

**A FUNERAL ORATION FOR  
MELETIUS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH**

**INTRODUCTION**

This funeral oration by Gregory of Nyssa<sup>1</sup> is one of five similar addresses related to two other bishops, Gregory the Wonderworker (*Thaumaturgos*) and his brother Basil the Great. Among this number are included orations on behalf of the empress (Augusta) Flacilla and the princess Pulcheria, young daughter of the emperor Theodosius and his wife, Flacilla. While Meletius was alive the so-called School of Antioch achieved the height of its fame and included such illustrious persons as Diodorus of Tarsus, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. This school placed stress on a literal rendering of biblical texts and entailed historical and grammatical studies<sup>2</sup>. Both Antioch and Alexandria became involved in combating the leading heresies of the day, notably Arianism, Apollinarianism and finally Nestorianism. Since it is beyond the scope of this Introduction to detail all the doctrinal intricacies involved, I will confine myself to some remarks about the role Meletius played in the Arian heresy which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ as well as some observations upon Gregory's own funeral oration.

As bishops responsible for their flocks, both Gregory and his brother had as their chief concern the unity of the Christian Church which was threatened by an almost total lack of harmony in the East, let alone between the two divisions of the Roman Empire, East and West. The latter part of the empire made an appeal to Rome to heal a schism between Meletius and Paulinus to determine which man was the rightful heir in the see of Antioch. In the two decades or so prior to Meletius' appointment as bishop, Antioch was headed by bishops sympathetic towards Arianism. A division existed between the former

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Danielou places **Meletius** "das les derniers jours de mai 381." *La Chronologie des Sermons de Gregoire de Nyse* from **Revue des Sciences Religieuses** #29 (Paris, 1955), p.359.

<sup>2</sup>The School of Antioch had as its chief rival of biblical interpretation the School of Alexandria which achieved fame under the direction of Origen and received later fame by Athanasius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus the Blind and Cyril of Alexandria. All these notable churchmen placed stress upon an allegorical interpretation of scripture. We find two references to such allegorical interpretation within the **Meletius** text itself: "He [Satan] despoiled neither cattle nor flocks or sheep unless we transfer the meaning of these words to the Church in a mystical fashion (*kata to mustikon*, J.446.6-8). And, "The willow trees upon which we place our harps are an enigma (*ainigma*) for me and represent life" (J.453.12-13).

bishop, Eustathius (who had been deposed before the accession of several Arians in this twenty year span), who followed Paulinus and those who favored the doctrine of *homoousios* formulated during the Council of Nicaea in 325<sup>3</sup>. Once the Nicene faith had achieved supremacy, the emperor Theodosius<sup>4</sup> convened a council of bishops to ratify the newly established doctrinal unity, and among the participants were Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory of Nyssa. Meletius presided over the council and died suddenly, a fact which accounts for Gregory's poignant remarks with regard to his fellow bishop even though the other Gregory preached at the funeral. Constantinople I was not an ecumenical council strictly speaking for the bishop of Rome was not invited and only one from the West was present among the 150 participating Eastern bishops. Furthermore, the schism at Antioch forbade the council's president, Meletius, to be in communion with the sees of Rome and Alexandria<sup>5</sup>.

Gregory's relatively brief oration on Meletius opens with words which affirm his fellow bishop's adherence to orthodox teaching, namely, that he as a "young apostle has augmented the number of Apostles by being elected to their company." In the very next sentence he alludes to Meletius' favorable reputation among the general population of Antioch by saying that persons of similar nature and interests have a natural attraction for each other: holy persons, athletes, royalty and persons in the service of the Church. Although delivered at Constantinople shortly after the death of Meletius, Gregory's remarks are directed towards the people of Antioch: "I have pity on you, oh Church! I

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<sup>3</sup>3.The Council of Nicaea used the word *homoousios* ("consubstantial") to exclude imperfections from the Word (Jesus Christ) and to assert his full equality with the Father, a definition intended to counter the Arian threat. Sixty years later at Constantinople I, the assembled bishops avoided use of *homoousios* when defining the divinity of the Holy Spirit. For further reference, refer to **God in Patristic Thought** by G.L. Prestige (London, 1959); **A Patristic Greek Lexicon** by G.W.H. Lampe (Oxford, 1961), pp.958-60.

