we once had.

When our strength is not yet strong enough for combat and for engaging the enemy in his assaults, we flee from contact with him. Scripture gives evidence of this by an inscription **J.119** for those engaging in such combat. One such example teaches that whenever you give birth to an Absalom (cf. 1Sam 18.9), you must flee as the Lord says (Mt 10.23), from one city to another. Absalom's hair

represents evil; he is a murderer of his brother, lusts after your noble wives and defiles your marriage bed. You must stealthily flee from such a son as Absalom, but once you have concentrated your resources against him and have fastened his evil hair with the assistance of a tree, you can destroy this enemy with three spears. The historical example of this tree to which this evil hair is fixed is clear. The Apostle calls it a written record of a debt of sins when he says, "He took it out of the way nailing it to the cross"[Col 2.14]. The cross is this tree.

What are the three shafts cast into the foe's heart which bring death to our last enemy? We may get a better idea of these three shafts if we turn to Isaiah's prophecy uttered in the Lord's presence: "He placed me as a chosen arrow and hid me in his quiver" (Is 49.2). This arrow is the word of the Lord "living, more penetrating than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4.12). Christ is this word who signifies the mystery of the Trinity. Through him we learn about the One who anoints, the One anointed and the One through whom this anointing occurs. If any one of these three elements is missing, the name of Christ does not exist. **M.548** When his name is exalted in our quiver, **J.120** by faith in our souls (the quiver of the word is our soul), the rebellious power of the one rising up and persecuting us is brought to ruin on a tree. After David fled his rebellious son he said, "Those afflicting me are multiplied; many are those rising up against me" (Ps 3.2) (This rebel has one nature yet is multiple with his evil assistance).

The Psalter contains similar texts followed by the beginning of victory. Flight from rebels at an opportune moment becomes victory over them. Therefore the next psalm has the inscription "for the end" (Ps 4). The end of all struggles is victory as we have said above. Once we get a taste of victory, others against our enemies follow suit. In the first victory where pleasures viciously contend against our life for the good. Persons who pursue vanity and love what is false are condemned, but you have transformed your desires from visible reality to what is unseen.

In the following psalm [five] we have another kind of victory. Two elements contend with each other for the divine inheritance, law and faith. The just Judge of this struggle gives you victory's reward to make your pure soul like the sun's rising which dispels darkness and heralds the dawn. Psalm five calls this "early morning." Thus the athlete **J.121** always has one victory following upon another because he constantly strives for something better and more illustrious than his victorious accomplishments. Yet another victory follows through what had preceded. He who makes know the inheritance imitates "the eighth" (Ps 6.1) (*Cf. Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs, 15<sup>th</sup> Homily, for an explanation of this "Eighth."*), a symbol for the end of this present existence and the beginning of the age to come. That which is proper to "the eighth" consists in no longer offering an occasion to do good or evil, but whoever casts seed for himself through his works produces sheaves from such actions. Therefore the person trained for these victories is bidden to repent (However, this zeal has no value in hell).

The Psalter once again frees us for other struggles and anoints us for the onslaught of temptations. This enemy is Absalom who is reborn from within us and who makes war against us. Our prudence about our course of action leads to destruction instead of relying upon God's assistance. Chusi attributes the cause of beneficial actions to God and gives thanks for this. It would be irrelevant to carefully **M.549** pay attention to historical details such as how Chusi, a faithful assistant of David, joined the friends of Absalom and whose counsel on behalf of this tyrant was more persuasive than Achtiophel's (2Sam 16.20) who, after advising Absalom against David, hanged himself.

**J.122** It may be helpful to apply these historical examples to a life of virtue, that is, how our power of free choice saves us and hangs our adversary. Both the Psalter and historical examples demonstrate this, but our goal is to understand the sequence of the psalms which leads us to the good. Therefore we should understand the destructive power of our free choice which counsels us. What is this

destructive element? We must both reckon with the author of iniquity and ward off his attacks. He is punished for his extreme acts of violence and becomes liable for punishment if evil for evil should be found just as if he were bartering and paying back what he received to those who provided it. Once more a victory is declared after these struggles.

There follows the inscription “for the wine presses” (Pss 8, 80, 83), signifying the end [of our struggles] and our victory. It would be superfluous to examine the inscription “for the wine presses” because we have already sufficiently explained it in its proper context. Just as after [David’s] first flight from Absalom his vain zeal for victory is deemed better than noble deeds, so after similar struggles we obtain help from the inscription “from the wine presses” against our adversary and persecutor to effect victory by his destruction. He is called “enemy” and “persecutor” because his allurements which make us commit sin are punishments when we apprehend them. Such enticements deceive a person to make him associate with evil, a most grievous form of retribution indeed.

**J.123** The divine Apostle explains this matter as follows: “They received in themselves the recompense of their error which was their due” (Rom 1.27). What other device can be more grievous than this shameful impurity which such persons bring upon themselves? The person who puts to death this force in his own life exacts vengeance upon this evil. He sees the heavens, the magnificence above them and the dignity of our nature placed in the same order. By reason of his position, man has domination over irrational beasts and is made a little less than the angels by comparison. Man therefore takes precedence over irrational beasts and is associated with the angels.

Still another kind of victory succeeds this one. Having **M.552** transcended external appearances, you enter the hidden realities of Scripture (The Song is the Scripture, *Logos*). By your training in earlier victories, you are now worthy to sing “for the secrets of the son” (Ps 9) through a fitting, suitable contemplation. You are again victorious over the beast lying in ambush so that it no longer can boast over us (“in order that man may no longer boast upon the earth,” Ps 9.39). By this victory you may have a more perfect trust in God and say, “In the Lord I have trusted” (Ps 10.1). You once again recall “the eighth” where the tongue speaking great words and the deceitful lips (Ps 11.1) **J.124** and the fury against God is destroyed. Those who do not associate with impiety but keep to the right way which God makes anew for us as a fresh, living way are guarded from this generation forever. What need is there to explain every detail since we have sufficiently pointed out to you in our introduction the means to attain the good through the order of the Psalter?

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Now that we have completed the first section dealing with [the soul’s] ascent through the psalms, the subject of blessedness is resumed in the fortieth psalm which defines it in a different manner than in the first section. The psalms of the first section defined blessedness as turning away from evil by praising our recognition of the good. The nature of the good or that which transcends our ability to find anything expressed in word or thought is the Only-begotten Son of God who, though being rich, emptied himself for our sakes. This psalm foretells God’s poverty in the flesh as related to us in the Gospel and calls “blessed” the person who recognizes that poverty. He who is poor in the form of a slave is praised according to his divine nature. Poverty and need are mentioned at the beginning of Psalm Forty **J.125** which concludes with “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, forever and ever. Let it be, let it be.” Therefore the person who obtains this height finds himself at the beginning of yet another ascent.

We have forsaken Core [Korah] our father who arrogantly usurped the priesthood and was consumed by fire, cast into a pit and was buried on account of his sin. The person associated through



faith to the true Father understands the great difference between being a son of God and a son of the apostate, Kore. Having attained the goal of victory and knowing how much it differs from the father of evil, this person consumes and annihilates in himself every wild poisonous thought like a deer with its natural ability **M.553** to destroy reptiles. He imitates the deer by his thirst for the divine fountains, that is, for the one divine nature subsisting in the Trinity. “As the deer longs for fountains of water, thus does my soul desire you, God.” The psalmist’s strong thirst is slaked, and he hastens after the object of his desire. Both in the middle and at the end of the psalm he says that even participation in a small portion of the good delays punishment. “Why are you sad, my soul?” and “Hope in God.” Indeed, these words pledge us to a fruitful enjoyment in God our hope.

