

A FUNERAL ORATION FOR THE EMPRESS FLACILLA

INTRODUCTION

This funeral oration composed by Gregory of Nyssa which is technically known as a *paramuthetikos logos* was delivered upon the death of the empress Flacilla in 385, wife of the Roman emperor Theodosius¹. In volume 46 of Migne's edition the text comes after two orations with a similar pattern delivered on behalf of Bishop Meletius (cols. 852-864) and Pulcheria (cols. 864-877) and before one on Gregory the Wonderworker (cols. 893-957). Theodosius' adherence to the orthodox Christian faith of Nicaea compelled him to spread it in the West, whereas in the East the heretical doctrine of Arianism had taken hold. Gregory makes brief reference to this situation towards the end of his oration by saying "the Arian infidelity and its idolatry is an abomination" (J.489.5-9)². This teaching insisted that the substance of Jesus Christ was "unlike" or at the very least "like" the Father's. Theodosius managed to expel Arian clergy from the eastern capitol, Constantinople, and was responsible for this part of the empire's revitalization not only through the reorganization of military power but more pervasively by his advancement of the Nicene Creed and the ideological unity it entailed.

A principle theme in Gregory's *paramuthetikos logos* is *eusebeia*, a difficult word to translate which is usually rendered "piety" but has deeper significance as intimating the practice of orthodox Christianity³. The emperor Theodosius married Flacilla around 376-8 who was later instrumental in dissuading her husband from associating with the Arian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus since he was vulnerable of betraying the Nicene faith which she brought with her from the West to the imperial center in Constantinople⁴. I mention this fact here since Gregory's oration uses the concept of *eusebeia* to connote hatred of Arianism which to orthodox eyes was equated with idolatry. Naturally the practice of *eusebeia* implies virtuous living, another fact which the bishop of Nyssa stresses as following excerpt from **Flacilla** testifies:

¹ Jean Danielou has established the oration's as "peut-etre le 14 septembre" (cf. the article *La Chronologie des Sermons de Gregoire de Nysse* in **Revue des Sciences Religieuses** #29 (Paris, 1955), p.364), a fact disputed by Jean Bernardi: "La succession des evenements peut etre reconstituee de la facon suivant: 25 juillet 385, mort de Pucherie [Flacilla's daughter]; dans le courant d'aout, depart de Flaccilla pour la Thrace; 25 aout, oraison funebre de Pulcherie; 14 septembre, mort de Flaccilla a Scotoumin; fin septembre, funerailles de l'imperatrice a Constantinople; 14 octobre, oraison funebre de Flaccilla." **La Predication des Peres Cappadociens** (Paris, 1968), p.320, footnote #60.

² Also refer to the brief allusion, J.489.18: "Its [paradise] stream does not reach infidels."

³ For a detailed study of *eusebeia*, refer to an article by Javier Ibanez entitled *Naturaleza de la eusebeia en Gregorio de Nisa* in **Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie** (Leiden, 1976), pp.261-77.

⁴ For a more detailed historical background to this period, refer to **Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity**, especially pp.1-47, by Kenneth G. Holum (Berkeley, Ca, 1982).

When human nature exceeds its bounds and transcends its usual borders, nature lends support, that is to say, the Lord of nature, by examples of virtue (*arete*) in a female body which surpass almost all bounds where every virtue of body and soul displays a remarkable phenomenon by providing room for one soul in one body. (J.478.9-16)

Gregory's admiration for Flacilla's virtues owes much to a public image of female empresses or Augustae which had already existed. One notable example is the praise offered by the church historian Eusebius with regard to Helena, mother of Constantine, "who was celebrated for her pious deeds and for the towering and wonderful plant that sprang from her"⁵. Although women were generally barred from exercising the highest imperial authority, an Augusta was not unprecedented. For example, the first Roman emperor, Augustus, invented it for his wife Livia, and we see a later instance when Constantine did the same for his mother, Helena and wife, Fausta.