<sup>4</sup>4.Theodosius attended the funeral of Meletius as testified by Gregory's text: "Let the emperor be downcast over the calamity, and let him rise from his throne, approach the saint's bier with the entire city, and let them exhort each other" (J.456.17-457.2).

<sup>5</sup>5 Gregory of Nazianzus was elected successor to Meletius as president of the council. It should be briefly noted that the creed ratified here was rejected by the West for nine hundred years. While following the logic of Nicaea, Constantinople I acknowledged the eastern tendency to accommodate ecclesiastical organization to secular power which later produced discord among the four great sees of Christianity. For details on this, refer to **The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787)** by Leo Donald Davis, s.j. (New York, 1987), pp.81-130.

speak to you, city of Antioch! I have compassion at your intense affliction!" (J.446.19-447.1). As Jean Bernardi has pointed out, mention of "diverse and similar tongues (*polumeros kai polutropos*, J.456.9), a gift with which King David was bestowed, suggests the appeal Meletius enjoyed among various parties at the Council of Constantinople as well as referring to the occidental background of the emperor Theodosius<sup>6</sup>. This council was convened to depose the Arian bishop of that city, Maximus the Cynic, and replaced him with Gregory of Nazianzus.

Gregory's description of the funeral cortege gives firsthand testimony to the widespread reverence with which Meletius was blessed: "Talk about the wonderful examples of how such a great throng of people at the sea formed one body and crossed in procession with the water which formed a tent" (J.456.5-8). As at the very beginning of his oration, Gregory again speaks of the Apostles with whom Meletius is associated: "Mention the people's longing, the assembly of Apostles" (J.456.14-15), thereby testifying to the Christian unity which he represented.

We see a further reference to Christian unity and the bishops' efforts at the Council of Constantinople to achieve it when confronted by heretical tendencies. Here Gregory employs the attractive imagery of a wedding: "How different in this present circumstance [i.e., Meletius' funeral] are our words from those we uttered earlier when we danced at a marriage feast! Now we groan miserably at our affliction. Then we celebrated nuptials whereas now we chant a funeral dirge" (J.442.18-443.1). Some may find his equation of an ecclesiastical assembly with its intrigues and politicking a bit over extended; nevertheless, it represents the bishop of Nyssa's attempt to depict the good job Meletius had done at Constantinople I as council president. The image we have of Meletius in Gregory's oration is vague yet reference to his able leadership gives us a hint that his ability as a reconciler will be missed:

Where is that splendid sail which the Holy Spirit has always blown? Where is the confident rudder of our souls which enabled us to safely sail past the enormous waves of heresy? Where is that immovable anchor of judgment which enabled us to enjoy peaceful rest after all our labors? Where is that noble helmsman who directs our ship's course on high? J.444.4-10.

Note reference to leadership qualities within a maritime context: sail, rudder, anchor, helmsman, all of which point to Meletius' chief quality, patience or long suffering. Gregory alludes to dissident tendencies yet is vague when referring to them

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<sup>66</sup> **La Predication des Peres Cappadociens** (Paris 1968), p.316.

during the lifetime of Meletius and uses the term "heretical" three times: "heretical darkness" (*ton hairetikon zophon*, J.550.11-12), "heretical water" (*tou hairetikou hudatos*, J.451.3) and "heretical commotion" (*ten hairetiken sugchusin*, J.453.8)<sup>7</sup>. A further suggestion of the difficulties Meletius experienced as bishop of Antioch is found in the following passage, and it is highly possible that Gregory of Nyssa received information about them through his close friend and confidant, Gregory of Nazianzus who had preached at the funeral:

Remember our earlier remarks with regard to this man of struggles; he honors the holy Trinity and in his numerous contests he keeps honor, struggling against three assaults by temptation. Pay attention to the sequence (*akolouthia*) of his toils, that is, what comes first, is at the middle and what is last. (J.449.4-7)

As noted at the beginning of this Introduction, the oration for bishop Meletius bears close resemblance to those of Basil the Great and Gregory the Wonderworker; however, it differs from the one on Meletius in that the latter was issued on his feast day and presents biographical details<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, there is noticeably absent in **Meletius** a detailed evaluation of the deceased bishop's character due to his untimely death and Gregory's haste in preparing the text. Nevertheless, Gregory does touch upon a concept original to him, the "garment of skin":