The Psalter then moves on to the divine altar which renews one’s youth (Ps 42.2). Further (Ps 43), the psalmist makes the descendants of Core visitors and shows that the lowly origins **J.126** of our fathers do not obscure God’s nobility. It ascribes the source of our enemies’ destruction to God: “You have saved us from those afflicting us and have confounded those who hate us” (Ps 43.8-44). These words serve as a transition to the canticle of the beloved (Ps 44) to make victors over evil those who first fell away that they may attain the end of their victory through understanding: “For the end, a psalm for understanding, for the beloved” (Ps 44). This inscription teaches us about the virgin escorted to companionship with God who cannot be worthy of such an honor unless she forgets her father. Psalm forty-five is attributed to the beloved which again bestows victory to the sons of Core and presents us with more enigmatic words. “For the hidden things” contains an indication of this psalm’s contents. “The sounds of waters, the commotion of the peoples, the tottering of winds and the tossing of the sea” describe “the Lord of hosts [who] is with us.”

All these words of the psalmist herald the manifestation of the Lord in the flesh. Demons cried out and were troubled and the mountains were removed, that is, the earthly arrogance of evil which seemed incapable of being moved from the place they had from of old. The river of gladness makes the city of God rejoice, and the Most High sanctifies his own dwelling while other such things from this psalm symbolically proclaim hidden things. The text bestows another victory where all nations clap their hands and exult because “God has ascended with a shout.” Paul’s explanation of this ascent is clear: “No one is able to ascend except him who led **J.127** the way by descending” (Eph 4.9).

The psalmist urged everyone to sing with understanding by giving a nobler meaning to Psalm Forty-seven by the inscription “the second day of the week,” the subject of this canticle. If we consider this first generation of the world, it refers to the creation of heaven, the firmament and the **M.556** waters above the heavens and on earth. If you examine the Gospel, it is [God] indeed who established heaven for us. If he calls heaven the firmament which Paul understands as faith in Christ, then heaven is created for us in accord with faith because the obscurity of the Sabbath has passed away. The mystery “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead” (Rom 1.4) who indeed is worthy of the highest praise, is worthy of our belief.

Later on Psalm Forty-seven calls Mount Zion “that divine city” founded on a mountain, “the joy of all the earth.” It is especially marvelous that what was once “the side of the north” is now the “city of the great king,” and the verse “God is known in its palaces” clearly points out the wonder of the Church. The earth’s northern region is shadowy, cold, perpetually in darkness and lacks the sun’s rays. Because of this “north” signifies the hostile power. **J.128** What once dwelt in the north and was at its side changed from a shadowy, frigid life to the city of God and the habitation of his kingdom: “God is known in its palaces.” A palace is a square shaped building symbolically composed of the virtues’ firm, lofty towers in holy souls who alone manifest God in their lives.

What follows is consonant with our words above, namely, that kings are gathered together in this

city; not slaves but a gathering of kings inhabits that divine city. “Those seeing it were astonished.” The cause for wonder is recorded since those who first inhabited this city were unworthy of it when it was on “the side of the north.” “They were troubled and shaken and trembling seized them.” Not only did trembling seize these kings but the painful pangs of childbirth. A strong wind broke all the ships of the rebels which floated upon the sea of life with wicked intent. “By a strong wind you break the ships of Tharsis.” The Acts of the Apostles states that this was not the strong wind coming upon the disciples in the upper room (2.2).

Scripture also speaks of the prophet Jonah who fled from God by seeking a ship to Tharsis (Jon 1.3). Then the psalm, as if divided into two separate persons, first assumes the role of a person speaking and then interprets the words which were spoken. **M.557** by assenting to the truth of words spoken **J.129** earlier as though they came from another person, it teaches “as we have heard, thus we have seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.” For this reason the text made those who exhorted each other see with delight what we have heard: “Walk round Zion and encompass it. Tell of her towers. Mark well her strength and observe her palaces” and other such things.

After this the preaching of the Word diffuses throughout the entire world (cf. Ps 48), and instead of a confusion of tongues there is one voice. Thus all the nations, inhabited regions and all peoples now become one in their listening to this Word and one heart resounding with the Word. Human nature in its entirety is gathered together, and all the world forms one assembly crying out with one voice, “Hear this, all nations; pay attention, all inhabitants of the world, earth-born and sons of men, rich and poor alike.” These three elements form a general distinction with regard to men’s lives. First the psalm mentions all nations and inhabitants of the world. The term “nations” signifies the delimitation of places, and the succeeding words refer to the inhabitants of these places. **J.130** By mentioning those who are earth-born and sons of men, the text distinguishes carnal, earthly and irrational men from those who have been saved or those having a stamp on their human nature which is likeness to God.

A general inequality with respect to poverty and wealth lies at the root of the various irregularities in human affairs. What person utters such words? Who else testifies that he speaks of wisdom and understanding? He who speaks these words has the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, that great gift, the result of careful meditation. The psalm does not first speak of opening the mouth before inclining one’s ear to the word of God: “I will incline my ear to understanding” and then “I will open my problem on the harp.” What is this “understanding” and “problem?” The text says that the creature of God does not see each day’s evil as the text mentions with respect to the creation of the world; rather, sin made that joyful day one of fear and retribution which we should not fear unless the serpent, whose name is iniquity, watches our heel. He has coiled himself **M.560** around the course of our life, fearfully bristling as he does with the rough, various scales of the passions.

Psalm Forty-eight is divided into two parts: the first advises us not to look to any other liberator, for neither can a **J.131** brother or any other man redeem, but each person must intercede for himself if “a man gives himself as a ransom to God and the price of redemption for his soul.” The psalmist then wishes to advise those who in their pride pursue useless things, the fruit of vain preoccupations. How do men in their foolish labors pass their time since they are always on the lookout for [such vanities]? How is it that they do not expect death’s corruption when they see people dying? It is because they are foolish and lack understanding. After this life they will leave their wealth to others, will dwell in tombs forever and not have their names registered in heaven through a better life. Rather, they desire their names to be celebrated on earth and not recognized in the city above. The reason for this is man’s failure to understand his own worth. He is freely attracted to creaturely pleasures of the throat and stomach which ejects filth.

Such are the matters treated in the first half of Psalm Forty-eight while its remaining verses condemn other things. The psalm terminates here, teaching, I think, that the first introduction of evil into our life makes man brutish and more like the animals by his passions. However, grace healed this evil when God in his mercy visited our human nature. Men again deserted the Good Shepherd and had death for **J.132** their shepherd, not the heavenly pastures, and have allowed themselves to pasture in hell. “They have been placed as sheep in hell where death shall pasture them.” Yet again sin causes us to forget our dignity according to grace and abases us by making our lives devoid of reason. Everything devoid of true reason is mindless, for such irrationality and lack of understanding belong to beasts.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It would be superfluous to carefully examine every detail of a psalm since what we have omitted requires little consideration. I see no need to prolong our examination further. It is only necessary to repeat the subject of our earlier discussion, namely, that the great David benefited both parts of our human nature by symbolically offering examples of our salvation and a means to change our hearts. **M.561** Psalm Fifty also gives us a means to accomplish this where another victory lies in store against our adversary. Knowing how to cleanse oneself of evil prepares us for full victory over our enemy. We have an unceasing struggle in life against the ruler of this world of darkness and against the **J.133** spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. There is only one adversary and for every assault of his trials, repentance is available. If this is successfully accomplished, we are always victorious over our adversary’s constant assaults.

The historical elements lying in the psalm inscriptions are of no consequence to us but only the intention of their order is important. For example, the story of Bathseba and Uriah is much later than that of Doeg the Edomite (2Sam 11.2; 1Sam 22.9). The latter event occurred at the beginning of Saul’s tyranny, whereas the former occurred a little before the end of David’s reign. However, the order of temporal, carnal deeds is not concerned with the spiritual meaning. What can we learn first from the Edomite’s actions and then from Bathseba? What does virtue have to do with them? What do they have to do with our ascent to better things? What do they teach about our desire for lofty matters? If we learn the mysteries contained in Psalm Fifty, the text presents a deeper meaning, and after our enemy’s destruction it offers us a cure. I call this cure repentance which enables me always to be trained for victory against the foe. I aim for this goal in order to attain the ascent which follows, that is, obtaining victory from victory.

