

## ON PERFECTION

### INTRODUCTION

Gregory of Nyssa's treatise **On Perfection** is addressed to a monk named Olympios who asked direction for attaining perfection. The treatise, which is in the form of a letter, is based almost exclusively upon Paul's great Christological texts which Gregory sets forth as the best guide to imitate Christ. As the treatise unfolds, we see a picture of sanctification which is both a result of human effort and God's good grace. Fellowship (*koinonia*) in Christ's name, the "one name by which we are called Christians"(J.174), is perceived by Gregory as a gift to which we thankfully<sup>1</sup> respond by our "determination" (*spoude*). Saint Paul is set forth as the "especially sure guide"<sup>2</sup> that is, he is a model or "imitation" (*mimeis*) of Christ by a life according to virtue" (J.196).

**On Perfection** falls into one of the five so-called ascetical treatises: **On Christian Profession, On the Christian Mode of Life, On Correction** and **On Virginity**. Among these works, **On Virginity** (Gregory's first) is closely related to **On Perfection** since both treatises deal with the topic of perfection. We might add to this list the **Life of Macrina** where Gregory's ascetical doctrine is developed. The notion of perfection<sup>3</sup> (*teleiotes*) is classic: among the

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<sup>11</sup> For the relationship between thankfulness (*eucharistia*) and perfection, refer to Walter Volker's remarks in reference to Gregory's treatise, **On the Inscriptions of the Psalms**: "Der grosse Chor der Engel und Menschen verkundet Gottes Herrlichkeit und bringt seine *eucharistia* dar (PG44.484.B-C). Dies ist zwar das Bild der Endzeit, es verwicklicht sich aber bereits im Leben des *teleios*, der ja alles Zukunftige schon als gegenwartig erlebt." **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker** (Wiesbaden, 1955), p.245.

<sup>22</sup> In Gregory's other works we find Moses and David as the two other notable guides for a life according to virtue. Hans Urs von Balthasar has this to say about Paul as an Apostle: "Paul is the eyewitness of this step forward (that is, from the pre-Easter testimony), since he not only had to defend his eyewitness arduously in itself, but his eyewitness in this matter against the privilege of the other Apostles...For Paul there is no other legitimation than that of his own turning from the Old to the New Covenant and to the new man, his *conversatio morum*...the fact that his existence has been so transformed that it has become an incontestable mirroring of the image of Christ. Paul proves himself to be one who has seen essentially by letting himself be seen and by being, in fact, seen." **The Glory of the Lord** (San Francisco, 1982), p.187.

<sup>33</sup> For a modern expression of Christian perfection, refer to the Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council: "...all the faithful of Christ...are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this *perfection* they must use their *strength* according as they have received it as a *gift* from God. In this way they can follow in his footsteps and mold themselves in his *image*." **The Documents of the Second**

ancient Greeks it was considered as something stable, achieved, and not subject to change. In order to find God, perfection in itself, soul must purify itself of all foreign elements (Plato) and thus come to resemble or imitate the divine archetype. As opposed to Plato, Gregory develops the original insight that perfection lies in progress itself. This is a bold step since progress had for the Greek mind the notion of movement and hence instability and imperfection. As Jean Danielou points out<sup>4</sup>, Gregory associates change with created nature, not evil, and human nature is therefore called to change perpetually according to free choice<sup>5</sup>: This crucial fact of Gregory's anthropology and spirituality must never be forgotten in order to appreciate his contribution to Christian mysticism. The soul's essence is a participation which always grows but is never achieved; it must consent, that is, practice virtue (*arete*). Gregory skillfully shows how the virtues employed "in the civil war within our nature" (J.184) are related to manifest Christ, the true light:

We learn that our life must be enlightened by the rays of the sun of righteousness emanating for our illumination. By them works of darkness are banished that we may walk becomingly in the day. (**On Perfection**, J.185)

To find this God dwelling within us as described by Gregory of Nyssa, the soul must, as was noted above, apply "determination" (*spoude*). Nevertheless, the gratuity of God's communication in Christ is required which is different from the Platonic concept of the soul's self-perfection of all foreign elements. Virtues are not performed according to right reason but according to imitations of the divine attributes implanted in man's nature whereby he is the image of God. For Gregory, "virtue" has a richer significance than it has for Western theology. In its positive aspect it is enlightenment or illumination by God and a communication of his own holiness: "Virtues are the rays (*hai aktines*) of the sun of righteousness" (J.185)<sup>6</sup>. The soul resembles God in that it has infinite movement; it is a question of finding a movement to imitate the divine immutability which Gregory sees in his notion of progress. This central insight presents a stability, a continuity, or imitation of God. We have a fine statement of the soul's infinity as related to movement

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**Vatican Council** (New York, 1966), p.67. (My italics indicate the similarity of words in this document and in Gregory's **On Perfection**).

<sup>44</sup> *Le probleme du changement de saint Gregoire de Nyssa, Archives de Philosophie*, 29 (1966), pp.323-47.

<sup>55</sup> "When wisdom and power are manifested in us by choosing the good and by strengthening its perception, the perfection of life is achieved" (**On Perfection**, J.183).

<sup>66</sup> Compare *hai aktines* with Heb 1.3 quoted by Gregory, J.187: Christ as "the splendor (*apaugasma*) of glory and stamp (*charakter*) of God's nature." The *hai aktines* of the virtues may be set alongside the quote from Wis 7.25 below: "For she [wisdom] is the breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty."

and virtue in the **Life of Moses**:

The perfection of everything which can be measured by the senses is marked off by certain definite boundaries...But in the case of virtue, we have learned from the Apostle that its limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit...It is undoubtedly impossible to attain perfection since, as I have said, perfection is not marked off by limits: the one limit of virtue is the absence of a limit...for the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness<sup>7</sup>.