The priest [an obvious reference to Meletius' office] has entered the sanctuary and inner chamber of the tent where Christ our precursor has preceded us after he removed the garment of skin (*tou dermatinous chitonas*). No longer does he minister by an image and shadow of heavenly reality but intercedes face to face with God on our behalf and the people who are unenlightened. He has discarded the tunics of skins since he has no need for them in paradise. On the other hand, once he put on the clothing which he had woven by a pure life, he has brought glory upon himself. (J.454.6-455.1)

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<sup>77</sup> Meletius was exiled three times from his see in his defense of the Trinity and was recalled by the emperor Valens. Gregory of Nazianzus unsuccessfully attempted to put end to the schism at Antioch by proposing to the council of Constantinople that Paulinus succeed Meletius. However, the schism with Paulinus lasted until the year 362.

<sup>88</sup> "La vie du Thaumaturge était issue d'un sermon de fete, mais elle a recu des adjonctions qui en font une veritable biographie. Finalement, elle tient autant de l'hagiographie que de la predication." **La Predication des Peres Cappadociens**, p.318.

Gregory finds a scriptural basis for such garments in Gen 3.21 ("And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.") and interprets them as those qualities which we share with animals; in other words, he is speaking of our inherent mortality. Despite this fact, we are destined to enjoy the risen body's incorruptibility. Two excerpts taken from Gregory's writings are helpful to understand the brief references to the "garments of skin" in **Meletius**:

But since all skin, after it is separated from the animal, is dead, I am certainly of opinion that He Who is the healer of our sinfulness, of His foresight invested man subsequently with that capacity of dying which had been the special attribute of the brute creation. Not that it was to last forever; for a coat is something external put on us, lending itself to the body for a time, but not indigenious to its nature. **The Great Catechism**<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, p.483.

Let us see how the bride obeys the Word and makes an entrance for her spouse. "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them" [Sg 5.3]? Rightly the bride heard her spouse summoning her to be a sister, companion, dove and perfect one, so that through these words truth might dwell in her. She did what she had heard, that is, she removed her garment of skin with which she clothed herself after her sin. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**<sup>10</sup>

The image of "garments of skins" assumes special meaning when considered within the context of **Meletius** because they refer to his priesthood and its fulfillment within the heavenly sanctuary. Meletius himself has assumed a role of guidance for his flock not only because he is counted as "a young apostle" who "has augmented the number of Apostles" (J.441.) but he follows in the train of those great Old Testament figures recounted on pages J.455-6 such as the psalmist [i.e., David], Simeon, Moses (by implication) who led the Israelites across the Red Sea, Joseph, "whose bones were transported to the land of blessing" and finally St. Paul. Gregory concludes his oration by an indirect intimation of the Eucharist: "Give your wine to those in distress, not to effect drunkenness but gladness of heart" (J.457.4-6). This theme is further enhanced by another one close to Gregory's heart, "sober inebriation," as pointed out by the following two passage taken from the **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

This is also the meaning of the flourishing vine [cf. Sg 2.13] whose wine gladdens the heart and will one day fill the cup of wisdom. It will be freely offered to those who drink from the exalted preaching to enjoy a good and sober inebriation (*nephalion methen*, J.156).

All inebriation makes the mind overcome with wine go into ecstasy (*ekstasis*). Therefore what the Song enjoins becomes a reality by that divine food and drink of the Gospel; as then and always, this food and drink contains a constant change (*metabole*) from a worse to a better condition. (J.308-9)

In conjunction the second excerpt just above Gregory continues in some detail for several pages in his **Commentary** by speaking of the examples of David, Paul and Peter who experienced different forms of inebriation and ecstasy.