I will read to you the historical inscription of Psalm Fifty-one: “For the end. [A psalm] of understanding by David when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, ‘David has gone to the house of Abimelech.’” This inscription teaches of victory’s goal when after the great David’s example, understanding directs my life. I then feel special sorrow for Doeg’s tyranny against my salvation and his entrance into the priests’ house. With the help of mules he no longer can openly struggle on my behalf, and he secretly devised an insidious plot to murder me since I had been living with the priests.

A clearer knowledge is needed about the mules under the Edomite’s control because he pastures these unproductive animals which lack God’s blessing given to creatures at the beginning [of creation] when the text says, “Increase and multiply” (Gen 1.28). Multiplication of evil does not come from God; mules do not proliferate by themselves but nature always generates this animal anew, bringing it into existence by trickery. The subject we are considering here has a purpose. If the Lord made all things “exceedingly beautiful,” **M.564** the mule is not included in creation. This should be evident because the mule represents evil and is omitted from the [Genesis] narrative. God does not endow the mule with

substance; once born it cannot provide for its own existence. Just as the mule cannot maintain existence on its own, evil cannot endure continually; rather, it is always generated by another evil when our noble, proud human nature swiftly succumbs to the cupidity of an ass and its stateliness assumes irrational behavior. Because Doeg **J.135** belonged to an alien tribe, he was Saul's informant against David. As pastor of an unfruitful mule herd he is nothing more than a wicked informant attracting the human soul to evil by various passions. When Doeg sees David in the house of the true priest and is unable to trample him down by his mules, he provided information for the sons of disobedience to accomplish their evil intent.

The person rooted in God's house as a fruitful olive tree expresses the following words of Psalm Fifty-one against the tyrant: "Why do you boast in your evil iniquity, Oh mighty man? Your tongue like a sharpened razor has wrought deceit." This tyrant despoils the beautiful hair of persons whom he wants to unsettle and cuts the bond of the seven curls containing our power. You know the meaning of these seven spiritual curls because Isaiah has enumerated the sevenfold grace of the Spirit (Is 11.2). Once these curls are cut as in Samson's case (Judg 16.14), he lost his eyes and suffered abuse from the alien tribes when they were drunk.

Psalm Fifty-one continues to describe evil's power by saying, "God will destroy him forever; he will now pluck him out and will remove him from God's dwelling." God will root out from the land of the living evil's bitter root. Psalm Fifty-one contains similar elements with this same meaning. **J.136** Steadfastness prevails or as the divine Apostle has said, "they have been rooted in faith" (Col 2.7). "I am as a fruitful olive tree in the house of my God. I have hoped in God's mercy forever." The psalmist calls "forever and ever" the [divine nature] transcending this present interval of time. Its measure is infinity where eternal thanksgiving prevails. "I will confess you forever" for you made me worthy of such thanksgiving. "And I will wait on your name," for his goodness is the waiting of our saints.

Just as the many-colored splendor in the various types of flowers imperceptibly changes colors and artfully combines the most brilliant colors with others, so do we see at the end **M.565** of Psalm Fifty-one a ray of understanding combined with the beginning of the next psalm through its continuing gleam. We do not notice the interval between these two psalms, for the meaning of one psalm is united spontaneously to the other one now under consideration. The person rooted in God's house as a fruitful olive tree is stable and immovable in accord with faith's firmness and extends the hope of divine oil to endless ages by thanksgiving. God's wrath flares up against the foolish who lack understanding—for their very source lies in folly—and they deny him who is above all and in all. Of such persons Psalm Fifty-two says, "Why does the fool say in his heart, 'There is no God?' They are corrupt and abominable" in whatever their minds devise (But first the psalm shows God's providence for men in which they have firm hope so that their **J.137** desire lasting for all eternity never wearies).

Corruption is the dissolution of existing reality, the falling away from him who truly exists. For how can a person continue to exist when he lacks faith in him who exists? He who truly exists is God as the theophany to the great Moses testifies (Ex 3.14). The person unmindful of God's existence denies him; this person's very own being is corrupted because he does not partake of existence. The psalm says of the person who has turned away from God, "All have become unprofitable" in the same way a rejected vessel is condemned as worthless. However, this uselessness serves evil as the psalm clearly demonstrates by the [vessel's] unsuitability. Because of this the Lord "has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men." Such words foretell God's intercourse with men as when he later spoke before the unbelieving priests, Pharisees, scribes and everyone else who listened to him. These unbelievers tore the people apart with their teeth, that is, with blasphemies and then devoured them. The psalm says of them, "There they feared where there was no fear, those eating my people as eating bread."

Persons afraid of water have a similar fear. If they can overcome their fear of water, their affliction is curable; however, they fear what is beneficial for their salvation and are alienated from him who can save them. By fearing him who cannot be destroyed, they prepare their own destruction. **J.138** The fountain cries out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (Jn 7.37). A raging unbelief seizes their sense perceptions, and they feared where there was no fear. They spurned the cup of salvation without knowing that God is with the generation of the just. He gives salvation to Israel from Zion and turns the captivity of his people from the **M.568** one who led us captive with wicked intent through sin when he fills the true Israelite and spiritual Jacob with joy and exultation. The first words of this psalm reveal its meaning and its inscription concurs with it. Psalm Fifty-two is a hymn of triumph signified by the inscription sung by a chorus with understanding. “For the end; upon Maleth, for David’s instruction.” “Maleth” is interpreted as a choral dance. In place of “for the end” are other words giving “a hymn for victory.”

Once again the sequence of events in the Psalter fittingly adopts historical symbols by a certain progression as when Doeg the Edomite pastured the unreliable nature of mules in his own person. We said earlier (cf. J.134) that a mule **J.139** represents sin. The fruit of that tree is untrustworthy, and scripture calls it both good and evil (Gen 2.17): good because it hides sin by pleasure’s bait which lovers of the body seek instead of beauty itself; evil because the end now sought after as beauty results in bitterness. Such is the nature of both horse and ass, symbols pertaining to the mule. The mule, horse and ass are not three species, but the two exist in one when the two natures of the horse and ass form this new creature. When that alien tribe (Doeg) informs the tyrant about our time spent with the priest, he boasted over our misfortune and established his power which has no laws. Let us have hope in God’s assistance and rule, and let us uproot him from the land of the living. As olive trees made glad and heavy with much fruit and strengthened by hope in God, let us celebrate our victory over the enemy and we advance higher. As the Song of Songs says, “leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills” (2.8).

What is this “mountain” upon which the text “leaps” from the first mountains or thoughts? It is another victory, and David’s intelligence composes other hymns to celebrate (Ps 53 & 1Sam 23.19) this victory. Those making war are no longer mule herds but the Ziphites. They confronted David passing through narrow, arid places and grieved at our salvation when they could not hinder him and ran to Saul. **J.140** “For the end, among the hymns for instruction by David, **M.569** when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, ‘Behold, David is hiding with us.’” A person familiar with this story knows that the text mentions a narrow, arid place. We interpret the evangelical way of the kingdom which the Ziphites hinder to be this narrow road.

The Ziphites represent the alien tribe of demons who assist opposing forces. Few persons find the broad way after they have turned from it. The psalm says, “Lo, is not David hiding in Masera with us in the narrow places in the hill?” Indeed, persons living with God are concealed in this narrow place. The New Testament shows us the way we ascend to the very summit of the mountain. The psalm inscription calls it a hill. When we pass that narrow way unhindered, the Ziphites inform the tyrant [Saul] about our deliverance. However, we entrust the power of God’s judgment for our good in his saving name exclaiming, “God, by your name save me, and by your power judge me.”