Although Gregory composed his oration in the tradition of classical consolation rhetoric, it is also helpful to read it as imperial oratory⁶, for his praise of Flacilla's virtues owes much to a public image of Augustae that had existed since Eusebius celebrated Helena as I had mentioned above. Although the bishop of Nyssa stresses that her *eusebeia* had served the Church well against Arianism and championed the homoousian creed of 381, it was primarily put at the service of fortifying her husband Theodosius' dominion. Despite this, the empress had free reign in her husband's newly established court to practice that *philanthropia* which also served to tighten the bonds between the new imperial family and people of Constantine. Gregory's somewhat embellished picture of Flacilla's *philanthropia* implied that those persons who were installed in prestigious positions under her husband Theodosius were not totally dependent upon imperial forbearance. Furthermore, the generosity for which Flacilla became renowned was an indication that she participated in Theodosius' rule, although she did not share his absolute authority. Indeed this arrangement was highly successful because Gregory says that her death struck with great force: "The present evil is a universal affliction; no single people or nation laments" (J.477.20-21). In another *paramuthetikos logos* devoted to the death of Flacilla's daughter at the age seven or eight, Gregory describes with some extravagant detail the blow this young girl's death dealt to the people:

Who is like iron which lacks feeling? you must realize that this tender dove [Pulcheria] adorned with royal beauty has just flown away on a bright wing and has left behind her youthful prime, having disappeared from our sight. Jealousy

⁵5. **Theodosian Empresses**, p.31.

⁶6 Cf. *Die Regeln Menanders für die Leichenrede in ihrer Tradition dargestellt, herausgeben, Übersetzt und Kommentiert* by J. Soffel in **Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie**, #57, (Meisenheim am Glan, 1974) pp. 82-9 and *Rhetorik und Theologie in den Grabreden Gregors von Nyssa* by A. Spira in **Studia Patristica** #9 (Berlin, 1966), pp. 106-14.

has immediately snatched her from our hands whether we call her a dove or a tender little flower who not yet had shone with full splendor even though she has already sparkled...It was clear, brethren, that we experienced a real tremor which certainly did not mitigate these harsh circumstances. **A Homily of Consolation Concerning Pulcheria**, J.462.

I mention the vivid description of this "earthquake" since it reveals a lively popular attachment to the imperial household, and the same certainly can be said with regard to Flacilla. We also find the image of a tremor in the **Pulcheria** text, a graphic example of how this young girl's death had affected the general populace:

It was clear, brethren, that we experienced a real tremor which certainly did not mitigate these harsh circumstances. Neither can the beauty of buildings, any lifeless object, flowery letters nor the sight of choice stones on the ground replace her; rather, the radiant dwelling of her own nature is magnificent in itself because it excels in grace, yet this jolt suddenly loosens it. (J.462-3)

It should be noted that of the panegyrics composed by Gregory only those pertaining to Pulcheria, Flacilla and the bishop Meletius may be classified as *logoi paramuthetikoi*, whereas the remaining addresses concern persons who have lived in the more distant past such as St. Stephen, the Martyr Theodorus, Gregory the Wonderworker and the Forty Martyrs⁷. As Robert Gregg has noted with regard to the **Pulcheria** text⁸, one characteristic of this *logos_ paramuthetikos* is to rouse the audience, following the dictum of Menander of Laodicea (third century) that tragedy's purpose is to stir up the feelings of the audience by magnifying it⁹. Compare the two texts:

How is it possible to surmount the passions while remaining in nature and not be constrained by grief at this sight when death draws night not in old age but in the prime of Life? Eyelids darken the eyes' rays, ruddy complexion becomes pallid, the mouth is silenced and the blossoming flower of the lips is darkened,

⁷⁷ Johannes Bauer notes that the orations in honor of Ephraem and Gregory's brother Basil are classified under the heading of *epitaphios logos*: **Die Trostreden des Gregorius von Nyssa in ihrem Verhältnis zur artiken Rhetorik** (Marburg, 1892), pp.30-1.