Despite the lofty sentiment of these thoughts, Gregory's accent is upon the

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<sup>10</sup> My translation; published by Hellenic College Press (Brookline, Ma.), p.204.

hardships endured by Meletius who provided in his own person an example for his flock. Naturally the image of Job comes to mind, and Mariette Canevet has noted that the greatest number of citations and allusions from the Book of Job (fourteen in total) are situated within **Meletius** and Gregory's other oration concerning Pulcheria<sup>11</sup>. Compare excerpts from these two texts:

He [Job] was well-born and came from the land of the sun's rising; he was blameless, just, true, pious and had no share in any evil deed (the great Job was not jealous because witnesses spoke about him and his imitator glorified him. But when jealousy [i.e., Satan] observed all his good deeds and saw with a sharp eye our prosperity, he sowed the seeds of affliction against our good deeds while strolling through the world. **Meletius**, J.445.18-446.6.

When these calamitous events were reported to Job (It seems to me that he was an athlete not that you may admire just his victory, a small gain from such admiration, but that you may also be prepared in similar circumstances. Furthermore, this athlete can be a teacher [lit., gymnastic] whose example will anoint your soul for patience and fortitude when trials come your way), what did he do?...as soon as he heard it, immediately pondered over the nature of things, considered their origin, what nature made them come into existence and what role they have in the scheme of things. **A Homily of Consolation Concerning Pulcheria**, J.470.

Despite his personal grief, Gregory of Nyssa says that he "must wipe away my tears" (J.454.3) and console himself that Meletius has achieved the final goal of his vocation as priest and bishop by having entered the "sanctuary and inner chamber of the tent where Christ our precursor has preceded us" (J.454.6-8). These words which are towards the end of his funeral oration recapitulate those on the opening page, "It is better to be with Christ, whereas we still remain in a wretched condition" (J.441.12-13).

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<sup>11</sup>**Gregoire de Nyse et L'Hermeneutique Biblique** (Paris, 1983), p.117. With respect to the Book of Job Canevet notes "trois themes precis:" Leviathan image du Diable, les mythes helleniques et les circonstances de la mort. Ces references servent souvent a marquer du sceau chretien ce qu'il y a de grec en Gregoire: gout des mythes, consolations paiennes a la brievete de la vie, preuve de l'immortalite de l'ame fondee sur le fait que le nombre total des ames ne peut pas changer. C'est un peu la part profane de Gregoire qui trouve echo ici." Ibid, p.118.

A note regarding the text, **A Funeral Oration for Meletius, Bishop of Antioch**:  
The critical edition by Andreas Spira may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni Opera**, vol. ix, Sermones, Pars I, published by E.J. Brill (Leiden, 1967), pp.441-57. The edition by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca**, vol. 46.852-64 (Paris, 1858). An English translation exists in **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mi, 1972 reprint of a 1892 text), pp.513-17.

## THE TEXT

[**M.852 & J.441**] The young apostle has augmented the number of Apostles by being elected to their company [cf. Acts 1.26]. Holy persons attract similar people to themselves; the same applies to athletes in a contest as well as those who have been crowned by persons in a royal position, the pure of heart and servants of the Word with regard to its proclamation. Our blessed father resides with the Apostles and has departed to be with Christ whereas we continue to abide in a wretched condition. Do not allow not this unseasonable time when we are orphans to dislodge us from our father's heritage. It is better to be with Christ, and we are yoked to his paternal patronage. Behold, it is time to pursue counsel yet he remains silent towards those in search of it; war encompasses us, that is, [**J.442**] heretics, and we have no leader. The Church's entire body sags with afflictions and we cannot find a physician. Look upon our condition! I have wished in any way possible that my prolonged debility ascend with the weight of misfortune and to make desperate entreaty which is in accord with the amount of suffering just like our ancestors who lamented our father's calamity with loud cries. But what can I do? How can I force my tongue to be at the service of preaching when shackled by a grievous misfortune? How can I open a mouth which has been dumbstruck? How can I begin to speak of suffering and grief when I am weighed down like this? How can I raise the eyes of my soul which are covered by despondency? Who will scatter for me this heavy dark cloud of sorrow and again show me the bright rays of peace? Our star has perished; from where will come that ray of light? Oh miserable darkness which can never hope for the sun's appearance!