Since this action described in the psalm lies in the future, we may disregard scripture’s account of the temporal order. Prophecy often speaks of future events by means of the past and the past in terms of the future as at the end of Psalm Fifty-three. It does not say that “I will look upon my enemies” but “Since my eyes have looked upon my enemies.” We learn here that for God neither the past nor the future exists, but everything lies in the present. Whether **J.141** the text speaks of the past or future in reference to the manifestation of divine power, our understanding with regard to the present is now invalidated. Therefore the person who has passed to God through the narrow, arid way has fled the Ziphites because in

your name lies our salvation, and in your power is judgment for the good which will abide forever. Such words turned God's attention to hear our thanksgiving when we spoke of the alien tribes' insurrection and the forces of evil on the prowl for souls.

God is not the leader [of these alien tribes] but their adversary, and for this reason the text says, "They have not put God before themselves." God indeed is my help who returns evil upon its instigators. "And in truth he destroyed" every enemy of the truth and every alien tribe. But I speak in the name which saved me; I will give thanks because thanksgiving is good. Having been rescued from my afflictions, my own eyes witnessed destruction of my enemies. The eye of the prophet exults over this because no longer does he see an adversary to virtue; evil, virtue's enemy, had been destroyed **M.572** and the names of the enemies exist no more. How can the enemy be named? According to the Apostle (Eph 2.14-16), he is not left alive because peace has destroyed him.

The ideas we have just set forth may be adapted to Psalm Fifty-three **J.142** which considers the superior Ziphites and evil's destruction. Once again this consists in understanding the help from above expressed to God as a hymn of victory: "For the end, among the hymns of understanding by David." In contests of a physical nature, athletes do not contend with the same opponents against whom they might have prevailed as youths in wrestling school; rather, they strengthened themselves to fight greater, more formidable opponents. If they win, they contend with even more superior adversaries, for such athletes always struggle against more powerful foes by an appropriate increase in their strength.

Similarly, the person trained to prevail against his enemies accomplishes nobler victories when he contends with more famous opponents. Because of this the athlete calls out to the judge of the games [God], "Give ear, oh God, to my prayer." He urges him to be attentive to the struggle by saying, "Attend to me and answer me." Such words indicate the contestants' labors and recount the grief, disquiet, tribulation of heart, enemy's taunts and affliction of the sinner. Hence the judge of the games has shown the benefits gained from wrestling school by contending with adversaries. Nevertheless, the contestant has a troubled heart, timidity in the face of death, fear, trembling and dark shadows on the watch for his life.

The psalmist has discovered that this affliction has a **J.143** better, higher purpose, namely, to assume the wings of a swift dove. Once elevated to a lofty place, the psalmist has come to rest in that place which is a solitary desert free from all evils and abounding in more divine things. He says, "I have lodged in the wilderness" from all faint-heartedness below and from the tempest of temptations where I receive God's salvation and where evil is absent. The psalmist says that this evil has vanished and has sunk into the sea, for everything cast into the depths is utterly destroyed. Hence, the submersion and destruction of sin bring about the ruin of evil. The psalmist says that God hurls evil into the deep when he divides the tongues of those conspiring evil.

Psalm Fifty-four next describes in detail the city **M.573** inhabited by persons of evil conduct. Iniquity and dispute prowl about the city at night and has nourished in its bosom iniquity, suffering and unrighteousness. The psalmist shows the wicked citizens filling the city streets and calls them usury and deceit. The most disagreeable of these is hypocrisy which hides deceit under the form of harmony and love with the cloak of goodness. Because of this the just Judge banishes such inhabitants from the city. Do you wish to know their names? "May death come upon them, and let them go into hell alive." Once the psalmist has shown every kind of sadness, he speaks sweetly, the means by which he **J.144** conquered the city with its multitude: "I, however, will hope in you." He says that the city is filled with men of blood and deceit; they do not live out half their days nor have they done away with their wickedness; instead, they find fulfillment in evil. The psalmist is victorious over all these inhabitants when he manifests his own attitude to God with that one statement, "I, however, will hope in you."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A diligent person examining these reflections should read the divinely inspired words of Psalm Fifty-four. We may not then be a source of confusion for him by our consideration of every word and a prolonged contemplation of each point. This process resembles persons ascending a precipitous, arduous road; once they come upon a resting place, their great, strenuous labor ceases. Renewing their strength, they arouse themselves to ascend further. Thus the wayfarer of virtue, whose steps are victorious against his adversaries as a preceding psalm inscription testifies, exerts himself onto victory and again pushes forward. Psalm Fifty-four already has described such a great struggle: grief, disquiet, tumult, the enemy and hearsay. The enemy's voice consists in affliction from sinners and wrath of malicious persons which produce **J.145** a troubled mind, darkness and the like.

The person overcoming his opponents resembles a dove by his wings; he stands apart from things which have grown wild with evil and has entered a place of rest, a desert place free from the wicked sprouting of weeds. He has vanquished the entire city filled with adversaries. Such inhabitants are iniquity, suffering, contradiction, usury, deceit, death, a descent into hell alive and the most evil race in existence whose constant hypocrisy gives an appearance of concord and unanimity. A person desiring better things keeps his entire life faithful to God. By the terms "evening," "morning" and "noon" the psalmist includes the day's course in which God condescends to listen. **M.576** God has redeemed his life through peace from a great multitude of opponents. The psalmist calls them "men of blood" who are "deceitful and consummate in evil."

The psalmist has therefore strengthened his hope in God against such persons as these. Having again forgotten his earlier labors, he strives against even greater antagonists. Observe what labors he attributes to himself through such struggles: "For the people who were far removed from holy things" [inscription to Psalm Fifty-five]. This people represents [God's] holy commandments by erected a wall, that is, by creating a huge, immeasurable distance from God. The psalmist recalls this people by his victory over his adversaries and made a prize out of his struggles, the salvation of those who were lost. He inscribed the grace of this good deed **J.146** in indelible writing that its memory may last for all ages. David's victory on the titular inscription (*steleographia means a titular inscription as well as a column or monument*) says "When the alien tribes caught him in Geth" [inscription to Psalm Fifty-five].

That we may not miss the meaning woven into historical symbols I will now briefly examine their historical background (1Sam 21.12). Saul became jealous of David due to his victory over Goliath and whose victory was joyously proclaimed by choruses. By every means, both secret and open, Saul plotted murder against David. At one time he secretly devised plots, openly attempted to nail David to a wall with his weapons and conspired against him. Saul afflicted David with many, various temptations, yet David safely dwelt with the Gethites (1Sam 23.5-6) in one of the Philistine's cities who willingly allowed this. David fought with them (1Sam 25.42-3), legitimately took two wives, one of whom was an Israelite and the other, the wife of the ruler of Carmel after whose death David married her. Such is the historical background.

David's detention among the Philistines does not signify that he consented to anything evil (this was not the case), but he did so out of love. The Gethites were driven from their native land and dwelt by themselves. Who is this David, the son of Jesse? He was a man borne from men and was victorious in his own struggles. Human nature in its entirety strayed **J.147** far from God by transgressing [God's] holy commandments and is summoned back, a fact recorded by this titular inscription [of Psalm Fifty-five]. We will not be mistaken by calling this titular inscription divine scripture. The historical context makes it

clear that David, being outside the borders of Judea and dwelling with the Philistines, **M.577** took two wives, one from the Israelite nation and the other from the Philistines.