⁸⁸ **Consolation Philosophy: Greek and Christian Paideia in Basil and the Two Gregories** (Cambridge, Ma, 1975), p.68.

⁹⁹ Again refer to Gregg's book, p.63, where he outlines Menander's four classes of orations or eulogies:

- 1: *to katharon egkomion*: a simple panegyric not delivered in connection with a tragedy.
- 2: *ho epitaphios logos*: related to laments.
- 3: *he monodia*: indulgence by both deliverer and audience in lamentation and pity.
- 4: *ho paramuthikos logos*: when theme of consolation is added with elements taken from other kinds of *enkomia*.

something difficult not only for the parents but for anyone who happens to behold this sight. **Pulcheria**, J.464.

Permit me to add something to this Assyrian's [i.e., king Nebuchadnezzar] injunction that I may proclaim with louder voice the present condition and say as an actor crying out on stage, "Oh city, people, nations, earth and sea...oh men in every place, groan as one over your common catastrophe and bewail loudly that misfortune which afflicts everyone! **Flacilla**, J.477-8.

Gregory, together with his brother Basil and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, sought to integrate the Hellenistic culture in which they were trained with the newly emerged Christian faith. Although each Cappadocian took a different approach, they are all characterized by this tension between integration and detachment¹⁰, an equilibrium evident in, for example, Gregory of Nyssa's funeral orations:

What takes their place [i.e., passions]? Detachment (*apatheia*), blessedness, alienation from every evil, fellowship with the angels, contemplation of invisible reality and participation (*metousia*) in God; all these attributes have no end. With this in mind it behooves us not to mourn the empress when we learn that she has exchanged these for what is better. **Flacilla**, J.486.12-16.

This theme of *apatheia* which runs through much of Gregory's writings connotes separation of soul and body at death which, as Gregg indicates¹¹, is not specifically Christian but has roots in non-Christian authors such as Plato, Plutarch, Cicero and Seneca. We have two references which expresses a longing for separation of the soul from the body's prison and make use of Ps 141.8 to articulate this desire:

Does he [David] not groan in this life? Does he not say that he has not guarded it? Does he not cry out to the Lord, "Lead my soul out of this prison? [Ps 141.9]" Is not his life vexed with time's extension when saying "Woe to me because my exile is prolonged" [Ps 119.5]? Did not the holy ones know how to discern good from evil and thus reckon the soul's exist from the body as better? **Flacilla**, J.484.11-17.

In the holy psalms I have often heard David desiring freedom from such demands: "My soul longs and yearns for the courts of the Lord" [Ps 83.3], and "Lead my soul out of this prison" [Ps 141.8]. Similarly Jeremiah judges as cursed that day when sentence was passed on him [cf. Jer 20.14-18]. We can find many such

¹⁰10 "Christianity through them [the two Gregories and Basil] now emerges as the heir to everything in the Greek tradition that seemed worthy of survival." Werner Jaeger, **Early Christianity and Greek Paideia** (Cambridge, Ma, 1961) p.138.

¹¹11 Ibid, pp.199-201.

examples in divine Scripture of the ancient holy men who had great aspirations in the present life while being weighed down by fleshly existence. **Pulcheria**, J.467.

Before offering some concluding remarks about the theme of blessedness which Gregory offers his listeners of the **Flacilla** oration, it is helpful to briefly examine those elements which hinder our pursuit of blessedness. In Gregory's **Concerning Those Who Have Died** he asks the pertinent question, "What characterizes true goodness" (J.29)? After describing what blessedness is not, several pages later he suggests a theme developed at considerable length in his **Commentary on Ecclesiastes**¹² about the "vanity" of earthy pursuits. These quests are reflected in the natural fluctuations of created reality as revealed by two excerpts:

Our body is animated by the reciprocal action of fullness and emptiness, that is, eating and drinking, inhaling and exhaling, and cannot survive without this alteration. If it were to cease our life would come to an end because such reciprocal actions would no longer succeed each other and fail to animate our [human] nature. This activity ceases when nothing enters nor exits the dead; instead, the body's natural elements dissolve and disintegrate. **Those Who Have Died**, J.31-2.