How different are our words in this present circumstance from those we uttered earlier when we danced at a marriage feast! Now we groan miserably at our affliction. At that time we celebrated nuptials [**J.443**] whereas now we chant a funeral dirge. You recall that spiritual marriage when we led you to the virginal dwelling with elegant bridal adornment and when [**M.853**] at such a joyful occasion we were pleased to bring this raiment which consisted in words of power. However, our gladness has turned into anguish and our garment of joy to sackcloth [cf. Lam 5.15]. Should we be silent about our pain and restrain it in order not to provoke the sons of the bridal chamber who will then lack splendid wedding garments since they have soiled them by their words [cf. Mt 22.11-12]? Once the lovely bridegroom has been snatched away [cf. Mt 9.15] we are somber and inconsolable; our words are not enlightened in the usual manner, that is, adorned with a stole which jealousy has now sullied. Despite being laden with good things for you, we come naked and we depart in poverty. We have set over our heads a lamp resplendent with light [cf. Mt 25.1-12] whose flame which has been quenched by

smoke and dusk we now restore. We have a great treasure stored up in earthenware jars [cf. 2Cor 4.7], but it remains unseen while the earthenware jar is empty and kept for storing valuables.

What reply have those who have been sent away? What is their response to the one who demands an answer? **[J.444]** Oh, what a horrible shipwreck! How do we cause such a disaster while in the port of our hope? How does the ship loaded with a full cargo sink and leave us who were once laden without clothing? Where is that splendid sail which the Holy Spirit has always blown? Where is the confident rudder of our souls which enabled us to safely sail past the enormous waves of heresy? Where is that immovable anchor of judgment which enabled us to enjoy peaceful rest after all our labors? Where is that noble helmsman who directs our ship's course on high? When small vanities assault me, do I not go affected by them? Should I speak even though I cannot overcome this calamity?

Make use, brothers, make use of tears produced by unfortunate circumstances because when you were cheerful, we shared your joy. Therefore give something in exchange for this evil in your possession. "We rejoice with those who rejoice." This we have done. "We weep with those weeping." This we return to you [Rom 12.15]. **[J.445]** In times past an alien people wept over the patriarch Jacob [cf. Gen 50.7-11] and won over their sympathy when the entire people transported their father from Egypt and mourned his exile among foreign tribes for thirty days and nights while continuously pouring out grief over him. You, my brethren and fellow citizens, imitate these alien tribes. We share a common exile, pilgrimage and tears; let us keep them in common because we share the same calamity. Observe these patriarchs who are all children of Jacob and free. Not one is irrelevant or illegitimate, and it is not the custom for a servile race to share the same lot as a well-born race of believers. Therefore he [Jacob] is your father because he is the father of our own.

**[M.856]** You have recently heard about Ephraim and Manassas who spoke much about their father and his miracles which exceeded anything they had recounted. Allow me to speak about them for it is safe to sing their praises. I no longer fear jealousy because who can do me greater harm? He [Job] was well-born and came from the land of the sun's rising [cf. Job 1.1]; he was blameless, just, true, pious and had no share in any evil deed (the **[J.446]** great Job was not jealous because witnesses spoke about him and his imitator glorified him [cf. Wisd 2.24]). But when jealousy [i.e., Satan] observed all his good deeds and with a sharp eye saw our prosperity, he sowed the seeds of affliction against our good deeds while strolling through the world [cf. Job 1.7]. He despoiled

neither cattle nor flocks of sheep unless we transfer the meaning of these words to the Church in a mystical fashion. Indeed he causes no harm by jealousy nor damages asses or camels; neither has he pierced the senses with a wound to the flesh but has despoiled us of our head. The head is honored along with the senses. No longer does the eye look heavenward, the ear does not listen to the divine voice nor does the tongue [taste] the pure delight of truth. Where is the eyes' pleasing serenity, the happy smile upon the lips, the courteous right hand and that blessing coming from the mouth?