To clarify this point, we see David as a victor and a spouse. He had prevailed against the devil who possessed death's strength by being powerful in battle and freed innumerable peoples held hostage in hell. Due to envy and jealousy, the Israelites were eager to kill David since he received benefits from the Philistines and founded one of their cities, I mean the Church, in which he reigned and said to those under Saul, "The kingdom will be taken from you and be given to a nation which will bear fruit" (Mt 21.43). In this city dwells the Israelite race of which the prophet says, "In the churches bless the Lord God from the fountains of Israel" (Ps 67.27-8).

Those holding the word of faith are the preachers of truth, the founders of the Church, I mean the disciples and apostles who came from the fountains of Israel. "The princes of Judah and their rulers. The princes of Zabulon and the princes of Nephthali." By certain signs and symbols this **J.148** prophecy foretells the characteristics of the race of the disciples. Among them is a youth, "Benjamin in ecstasy," who has been instructed in the mysteries. He is from the seed of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin, that is, Paul, the divine Apostle (Rom 11.1).

The Old Testament further tells us that king David is married to an Israelite woman but loves Abigail more. Abigail's first husband, whose name means a dog, was Nabal of Carmel; he was a savage, a mountain dweller and a shearer of sheep (1Sam 25). When Nabal died, Abigail married the king [David] and became a mother of kings. The inscription to Psalm fifty-five contains these mysteries and indicates victory over people who wandered far from holy things as well as a pillar for David's triumph over the Philistines. The titular inscription stands as a disgrace for the Jews' unbelief but is a guide and example to the good for those who have been saved through faith. The psalm rather seems to pertain to David's opposition to evil and performance of good deeds instead of to his kingship.

No one would claim that the psalm's contents do not agree with the symbols of scripture, for the person who pays attention to the theology according to which he must live will truly show his life to be in agreement with faith. This cannot be so unless the exercise of virtue subdues the rebellion of the flesh. The source of virtue is God's assistance; the person **J.149** who has assimilated it in his life will become worthy of possessing God's mercy. In the same way a robber or murderer at once summons his friends for help since he does **M.580** not have sufficient means to flee from dangers. Thus in the struggle with man (by "man" I mean the passions of human nature taken collectively), the psalmist summons help from on high saying that he is trampled down by the enemy, is weary of the daily struggle and suffers affliction.

Not only do we witness the psalmist engaged in just one struggle but a multitude of enemies who are as one man. "My enemies have trampled me down all the day" casting [weapons] from on high. They are mightier than the enemy I have trampled. This struggle does not occur in one day nor in the light, for I would not fear the one fighting against me in daylight. Because of this the psalmist says, "By day I will not fear," silently implying the fear of his enemies brought upon him by darkness. However, he procures "day" by hoping in the light which dispels darkness. "By day I will not fear; I will hope in you."

Anyone paying close attention to the symbolic meaning of the inscription ought to probe its words. When the human race strayed far from the holy angels, the passions struck it down. It gave way in the heat of battle, suffered affliction, was cast down from lofty places and experienced fear at night. But when the psalmist hoped in God after being deceived **J.150** by empty hopes which he shook off like a weight, he burst into praise and a confession of faith: "In God I will praise my words." But my enemies abhor these words of praise, he says, and finds reason to do evil against me; they prepare hidden, secret plots against me. Being concerned with their own devices, they are constantly at my heel, for right from



the beginning their watching a man's heel (Gen 3.15) is the work of the murderer (Jn 8.44). But if their attacks are heavy, your assistance will repel them. You have freely bestowed salvation to men not because of their just works but because of your grace alone. "On no account will you save them."

The remainder of the psalm explains the restoration of our human nature whose head [Christ] is impervious to the enemy's victory. It resembles a monument to recall God's love for mankind and gives a reason for every creature to praise God. For this reason the last words of Psalm Fifty-five pertain to this column: "In God will I praise his word; I have hoped in God." Here the psalmist no longer fears the flesh. "The vows of your praise which I will pay are upon me. Because you have delivered my soul from death and **M.581** my feet from slipping." He calls this slipping a violation of the way of [God's] commandments which produce this fall. **J.151** Hence the psalmist has been freed from death and set aright from his fall. He is in God's presence now from where he had fled after eating the [fruit] forbidden by [God's] command and after having hid himself out of shame in the shadow of a fig leaf. Once man received his liberty, he is restored to the light of the living: "I will praise God in the light of the living" from where he first drew back by sin. I do not think we should examine each element of the psalm more carefully nor extend our investigation further.

Many psalms of victory in these divine hymns have the inscription "for the end." In many ways they signify victory against adversaries while this term seems to have a particular use through historical symbols. By history I mean events related to Saul. The order of the psalms does not concur with the sequence of historical events but pertain to those who have been perfected in accord with their progress through virtue. It appropriately adapts each historical deed to demonstrate our progress in virtue so that the beginning and end of virtue may appear as one whole while the material events are irrelevant to the order [of the psalms]. After many events we have an incident which occurred earlier, that is, David's encounter with Saul in the cave when Saul sought to kill David who then fled. Although the situation was reversed--David could have killed Saul **J.152** and have taken revenge on his enemy—he suppressed the opportunity by putting to death his own anger.

Historical events are indeed unknown to everyone not concerned with the study of divine matters. We will now briefly speak of those matters to compress the above-mentioned story in a few words. When David was persecuted and helpless, he lived in the desert of Judah. Here was a roomy cave which could let in persons by one entrance only. Saul was seeking David and scoured the desert with his entire army, so David and his companions fled into the cave. When inside, Saul entered after them to relieve himself and was completely unaware of any threat against his safety. Thus Saul was alone and took off his double cloak. The light at the cave's entrance made Saul visible to the men hidden by the darkness within who wanted to rush with David against their enemy and avenge themselves against Saul who came to murder them, and God handed over their enemy, the one seeking their destruction. David, however, **M.584** rejected their impetuosity, judging it to be unlawful to lay hands on the king. He then drew out his sword from its sheath and quietly stood behind Saul. There was no one to witness David lay hands upon Saul because the cave's darkness hid David's face and removed the reproach of his deed. With **J.153** one blow David could thrust his sword through Saul's heart from behind, but he did not touch him nor wish to do so. However, David secretly cut the hem of [Saul's] double cloak so that this piece of hem might testify to his love for Saul and show that he had the opportunity to strike him.

This deed demonstrated David's disciplined patience because he had a sword and could thrust it into the body of his enemy. David overcame both his anger by reason and his opportunity to strike Saul out of fear of God. Not only did David transform his wrath but restrained his own armor bearer who rushed to murder Saul with those memorable words, "Do not harm the Lord's anointed." Thus Saul exited the cave without knowing what had happened and wrapped himself in the cloak which had been cut. But David left the cave behind Saul with the cut hem; after he was in a safe place on a hill above the

cave, David held out the cut-off border of Saul's garment, a bloodless trophy against his adversary. Saul cried aloud and spoke of this new, wonderful deed of valor free from the defilement of blood by which David was victorious and Saul was left unharmed. This action gave David faith to believe **J.154** that his own salvation lie not in his enemy's destruction but to leave unharmed those taking counsel against him. This historical incident teaches us that a person of outstanding virtue bears no hostility towards members of his own tribe; instead, he valiantly strikes the passions. Thus David's valiant deed mortified his anger in two ways: by reason and the restraint of vengeful wrath. But despite the love shown to him, Saul still sought to destroy David. After Saul spoke to David the victor, he sank into shame at what David had undergone. Saul's lament and tears showed a turning away from the evil within his heart, a lesson we can learn from this incident.

Historical events also shed light on the subject of Psalm Fifty-six. Its inscription speaks of David hiding in the cave as follows: "For the end. Do not destroy; by David, for a memorial, **M.585** when he fled from Saul's presence to the cave." That the psalm's thoughts may be in harmony with its inscription, I think we should briefly consider its contents by first explaining the divinely inspired words. "Have mercy upon me, God, have mercy because in you my soul has trusted. In the shadow of your wings will I hope until iniquity has passed away." Because the psalmist believes and hopes in God, he summons God's mercy to be bestowed upon him "until iniquity has passed away."