Is there anything more miserable like ourselves who are beasts destined for toil with hidden eyes, who always walk in circles and return to the same place? Shall I tell you about this circuit? It consists in hunger, satisfaction sleep, wakefulness, movement and satiety. These always succeed each other, and we never pause while following this cycle until we are free from such toil. **Flacilla**, J.485.6-13.

Such miseries are typical of that "alien residence" (*allotrios oikos*, I.14) in which Job found himself and whom Gregory employs as an example of how we should conduct ourselves in this impermanent existence. Compare the following two texts in which Job is mentioned:

"What is corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and what is mortal must put on immortality" [1Cor 15.53]. Job considers this and is heartened by the good fate of his children; although young, they have shed the chains of life. A two-fold sign promised by God lies in store for what has been snatched away; a two-fold restitution not only of children but ten take their place. Since men's souls are eternal, two compensations are given: the progeny of children is included along with their parents as all living to God, and the presence of death poses no hindrance for those who have died. **Pulcheria**, J.471-2.

¹²12 Refer to the following: "Ecclesiastes responds by saying that a person susceptible to change and the fluctuations of happiness cannot have wisdom and knowledge. The benefit of these [changeable] elements consists in the empty pursuit of distractions caused by the flesh." (J.363)

The story of Job (Job 1.7+ & 2.1+) teaches us that mankind's harmful adversary served to make him pleasing; by proving Job, he was found sincere, just and blameless. Similarly, the adversary looks with evil intent upon [the martyrs'] good deeds and struggles. He also takes into account the mature demeanor present in the prime of their youth. He sees sound bodies adorned with restraint, the armed chorus leading them in battle array to God, a beautiful sight to behold. **Homily on the Forty Martyrs**, J.148.

Gregory closes his *paramuthetikos logos* on behalf of the empress Flacilla by locating her in the heavenly kingdom, Abraham's bosom, a symbol of eternal rest which Christ himself had used [cf. Lk 16.22]. Furthermore, Gregory implies a return to paradise from which our first parents were expelled when referring to "flowing waters." By way of conclusion, I compare two texts which deal with this theme:

In this faith he grows, flourishes, is disposed by the Spirit, is received into the Father's bosom by Abraham's faith at the fountain of paradise (its stream does not reach infidels), is under the shadow of the tree of life planted by flowing waters which we are worthy to receive in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. **Flacilla**, J.489.15-490.2.

If anyone happened to be near the fountain which scripture says [Gen 2.6] rose from the earth at the beginning of creation and was large enough to water the earth's surface, he would approach it marveling at the endless stream of water gushing forth and bubbling out. Never could he say that he had seen all the water...In the same way, the person looking at the divine, invisible beauty will always discover it anew since he will see it as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he had already comprehended. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, J.321.

Gregory focuses upon this theme of continuous growth in God in many places within his writings, but its explicit mention is absent from **Flacilla**. He certainly does not wish to disregard this topic, for it is implied in the text when speaking of that yearning for heavenly existence. However, due to the sorrowful context of the empress' death, it was important that he suggest only those elements which were able to offer some immediate comfort to the mourners. Because Gregory's intent is to comfort so many persons who have benefited from Flacilla's *philanthropia*, it is only natural that he allude to Christ's resurrection. Interestingly he speaks of it after making some fine remarks on the identity of Christ with members of his Church (cf. Mt 25.31-46)¹³, an allusion to the magnanimity the empress Flacilla was able to offer.

¹³13 Refer to the book **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** by Reinhard Hubner (Leiden, 1974) for a detailed study of how Gregory relates the person of Jesus Christ to the unity of his body the Church.