But I offer as one crying out on stage some words concerning our misfortune, "I have pity on you, oh Church! I speak to you, city of Antioch! **[J.447]** I have compassion upon your intense affliction!" How much greater is its beauty? How was it despoiled and how was the flower suddenly taken away? Indeed "the grass withers, the flower fades" [Is 40.7]. What evil eye and wicked slander breaks against the Church? The fountain has failed, running waters have ceased, the river has dried up and water has turned into blood [cf. Ex 7.17-1]. Oh what an appalling messenger who has brought news about the Church's disaster! Who can tell children that they are left orphans? Who can tell the bride that she is barren? How sad! Who dares speak of these and what is the response? They sent for an ark and instead got a coffin [cf. Heb 9.4, Ex 25.10-16]. The ark, brethren, is the man of God who has the divine mysteries abiding in himself. In him is present the golden urn of corn full with divine manna, the nourishment of heaven [cf. Ex 16.33]. In it are the covenant's tablets; the Spirit of the living God, not a pen, has inscribed [words] upon tablets of the heart [cf. Heb 9.4, Ex 25, 16.21, 2Cor 3.3]. Nothing obscure **[J.448]** overshadows the heart's purity nor do [human] thoughts make any dark impression. In it is the rod of the priesthood which blossomed in his [Aaron] hands [cf. Heb 9.4]. Should we hear that the ark contains any other objects, man's soul contains them.

**[M.857]** But the text does not mention anything in their place except iron basins, a countless number of silk robes and abundant ointments and spices which serve to adorn and embellish a woman's honor. Just as these things are self-evident, so is it true with regard to the priest when the alabaster jar of ointment is poured on his head [cf. Mk 14.9]. What does this mean? Dead bones and what has already been long dead bring to mind our distressing circumstances [cf. 2Cor 4.10]. A voice is again heard in Rama [cf. Jer 31.14, Mt 2.18]. Rachel is not weeping over her own children, but her husband [Jacob] cannot be consoled. Please do not speak of consolation now! Do not let your **[J.449]** sympathy win out! Let the widow mourn profusely and let her feel the impact of the curse which afflicts her, for the athlete is not unaccustomed with this isolation since he must endure his struggles. Remember our earlier remarks with regard to the man of

struggles; through everything he honors the holy Trinity and in numerous contests he preserves his honor while struggling against three assaults by temptation. Pay attention to the sequence of his toils, that is, what comes first, is at the middle and what is last. It would be useless to repeat these words but to speak of them would not be importune at this moment.

When that man first saw the meek Church, truly he beheld something formed in God's image, love springing up, grace adorning its lips and no bound to humility; he was unable to see any further than this. His vision was in accord with David's travail, Solomon's understanding, Moses' goodness, Samuel's excellence, Joseph's prudence, Daniel's wisdom, Elias' zeal for faith and John's **[J.450]** purity of body. He saw the assembly of such good men who were of one soul. He was wounded by blessed love [*eros*] with pure, good compassion and loved [*agape*] his bridegroom. But before he filled his desire and gave it rest and while he continued to seethe under its charm, only one more temptation remained to summon the athlete. Although he toiled on behalf of the truth, he maintained prudence and was chaste while still married. On occasion adulterous impulses approached the immaculate bridal chamber but his wife was not defiled. This assault occurred twice, and on the third occasion the Lord scattered heretical darkness and conferred a ray of peace which offered hope of respite from so much affliction.

At a later time delights and spiritual desires renewed their assault and inflamed his desire but his last exile suddenly cut short their enjoyment. **[M.860]** He came that he might adorn you as for a spouse and that you may not receive this lightly. He imposed wreathes of blessing upon this lovely union. **[J.451]** He imitated his own Lord when, for example, he was in Cana of Galilee [cf. Jn 2.1-11]. Although the Jews' pitchers were full of heretical water, he changed the nature of unmixed wine which became full by faith's power. Often the cup unmixed with wine was present among you which he offered as a cup overflowing with grace by his own sweet voice. Often he bestowed upon you a spiritual feast. He instituted blessings to which his charming disciples ministered by serving up small portion for the people, and we rejoice by attributing proper glory to your offspring.

How wonderful are the reports about this, and how blessed are the words which found consummation in them! Is there anything further to say? Jeremiah exclaims, "proclaim lamentations" [Jer 9.16] because a burning heart caused by the swelling of passions cannot be quenched unless groans and tears alleviate it. Then the hope of return consoles your exile now that our intense alienation has been removed. A great chasm

stands between him and the Church [cf. Lk 16.26]. **[J.452]** He who rests in Abraham's bosom is not the one who stoops with drops of water to refresh the tongues of those in torment. That beauty has departed, his voice falls silent, his lips are shut, grace has withdrawn and the narrative tells of his good fortune. At one time the Israelites mourned Elijah whom God snatched away from the earth [2Kg 2.1-11], but Elisha's fine sheepskin serves as a consolation for the fact that he has departed. Now the wound is beyond care because Elijah was assumed and Elisha was not.