**J.155** In order to obtain a clearer sense of these words, let us examine their content. Sin is unstable and transitory; he who brought all things into existence and invested them with being did not create sin along with creation at the beginning, nor does sin always remain with created beings. Those things which are in him exist and always continue in being. If anything lies outside him who exists, it does not have existence but exists in what is not good. This resembles wild, unploughed, rootless grass on a roof. If a troublesome, insubstantial root briefly sprouts up, it will pass away and disappear in the restoration of all things to the good. Thus no trace of evil now prevailing in us will remain, for our life now consists of hope. "And yet in a little while the sinner shall not exist. You will seek for his place and you will not find it" (Ps 36.10).

The preliminary words of Psalm Fifty-six teach us about evil. By inquiring into lofty matters, it says that we need God's help and mercy until iniquity pass us by. Our faith procures God's help and readies us for battle in the shadow of his wings. The shadow of God's wings is a cloak which may symbolize the virtues. The divine nature transcends our understanding and cannot be grasped by human nature because it ineffably supercedes every thought. The virtues outline **J.156** the stamp of God's ineffable nature for those who turn to it with open eyes. Wisdom in its fullness as well as intellectual knowledge and every kind of apprehension are not the divine wings themselves but its shadow. This shadow is a great benefit for us: "I will cry for God the most high, to God who has benefited me" by this shadow sent from on high to our life here below. God saved me by his Spirit who overshadowed me in a cloud. After trampling down those adversaries mentioned in the first psalms, the psalmist has now driven back those who heaped scorn upon him. "For God **M.588** sent forth his mercy and truth and rescued my soul from the midst of [lions'] whelps." The whelps, a symbol of my first sins, have pulled me to pieces with their fearful, open mouths and sharp claws. But help came, mercy and truth, a noble pair, for mercy does not exist without judgment nor truth without mercy; together they free me from the lions' whelps. The psalmist calls these beasts "the sons of men whose teeth are arms and missiles and their tongue a sharp sword." Our human nature does not have such physical objects in our mouths for teeth, but when any person is compared to passion and is transformed into an overpowering evil, he is despoiled and resembles a beast. Because of this, the sons of men are called "lions" whose teeth and tongues are instruments of war.

**J.157** The person whose mind has been elevated above his adversaries lodges under the shadow

of the divine wings. His destiny consists in being taken away from earth to heaven (“He sent from heaven and saved me”). No longer does the psalmist look to earthly things but is attentive to the glory of heaven. “Be exalted above the heavens, Oh God, and may your glory be upon the earth.” After speaking of the enemies’ plots, the psalmist says that their own evils will encompass them and cast them into pits. “They have prepared snares for my feet and have bowed down my soul. They have dug a pit before my face and have fallen into it themselves.” The psalmist then claims to be ready to sing the divine glory. How blessed is that magnanimous person whose heart is ready to sing of the divine glory and who receives the uncontainable God!

The psalmist claims he is both ready and prepared, although he does not begin his song; rather, he summons the living instruments to assist him in singing the psalm: “Awake, psaltery and harp.” Man’s double nature, visible and invisible, shows the harmonious singing to God’s glory and the obedience of [musical] instruments to the psalmist’s bidding. Dawn is the appropriate time for such music because those persons who do not reject works of darkness cannot tell of the glory of God. “I will awake early” says the psalmist to his psaltery and harp. Thus the psalmist proclaims his thanksgiving to God, a confession fulfilled among peoples **J.158** and nations. The gift of faith is equally divided among the peoples and nations, for not only does God rule over the Jews but over the nations. There is “one God who justifies the circumcised on account of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith” (Rom 3.30). Because of this a two-fold font of divine blessings is poured out upon both groups: one upon the peoples and another upon the nations.

Prophecy [in the psalm] gives thanks to God for these two **M.589** benefits because sin has increased without measure. But the greatness of God’s mercy transcends it because he is loftier than the heavenly height. “Your great mercy is above the heavens” (Ps 107.5). I think that such praise comes from the conclusion of psalm [Fifty-six] when it says, “Be exalted above the heavens, Oh God, and may your glory be upon the earth” because the faith of persons who have been saved amplifies God’s glory which abounds upon the earth. The transcendent powers rejoice at our salvation; they praise and glorify God as the heavenly hosts exclaimed to the shepherds when the angels saw upon earth the peace manifested to men of good will by our lives: “Glory to God in the highest” (Lk 2.14).

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Psalm Fifty-seven excels the one before it by reason of its **J.159** greater magnificence. Just as a runner is more victorious than before by outstripping other opponents and receives more glory by outrunning them, so does Psalm fifty-seven surpass its predecessor by the greatness of its thought, having achieved greatness through its carefully constructed narrative. As the former psalm has prizes, so the latter outstrips the one which excelled it. Its inscription “For the end” bears witness to this fact. However, this inscription does not signify defeat for adversaries but testifies to an abundance of blessings by this victory. The reading of the inscription is as follows: “For the end. Do not destroy; by David, for a memorial.” How often does the judge [of the games] proclaim the long-suffering contestant for this crown of victory? Perhaps he frequently heard the Holy Spirit’s voice which marvelously transcended the limits of our human nature. This can only be said of an incorporeal, immaterial nature lacking human passions. Man has an innate temper. He is sorely afflicted by evil when there is no occasion for it. Although he has been deemed worthy of many great blessings which transcend his humble origin and events which transpired [from his creation], man becomes a fugitive from his own house and is subject to death instead of the blessing he merited.

At another time [David] desperately sought a different place to hide. **J.160** He dwelt in the desert, fled to mountain peaks, was a fugitive among the Philistines, suffered affliction due to lack of

basic necessities and endured many trials in the field while often experiencing close brushes with death. Now with his own hand Saul took a spear against David with the intention to commit murder. Once again Saul's bodyguards surrounded David's house to prevent his escape from death. **M.592** Saul then eagerly inquired about David everywhere among the people with whom he had dwelt, fled, took nourishment and had wandered. Twice David could have killed his enemy and now in the cave Saul unexpectedly fell into his hands. When Saul was overcome with sleep in his tent, David came upon him and had every chance to avenge his anger by murdering his persecutor. He did not lay hands upon Saul but said to his companion desiring Saul's death, "Do not destroy." These words restraining Saul's death are indeed worthy of God himself.

Just as engravers who make letters more recognizable in stone cut them deeply by frequent blows from a chisel, so by frequent repetitions the Holy Spirit attempts to make his magnificent voice clear and manifest in the column of our memory that we might read this clear engraving in us when our passions are aroused. I think that we should look **J.161** for this assistance from the Holy Spirit; by offering us the deeds of holy men to guide us into the next life, he invites us to imitate a similar good. When the soul swells with anger to take vengeance on its assailants, and when the blood around the heart seethes with rage due to the grief it had suffered, it looks up to this column which the Holy Spirit erected through David. The soul reads his words uttered for his would-be murderers and will smooth the turbulence of its thoughts out of desire to imitate similar deeds which have assuaged passion. The magnitude of this ascent is possible by advancing on the step of Psalm Fifty-seven which shows the great distance a person has traversed from what lies behind him.

No longer does the psalmist claim to be afflicted by his enemies, nor does he seek mercy; rather, having been borne above, he rebukes from this lofty vantage point those passing through the valleys of this human life at the foot of the mountain. "Oh men, what are saying and doing? Is it not justice of which we are speaking? Do you judge honestly? I see that your hearts and its stirrings belong to the earth, for they lack understanding. Evil lies close to your minds, and the work of your hands is consistent with your thoughts." These words clarify the psalm's text, "If you indeed speak righteousness, then judge rightly, you sons of men. For you work iniquity in your heart in the earth; your hands plot unrighteousness." **J.162** Then the psalmist continues to complain bitterly of those who have fallen from salvation. "Sinners have gone astray from the womb, and from the belly they have been deceived" (Ps 57.4).