However, the bishop of Nyssa mentions the resurrection fleetingly but suggests its fruit under image of paradise at the very end of his address:

But praise does not stop here [i.e., the reference to the text of Mt 25.31-46]; it advances further for those who do right in accord with what is commanded. Persons who recognize in themselves the grace of the resurrection are dead to the law, have received acquittal with regard to death and are again summoned to life. **Flacilla**, J.487.21-5.

A note regarding the text, **A Funeral Oration for the Empress Flacilla**: The critical edition by Andreas Spira may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni: Sermons, Pars Prior**, vol. ix (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1967), pp.475-90. The text by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca** (Paris, 1858), cols. 877-92.

THE TEXT

[M.877 & J.475] The faithful, prudent servant (I open my remarks with reference to the divine Gospel, cf. Mt 24.45) whom the Lord has set over his household to give in due time a measure of corn, had earlier passed an accurate sentence since no address had been given, and having correctly perceived the greatness of this occasion, he decided to honor grief by silence. I do not know if he speaks a second time to the Church in the present assembly, thereby rescinding his own vote against the sentence he had already passed. I have great admiration for the teacher's prudence in many things and have special esteem for his silence at this time. To me silence (*sigē*) seems a suitable remedy for those in mourning; it is an occasion for the soul to express sorrow through stillness (*hesuchia*). Should anyone **[M.880]** incite the soul with passionate, inflammatory remarks, **[J.476]** the wound of sorrow becomes more wretched by the recollection of sufferings just as though it had been pricked by thorns.

Without being rash I will attempt to correct the teacher, perhaps passing sentence on our present silence, and proceed to give an address which hopefully will not cause distress when you hear it. It is not yet time for the mind to be accustomed to evil while passion is still young in the soul (grief always follows this pattern) and our hearts are troubled like the sea which swells like a storm, having been roused from the depths while our thoughts seethe at the recollection of evils. Since this tumult brings instability to the soul, how can I impart consoling words in a worthy fashion when passions of evil assail you? Although I am summoned to offer words of persuasion, I do not know how to present them in a suitable manner since I cannot fathom the teacher's intention. Does someone wish to freely express grief and move the Church to tears by more ardent words? If a person considers these matters, I believe that he will follow this through. In order to enjoy anything good we must keep in mind sorrowful occasions because as Ecclesiastes counsels, "There is a time for laughter and a time for weeping" (Eccl 3.4).

These matters instruct us that the soul must accommodate itself to present reality; it endures circumstances as though they were flowing, that is, it is glad at the time for showing cheerfulness and changes joy into dejection. It behooves one to change **[J.477]** gladness to tears, for just as laughter is a sign of inner joy, so grief in the heart clearly reveals the soul's wounds as tears of blood. The Proverbs of Solomon say, "A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken" (Prov 15.13). When the heart is gloomy its expression reveals this state. We can find words which the great Jeremiah uttered in sorrow over the Israelite's misfortune; rather, those words which were uttered long ago may be used to recall grief. Although Job had spoken about adversities, what advantage has just one house in exchange for sufferings which are so easy to number? If you recall large scale misfortunes such as earthquakes, wars, floods, yawning chasms, they are insignificant in comparison to the present. Why is this so? Because war does not plague the entire world; if a certain area is afflicted by war, another region remains at peace. Again, if a lightning bolt hits a particular area, water **[M.881]** causes an inundation or a chasm swallows everything up.

The present evil is a universal affliction; no single people or nation laments but joins with Nebuchadnezzar who said to his servants, "I speak to you, people, tribes and languages" (Dan 3.4). Permit me to add something to this Assyrian's injunction that I may proclaim with **[J.478]** louder voice the present condition and say as an actor crying out on stage, "Oh city, people, nations, earth and sea on which boats sail, oh all inhabited regions where the imperial scepter rules, oh men in every place, groan as one over your common catastrophe and bewail loudly that misfortune which afflicts everyone!" When human nature exceeds its bounds and transcends its usual borders, nature lends supports, that is to say, the Lord of nature, by examples of virtue in a female body which surpass almost all bounds where every virtue of body and soul, displays a remarkable phenomenon by providing room for one soul in a single body. In order that the good fortune of age might be revealed to everyone, [human nature] is lead to the kingdom's lofty throne where like the sun in lofty dignity it grasps the entire world by virtues' rays.