Listen to Jeremiah's sad, gloomy words uttered with great passion when the city Jerusalem is despoiled and laid waste: "The roads to Zion mourn" [Lam 1.4]. These words once uttered long ago are now fulfilled. When suffering is proclaimed the roads are full with mourning and pour out those persons who once enjoyed being nourished; they imitate the Ninevites in their calamity, rather, they suffer more intensely [Jon 3]. Although lamentation mitigates fear, mourning grants no respite from evil. I know of another **[J.453]** voice, Jeremiah's, which is numbered among the psalms he uttered during Israel's captivity when they sat by the rivers of Babylon recalling their own good fortune: "We hung up our harps on the willows." [Ps 136.1]. These words bring sentence upon their silence and their instruments. I will make use of this psalm to see any heretical commotion (for this is the meaning of Babylon), temptations emanating from it and will speak of the rivers of Babylon by which we weep profusely, although we did not pass through them. The willow trees upon which we place our harps are **[M.861]** an enigma for me and represent life. A willow tree is sterile, and the sweet fruit of our lives is snatched away. As a result we have become unfruitful trees unable to move and remain stationary instruments of the good suspended upon branches. "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither" [Ps 136.5]. Allow me to alter the text slightly because it is not our right hand but our right hands, and the tongue cleaving to the roof of one's mouth **[J.454]** prevents us from speaking in order that we may no longer we hear that sweet voice.

I must wipe away my tears, for I have feelings about our loss despite the fact that I may behave like a grieving woman. The bridegroom who stood in our midst was not taken from us even though we do not see him. The priest has entered the sanctuary and inner chamber of the tent where Christ our precursor has preceded us [cf. Heb 6.19-20] after he removed the garment of skin. No longer does he minister by an image and shadow of heavenly reality but intercedes face to face with God on our behalf and the people who are unenlightened. He has discarded the tunics of skins since he has no need for them in paradise. On the other hand, **[J.455]** once he has put on the clothing which he had woven by a pure life, he brought glory upon himself. The death of a holy person is

honorable before the Lord [cf. Ps 115.6]; it is not death but release from bonds. The psalm says, "You have broken asunder my bonds" [vs. 7]. Simeon was delivered and set free from corporeal bonds [cf. Lk 2.29]. The snare has been broken and the bird has escaped [cf. Ps 123.7]. He has left Egypt, [symbol of] a crass, material life. Instead of crossing the Red Sea he passed over this life's dark, gloomy sea. He has entered the promised land and has conversed [*philosopheo*] with God on the mountain. He has shed the soul's shoes in order that by keeping his mind pure, he might enter the holy land [cf. Ex 3.5] where God [**J.456**] is seen.

Brethren, with these words of consolation in mind pay attention to Joseph whose bones were transported to the land of blessing [cf. Gen 50. 24-5, Ex 13.19] and listen to Paul's precept: "Do not grieve as those who have no hope" [1Ths 4.13]. Speak to that people and consider what they need to hear. Talk to them about the wonderful examples of how such a great throng of people at the sea formed one body and crossed in procession with the water which formed a tent. Speak of the numerous means at noble David's disposal when he parceled himself out in countless ways by using diverse and similar tongues and had danced about the tent. Include how fire streamed from two sides, brought their light together and how it formed a channel of flowing water which extended so far that the eye could not follow it [cf. 2Kg 6.3-5, 12-14]. Mention the people's longing, the assembly of Apostles, how handkerchiefs were taken away as protection for believers [Acts 19.12]. At these words let the emperor [Theodosius] [**M.864**] be downcast over the calamity, and let him rise from his throne, approach [**J.457**] the saint's bier with the entire city, and let them all exhort each other. Solomon offered a cure for anguish. He ordered that wine be given [cf. Prov 31.6], but I say this to you who work in the vineyards, "Give your wine to those in distress, not to effect drunkenness but gladness of heart. By a purer wine in a cup and with more abundance offer the cup of preaching that once again we might turn sorrow into joy in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever. Amen."