You will understand these matters if you consider the origin **M.593** of human life in the womb and the belly which bears such life. I think it is solely God's love and his goodness for mankind which formed and brought us to birth. God says, "Let us make man according to our image and likeness" (Gen 1.26) when he fashioned every human heart. Again God said, "I have begotten sons and have exalted them; they have hoped in me" (Is 1.2). Many similar words can be found in holy scripture which reveal the belly that fashioned us and the "womb leading into light through birth." With these statements in mind, the psalmist bitterly grieves over the rebels' destruction, for we have an open lamentation uttered with regard to sinners: "How have sinners gone astray from the womb?" How have they wandered from the womb, honoring falsehood instead of truth while their anger resembles that of the original father of lies? "As a serpent deaf and stopping its ears which will not hear the voice of charmers nor heed the charm skillfully prepared by the wise." The wise speak about this form observing this beast because it burns with rage and compresses its **J.163** breath in the throat without emitting it. This resembles a leather skin which the wind swells up and renders everything useless and ineffectual placed in it such as charms or natural antidotes against the serpent contrived by wise men.

These examples show that the heart is steadfast in evil and does not accept cures brought by teachers. Psalm Fifty-seven in its entirety laments the destruction of wretched men. The psalmist

foretells their fate: “God will crush the teeth in their mouths.” What teeth does he mean? Those which devour the fruit of disobedience, the slaves to the belly’s pleasures (The preceding Psalm, Fifty-six, calls them “arms” and “spears”) and tear apart the word of truth. “The Lord has broken the teeth of lions.” Pay attention to these “lions” if you would learn the properties of such beasts. Lions are said to have deformed eyes, are carnivorous and desire blood.

You are familiar with the symbolism of these distorted eyes which do not see correctly and the foul breath of blasphemy. Thus [lions] are naturally related to the stench of sin. This unpleasant breath means that flesh and blood, the special food of lions, are rejected from God’s kingdom. At the time of bestowing honor upon the just the psalmist says, “They [evil doers] will utterly pass away” with the unstable nature of material things to which they have been addicted to in life. “They will utterly pass away like water running through.” **J.164** An archer hostile to our souls has directed the fiery **M.596** weapons of sin against human life. He does not cease to aim them until he has sapped our strength: “He will bend his bow until they will fail,” and they will become as melted wax, easily formed to every kind of sin.

Further dire words are uttered against such miserable men: “The fire has fallen and they have not seen the sun.” Another interpretation clarifies the meaning of this verse, calling an untimely exit from the womb an abortion: “The abortion of a woman will not see the sun.” The words at the beginning of Psalm Fifty-seven say that “sinners have gone astray from the womb and have gone astray from the belly.” This indeed means a miscarriage caused by passion which resembles a serpent and asp. By repeating similar words, the psalmist says that evil has aborted persons with an imperfect nature. They have slipped and fallen from what we have understood as the womb and have brought down fire on themselves by choosing material things. They do not have the grace to look upon the sun. The sun represents true light which the Jews in their untimely birth did not see. The later part of Psalm Fifty-seven agrees with the preceding section, for it now calls a “dead asp” a “thorn” with no understanding. From hearing comes understanding. The person who does not hear has indeed rejected understanding along with hearing.

**J.165** Psalm Fifty-seven has given the general name for a serpent and adds that most pernicious kind of beast, the asp. After offering a generic name for a thorn here, the psalm adds a harsher kind of thistle, the prickly shrub with sharp points like weapons which strikes those who approach it and wounds them with venom. There are other thorns like this prickly shrub which seem to be alive, but the person lacking true life does not live. Anger will devour you just as it is said that sinners do not have life, for the psalms mention anger alone (for anything separated from true life is not life). God does not have anger, although for sinners it seems to be the case and they call it so; neither is it wrath but people call the just recompense given by God “as anger.” This anger, then, is “as living.” “As in his wrath he will swallow you up,” that is, persons who do not have true life while god himself is not angry. Then the psalmist says, “The virtuous shall rejoice when they see vengeance.” They do not rejoice over the destruction [of sinners]; rather, compared to them the psalmist will pronounce himself “blessed” due to good judgment since he is not among those sinners subject to vengeance.

**M.597** The psalmist’s clean hands contrast with the filth of sinners: “He will wash his hands in the blood of sinners.” **J.166** We know that the only way to remove dirt from our hands is by washing them. The defilement of blood does remove earlier filth since it too is filth. Therefore just as the color white contrasts with the brighter color of blood, so are the clean hands of a righteous person brighter in comparison. For it is now inconceivable that any participation in the good freely undertaken will be harmful when it is manifested through one’s experience.

Whoever considers these matters right says that God’s own just judgment stores up fruit for the just man. Do you see the loftiness of this psalm and its greatness which surpasses those preceding it?

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

This is not the end of the upward journey for persons advancing through virtue, for the next psalm (fifty-seven) transcends the one before it by the magnificence of its contemplation. Again, the inscription proclaims the crown of victory and records this victory which transcends human capacity: “For the end; do not destroy.” Victory often signifies the end, so there is no need to explain the meaning of this inscription. “Do not destroy.” These loving words which reveal great patience suggest a deeper meaning. A person ignorant of a benefit lying in store for him does not show evil to anyone. Who does not know that even an ordinary person is ready to do a favor when he had no reason to do it? Often **J.167** on the occasion of an insignificant experience of grief the person with a more magnanimous disposition who had experienced something unpleasant does not refuse to do good when required, although he is saddened by lesser matters. But a petty-minded person seizes the opportunity to do evil when something small or irritating happens and vents his full wrath. Even though the kindly deed is similar, we do not show equal admiration for the person who had experienced nothing evil and for the person who did good to someone obnoxious.

For this reason the outstanding, incomparable lack of envy in David’s patience which, however little imitated the divine nature’s freedom from passion, is compared to Saul’s wicked insanity. The inscription of Psalm Fifty-eight says in David’s words, “Do not destroy.” This was engraved as a memorial for posterity, not for the occasion when Saul the tyrant manifested love toward David but now, once these [wicked] deeds have been done, that is, when Saul came to **M.600** kill David in his house (1Sam 19). You who desire knowledge are familiar with that historical incident signified by the inscription of Psalm Fifty-eight. When a demonic spirit inflicted Saul with vehement passion and the saintly David lulled to sleep this turbulent passion with his harp, Saul, finding a spear, brandished its point against his benefactor and let it loose. But with God’s help David escaped, and the spear’s point deeply embedded itself in the wall. David fled from the king’s palace to his own home hoping that the king would repent.

**J.168** When Saul surrounded David’s house with his body guard and ordered his soldiers to kill him, David barely escaped through a window and without the guard’s knowledge evaded these dangers (1Sam 26). At another time David came to a different locality after wandering helplessly among foreign peoples. Then Saul’s entire army surrounded the hill to which David and his men had fled. David had the opportunity to kill him under the cover of night (for Saul waited until morning to pursue David) by approaching his foe’s tent and killing him while asleep. Not only did David restrain his hand from satisfying his wrath, but he restrained his shield bearer from killing Saul (He said, “Strike and do not give a second blow”). David suppressed his impulse by that great, well known song when he said, “Do not destroy” him who attempted to kill us. Not only was this deed most admirable because David spared Saul who devised all kinds of plots, but because David was anointed for the kingdom and knew that he could not otherwise assume its dignity unless Saul was removed. David judged it better to bear evil patiently in his own humility than to assume the kingdom by venting his anger against one who caused so much trouble. For this reason David included with his words of compassion, “When Saul sent men to kill David in his house” (Ps 58.1). David did not **J.169** express these words when the event occurred, but they were added to increase our admiration because the same person who had suffered these misfortunes also expressed them.