The divine decree which extends over the entire world imparts a common blessing and submission to the kingdom so that as Scripture says, she [Eve] might help **[J.479]** him [Adam] in every good endeavor [cf. Gen 2.18]. If this is an opportunity for kindness and concurs with the good or is attained, both share a yoke which consists of tenderness. We have an entire host of witnesses who came earlier and confirm what we now hear by the proclamation of truth. If you seek piety, it applies to them equally; if it is providence, justice or any other pursuit concerning the good, all contribute to the struggle where everyone attains victory in good deeds and no one is inferior. Both share the same gift: a prize of virtue is offered to the whole earth; the supremacy and good substance of earth and sea is considered as small. It supplies benefits to everyone, keeps guard and looks out for each one. Words cannot describe it (What beauty which transcends appearances can resemble it? Anything visible suffices for those in their youth.) because no carefully wrought image exists, and anything written or fashioned is defective with regard to the truth.

[M.884] Up to this point I have given examples and will proceed with more as follows. I see how important it is to cry out, and you reveal to me **[J.480]** the reason for this unsuitable commotion. Oh Thrace, your very name makes us take flight! Oh unfortunate people, you who are familiar with disasters were the first to be laid waste in war by fire during the barbarian invasions and now are burdened with a supreme misfortune. Your good is snatched away, people are jealous over the kingdom, the whole world suffers shipwreck; having been submersed by the assault of waves, we sink to the very depths! Oh terrible exile which does not know the way home! Oh bitter waters which lack no springs! Oh place of harm which people call desolate (I understand that their native tongue aptly calls their country Skotoume)! There the lamp goes faint, light is quenched and rays of virtue are forgotten. The kingdom's beauty comes to ruin together with the rule of morality which is the image of kindness or better, is its archetype. The ideal of marriage is forgotten, the virtue of prudence is anathema along with ready access to dignity; tenderness and its attendant lofty meekness is unknown and remorse is absent which acts as harmony to effect good behavior. Zeal for the faith has departed, including the Church's column which adorns the altars, the wealth of the poor and a helping hand which offers one harbor for those afflicted. Let virginity mourn, widowhood wail and orphans grieve because they lack what they are accustomed to possess.

What reason do I have for distinguishing between various types of afflictions? Let every age groan and emit a deep sigh **[J.481]** from the heart. Let the priesthood wail because jealousy has despoiled its adornment. Are we courageous enough to quote the prophet who says, "Oh God, why do you cast us off forever? Why are you angry with the sheep of our pasture" [Ps 74.1]? For whose sins do we make recompense? On whose behalf are we lashed with one scourge after another? Is it simply by chance that a multitude of heretics pronounces a sentence of impiety against us? Observe that in a short time such misfortunes afflicted us; we have not yet recovered from the first blow nor have we whipped the tears from our eyes when a calamity assaults us yet again. We have lamented the youthful, tender blossom which developed into a young, flourishing shoot in whose beauty many put their hopes; now its good which once was anticipated is flourishing but has met with danger.

Tell me, brethren, am I speaking irrationally with regard to this misfortune? As the Apostle says, creation is groaning with evil [cf. Rom 8.22]. I remind you of what transpired, and I know many things which can be expressed in words. When the empress veiled in gold and purple is carried into the city (she is borne upon a litter) and people of every rank and age rush out, they marvel at this sight visible to all, enthusiastically following on foot in a great throng and giving vent to grief (You certainly know that clouds darken the sun's rays so that it is not by chance that the empress enters the city in triumphal procession lacking the form of pure light; neither is she in a chariot nor in a wagon set in gold adorned with royal ornaments with attendants but is concealed in a coffin. Her form is hidden from view by that somber veil which creates such a terrible, pitiful sight and makes anyone nearby burst out in tears. The people assembled together, both strangers and residents, do not remain silent but receive her entry with loud wailing). The air was sullen as though some had cast a garment of sorrow over it. However, clouds shed tender drops of tears which they freely released at such a tragedy. Are

these observations folly and not worthy of mention? If creation behaved like this by offering a sign, it is not creation but its Lord through whom the death of a regal person was proclaimed. It is said that "the death of his saints is honorable in Lord's sight" [Ps 115.6]. I have seen another more admirable sight, namely, two rainstorms, one from the sky and the other consisting of tears flowing to the ground. The one coming from eyes was of no less account than the one from clouds. In countless instances there was not a single eye which did not moisten the earth by teardrops.

Perhaps we have not correctly surmised the teacher's mind and have spoken more than necessary for those who are downcast. **[J.483]** He wishes us to heed the matter rather than to be sad, whereas we have done the opposite much like a doctor who not only alleviates an injury but applies remedies to an afflicted patient. Just as oil is poured upon a swollen wound, so does the evangelical medicine mix oil with tart wine [cf. Lk 10.34]. Let us now offer you through Scripture the ability to receive the flask of oil as far as possible, thereby changing grief into consolation. But I tend to believe anything even if it should be incredible; brethren, the good which we seek exists and is immortal. I have said less about the truth, for not only is it true but holds a preeminent place among anything which is lofty. Do you seek the empress? She has gone to royal palaces. But do you desire **[M.888]** to know this with the eye? You are not allowed to view the empress as a busybody. A fearful guard of soldiers stands about her; their weapons are not made of iron, but they are armed with flashing swords, a sight which men cannot endure to behold. The empress' dwelling is in secret; although you may observe this sight **[J.484]** with the body [cf. Dan 8.16-18, Is 6.1, Ezk 1.1+], you cannot otherwise enter the empress' inner chamber unless divested of the body [cf. Heb 10.20].

Do you think that corporeal existence is better? Let the divine Apostle teach you about participating in the hidden mysteries of paradise [2Cor 12.2-4]. What does he say about the common life of men? "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death" [Rom 7.24]? What is he saying here? "It is much better for me to be dissolved and be with Christ" [Phl 1.23]. What does the great David say who was adorned with such power and had access to all types of pleasures? Does he not groan in this life? Does he not say that he has not guarded it? Does he not cry out to the Lord, "Lead my soul out of this prison" [Ps 141.8]? Is not his life vexed with time's extension when saying "Woe to me because my exile is prolonged" [Ps 119.5]? Did not the holy ones know how to discern good from evil and reckon the soul's exit from the body as better? Tell me, what is the good which you see in this life? We judge life by what we consider. I do not quote for you the prophet's words, "All flesh is grass" [Is 40.6]; although that verse considers the misery of our [human] nature, grass appears better. How is this so? Grass lacks sensation, whereas our body which has all types of odors which are of no value is subject to corruption. **[J.485]** Is not what the stomach always consumes more disgusting? Do you not know anything more unpleasant than the stomach which continuously exacts tribute and seeks payment each day? Is there anything more miserable like ourselves who are beasts destined for toil with hidden eyes, who always walk in circles and return to the same place? Shall I tell you about this circuit? It consists in hunger, satisfaction, sleep, wakefulness, movement and satiety. These always succeed each other, and we never pause while

following this cycle until we are free from such toil. Solomon aptly calls this a deep pit and life an exile [cf. Prov 23.27]. It is an alien residence, not ours, because it is **[M.889]** not in our power to have what we wish or desire; we enter it and do not and go out as we do not know. You will understand the symbol of a pit if you reject desire as insatiable. Do you see how men continuously multiply for themselves honors, power, glory and other such things? But what is cast flows and does not remain with the person who cast it. Anyone who always strive after zeal glory, power and honor has an unfilled pit of desire. What about avarice? **[J.486]** Is not the pit's bottom punctured, empties out can and never be filled like the entire ocean?