I think it would be superfluous to add other things from historical events. For example, when Saul cast a spear at David, the historical account adds that it hit the wall and David escaped. Saul did not find David in bed but images (*kenotaphion*: *The Greek word for the Hebrew teraphim, probably means images placed on monuments. The Greek term also means an empty tomb, a cenotaph*) and a goat’s liver

which served to divert death. Thus David escaped from his sick bed after he put on it a garment used for clothing the dead and the goat's liver. It is clear to those who examine this incident more carefully that David's prophetic action is a story of the Lord's care for his people. Demons possessed Saul the tyrant which caused harm in the kingdom. **M.601** David, who was anointed to rule, expelled with a harp the demons which inflicted Saul with madness. But when these demons seized Saul, he cast a spear at David who manifested his power against such demons by a harp. However, the spear hit the wall instead of David who escaped unharmed.

Saul next sought David in bed but could not find him; instead, the bed contained the images and a goat's liver. The sequence of these historical symbols is clear to anyone who considers them, that is, the One prefigured by David is from David whose anointing signifies Christ. Human **J.170** nature represents a harp which produces the song, the revelation of the Word who became flesh for us and whose task is to destroy the madness of the demons that they may no longer be gods of the nations. When David ceased playing his harp, an instrument especially adapted for putting spirits to flight, the king possessed by demons cast a lance at him (it is wood armed with iron) which struck the wall instead. We understand the wall to symbolize our body's earthly dwelling and the spear as the wood and iron of the cross [of Christ]. But David, the anointed one and king, is not afflicted by passions, for the divinity is not fixed to the cross by nails.

When we hear of Melchol, Saul's daughter who married David, let us not be astonished at the sequence of events. We know that God did not make death but the father of death, the king of evil, who deprived himself of life. By the devil's jealousy death entered. However, it reigned from Adam until the Law (Rom 5.14), for the Apostle did not wish death to reign in our mortal bodies present in the house symbolized by Saul and named Melchol. This name represents the kingdom over which sin had reigned until that time. Because of this, David escaped through the window. **J.171** The window symbolizes the return into light of him who manifests himself to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. His images (*Note the play on words here: kenotaphion, with its double meaning of "image" and "tomb," and the word "tomb" or taphos a few lines below.*) are seen upon his bed. The angel said to those seeking the Lord in the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen. See the place in which he laid" (Mk 16.6). Those seeking the Lord saw the tomb (*taphos*) empty; only the burial shroud was there. Thus we understand that the images on David's bed signify our Lord's resurrection from the tomb which indeed diverted death.

**M.604** We interpret the blow in the wall [caused by Saul's casting of the spear] as the human body lacking blood. It is not the right time to consider the contents of this mystery by which we have been redeemed, I mean the blood found in the images [in David's bed]. The liver alone among the internal organs is the font and source of blood without which it could not exist. If blood is from the liver and the liver is in the images, neither does he [Christ] who shares our human nature lack blood by having averted death. The species of animal [goat] from which the liver was taken is ordained as a propitiatory sacrifice for sins (Num 7.10). Not only this, but it was also used for paschal sacrifices. Moses said (Lev 16.5) that this animal was destined to remove the people's sins because it served two purposes. Two he-goats are designated by lot; one is offered to God while the other **J.172** is sent out to the desert with [the people's] sins. These and similar examples of the goat liver manifesting blood avert death from mortally ill persons by our Lord's resurrection from the dead, a symbol of the image.

We must now briefly examine the meaning of Psalm Fifty-eight. Prophecy divides it into two parts: one is instituted for us with respect to God from the common nature of men, and the other is [Christ's] passion on our behalf. Thus we read, "Deliver me from my enemies, Oh God, and free me from those rising up against me and from those working iniquity, and from men who have set snares for my soul" (Ps 58.2), and who greatly afflict me, for we have not done evil to them. I have not injured them

nor have we returned injustice to our enemy to anger them.” Our previous way of life lacked iniquity but “See,” the psalmist says, “all my difficulties. Look over me and carefully protect me. Do not delay in your love to take vengeance against those who have fallen away. ‘Do not pity all those who have worked iniquity.’”

The text turns to a person of nobler spirit and says in the person of one praying that his enemies will return at evening, that is, those driven into the outer darkness, for the principle and mother of darkness is evening. “They **J.173** are hungry like dogs.” Salvation is not lacking for such persons because hunger results from a lack of good things to eat. Thus the wealthy man [Dives] in hell lacked the divine dew and was consumed by fire [Lk 16.23]. but the psalmist says, “They will go around the city.” To me this suggests that when the living cast anything useless outside the city, whether it is dead, corrupt or foul smelling dung, hungry **M.605** dogs find it, accustomed as they are to eat such filth.

The psalm teaches by the example of a city the difference between persons living in virtue and in evil. It calls the city a becoming, well-disposed way of life conforming to virtue. Anything outside the city signifies evil in comparison to its opposite where we find everything contrary to a more becoming life, that is, the foul smelling sin rising from the putrefaction of bodies along with filthy dung. The inhabitant of this city is great and honorable, for he is truly a man. From the beginning he had the stamp [of divinity] fixed in his nature and conformed his life to it. But the person concerned with things outside the city is a dog, not a man, so it is clear to everyone how important it is to distinguish dogs from men. I do not mean a physical distinction but one from each person’s life. The inhabitant of the city is indeed a man; if any person is licentious or shows imprudence regarding the foul odor of cupidity which is right named filth or desires other evil things, **J.174** he has strayed and crept around the city’s limit’s. Why, even his voice proves that he is a dog because he has been changed from God’s likeness to a dog! You know that this dog represents the carnivorous, murderous, primeval dog of which scripture speaks (Jn 8.44, referring to the devil).

The rest of Psalm Fifty-eight describes the life of such a dog. The psalmist says that instead of a sound emitted through the mouth and instead of canine teeth, such persons hide a sword under their lips. “Behold, they shall utter a voice with their mouth, and a sword is in their lips.” But persons who have God within them laugh at these terrifying things. “You, Lord, will laugh them to scorn; I will keep my strength [looking] to you.” A little later the psalmist indicates God’s providential care for his creation: “Do not slay them but bring them down from the height of evil to a flat, level manner of life in accord with God.” The great Paul and John the Baptist brought down every mountain and hill according to Isaiah’s prophecy (Is 40.3-5; Lk 3.4-5).

These examples teach us that destruction does not lie in store **J.175** for men, for God’s action would be ineffective if man were brought to ruin. “For the sin of their mouth and the word of their lips” is arrogance, cursing and lies. “They shall **M.608** not stand in the consummation of wrath.” When they no longer exist, “Men will know that God rules over Jacob and the ends of the earth.” Evil no longer remains; the Lord will indeed rule over all [earth’s] bounds, for sin which now reigns will be removed from his presence. Then the psalmist repeats these words regarding “those who return at evening” like hungry dogs and go about the city. I think that the repetition of these words signifies either men living according to evil or good, whether now or after this present life. For the person who now goes about the city in impiety does not live in the city, nor does he retain his stamp of humanity; rather, he is changed into a beast by his own free will and has become a dog. He falls from the city above and will suffer punishment by hungering after good things. But the victor over opposing forces proceeds (as it says in another psalm, 83.8), “from strength to strength.” He passes from one victory to another as the psalmist says, “I will sing of your strength, and in the morning I will exult in your mercy because you have become my helper, my refuge” (Ps 58.16). Glory befits you forever and ever. Amen.



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