What is grievous if blessedness has no share in life's evils and passes over to incorruptible life with a pure soul as if he had rejected the body's filth? The soul has no part in deception, does not believe in slander, resists flattery and keeps away from lies. It is withdrawn from pleasure and grief, fear and courage, deficiency and abundance, slavery and lordship, and keeps its distance from every irregularity in this life. As the prophet says, it flees from there [cf. Is 35.10, 51.11], that is, from grief, sorrow and groaning. What takes their place? Detachment, blessedness, alienation from every evil, fellowship with the angels, contemplation of invisible reality and participation in God; all these attributes have no end [cf. Rom 14.17]. With this in mind it behooves us not to mourn the empress when we learn that she has exchanged these for what is better. She forsakes the earthly kingdom but receives the heavenly one [cf. Mt 3.2]; she forsakes a crown of jewels [cf. 1Pt 5.4] but is crowned with **[J.487]** glory; takes off her purple dress but puts on Christ [cf. Rom 13.14, Gal 3.27]. Truly this is the garment which befits royal dignity! I know about the purple robe stained with the blood of sea shells, however, the purple blood of Christ radiates with what is above [cf. Rev 7.14]. You certainly can see how different is this garment!

If you wish to be persuaded by these words then read the Gospel: "Come, blessed of my Father" (the judge is speaking here about the righteous), "inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for you" [Mt 25.34]. Prepared by whom? It says that you have prepared them earlier through deeds. How did he accomplish this? "I was hungry, thirsty, a strange, naked and was in prison. As long as you have done this for one of the least of these, you did it to me" [Mt 25.35]. Should a friend manifest concern for the king through these actions, you will be numbered--if such a thing is possible—covered and nourished at his great right hand; instead of being shut up in prison, you are destined for release. Because a visit to those who are imprisoned welcomes the king, then freedom from retribution is worthy of greater honor if there is anything more noble for a king.

But praise does not stop here; it advances further **[M.892]** for those who do right in accord with what is commanded. Persons who recognize in themselves the grace of the resurrection are dead to the law, have received acquittal with regard to death are summed to life. Confirmation of these words can be seen in their eyes. **[J.488]** You have observed a youth standing by the altar who has rejected salvation. You have seen a woman grieving at her brother's condemnation. You have heard the good news proclaimed to the Church so that by the empress's memory the sullen lot of death might be transformed into life. Is that all? How

do we obtain a spirit of humility which Scripture says is more honorable when done in conjunction with virtue [cf. Mt 18.4]? Upon submission to the great king's rule to whom nations surrender and to whom the earth and sea bring presents from every inhabited place, that person has not yielded to pride when one always attends to oneself and disregards what does not concern him. Therefore the inheritor of blessedness has procured true loftiness by an appropriate humility. Let me say something with regard to marital love. When this corporeal union terminates and assets which had been accumulated are divided, how is distribution made? Although the father leaves behind three sons (for they are his crown) so that they might champion **[J.489]** the kingdom, he allows only the daughter inherit it. You see how reasonable and considerate he is with regard to such possessions by leaving the greater part to a man.

But I am obliged to continue a bit more in order to conclude my words. Hatred of idols is common to all who share the faith, but the Arian infidelity and its idolatry is an abomination. They consider the divinity to be in creation and do not believe the material from which such idols are fashioned as blasphemous, thereby considering it as suitable for worship. He who adores a creature in name of Christ is an idolater. Upon learning that God is not something new, he adores one divinity which is glorified in the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. In this faith he grows, flourishes, is disposed by the Spirit, is received into the Father's bosom by Abraham's faith at the fountain of paradise [cf. Lk 16.22] (its stream does not reach infidels), is under the shadow of the tree of life planted by flowing **[J.490]** waters which we are worthy to receive in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.