With this passage in mind it is interesting to read the following sentence from **On Perfection**: "Now the most beautiful effect of change is growth in the good since a change to things more divine is always remaking the man being changed for the better" (J.213). The present state of our human nature has a tendency towards evil that must be countered by the practice of virtue much like an athlete<sup>8</sup>. Although man has this penchant towards evil, he is called by being created in grace to participate in the divine life which is from above. Gregory indirectly stresses this otherness or gratuity in his enumeration of thirty-two names of Christ in J.175-76. It is significant that most titles deal with the foundational aspects of reality: first-born, first-fruits, principle of created beings. Although Gregory states his intention of considering Christ's titles in the order which he has listed them, he does not attribute significance to the order which seems to be lacking. All these names, of course, are based on the name of Christ, the "one name worthy of our belief" (J.174).

With Christ, the "principle of created beings," as the basis of our perfection, Gregory sees our growth in virtue as a transformation "from glory to glory" (J.214). This is perhaps the phrase for which Gregory of Nyssa is most famous, summing up as it does his entire doctrine of perpetual growth. This "mutable immutability," as Danielou puts it<sup>9</sup>, is not necessarily restricted to our choice between good and evil; there can be change within the realm of the good in the sense of progress or a continual movement to a higher good. By this continual, progressive transformation in the good, Gregory answers the question "How, then, can what is fixed and stable in the good be realized in a mutable nature?" (J.213). As Ronald Heine points out<sup>10</sup>, there are two basic presuppositions underlying the structure of thought about change in the **Life of Moses**: man cannot avoid changing either for the better or for the worse, and can control the direction of this change by his free choice. Moses or the Christian soul is always moving forward in the

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<sup>77</sup> **Life of Moses**, translated by A. Malherbe and E. Ferguseon (New York, 1978), pp.30 and 31.

<sup>88</sup> Refer to J.213 for a description of this struggle.

<sup>99</sup> "Le probleme du changement," p.334.

<sup>1010</sup> **Perfection in the Virtuous Life** (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp.58-61.

good, hence, always changing, but never alternating between good and bad. Therefore, Gregory transcends the Platonic duality of mutability/immortality, a major step in the history of Christian spirituality:

This indeed is most paradoxical of all: how the same thing is both rest and movement. For he who ascends in no way stands still and he who stands still does not ascend; but in this connection ascending takes place through standing still. This is so because the more a man remains firm and unchanging in the good, the more does he accomplish the course of virtue...using his stability as a sort of wing and furnishing his heart with wings for the upward journey through firmness of the good<sup>11</sup>.

Since the continual transformation to the better as movement "from glory to glory" is never real stability, it does not imply a falling backward. Hence continual progress and true stability can be identical, and it is on the basis of this understanding that man can have a permanence in the good. It is the foundation of man's freedom that he bears the image of God, differing inherently from his archetype in being subject to change. Such change which Plato had seen as a sign of distance from the archetype is presented by Gregory as the means by which man can regain likeness to his archetype by the positive exercise of freedom.

In light of what has just been said regarding perfection and change, Gregory offers the monk Olympios an outline for perfection as a creative promise where God's fatherhood is not inaccessible but is manifested in Christ as confronting and removing all barriers. Such divine perfection is the creative gift of the Father's Self, the "good news" within our reach. As bishop of Nyssa, Gregory combated the Eunomian heresy by not only emphasizing the divine nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but by definitely establishing the incomprehensibility of God; he stressed that our knowledge of God is the result of his presence in us by grace, the domain of the mystical life.

To show the relationship between God's incomprehensibility, a favorite theme of the Greek Fathers and our human sphere of existence, Gregory provides a clue in his use of Heb 1.3: Christ as "the splendor (*apaugasma*) of glory and stamp (*charakter*) of God's nature" (**On Perfection**, J.187). One biblical root of *apaugasma* is Wis 7.25: "for she [wisdom] is the breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty." The fluidity of words in this passage, plus those of verse 22 ('subtle, lively, clear, undefiled') receive a certain stability and contour in *charakter*. Both words,

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<sup>11</sup>**Life of Moses**, pp.117, 118. Compare the reference here of "wing" with a passage from **on Perfection**: "Therefore, what seems fearful (I mean our mutable nature) can serve as a wing for flight to better things" (J.213).

*apaugasma* and *charakter*, give expression to the mystery of beauty where an axis is found to express the personhood of Christ: his generation (passivity) corresponds to *charakter*, while his reflection (activity) is linked to the dynamic *apaugasma*. With regard to Christ's hypostatic union with his Father, Gregory says in **On Perfection**:

In explaining the Son's undivided union with his Father and envisioning him together with the limitless, eternal Father as boundlessly eternal, Paul calls him the "splendor of glory" and "very stamp of the Father's substance": by "splendor" union is shown, and by "stamp," equality...He who understands God's splendid nature has likewise understood his splendor, and he who comprehends with his mind the substance's greatness has indeed measured God's substance in his manifested stamp. For this reason Paul calls the Lord "the form (*morphe*) of God" (Phil 2.6); he does not diminish the Lord by the notion of a form, but by showing God's greatness in a form by which the Father's majesty is understood, by no means does his majesty exceed its own form nor is it found apart from his stamp. (J.189-90)

Here we have a synthesis of *apaugasma* and *charakter* in *morphe*, "form," the double act of measurement--God in man and man in God--that descends and ascends<sup>12</sup> and takes shape in us according to Gal 4.19: "until Christ be formed, *morphothe*, in you." This object of beauty, the subject so often treated in Gregory's works, is revelation, God's beauty appearing in man and man's beauty found in God through the Incarnation which brings man from a monologue to a dialogue in God's "marvelous light."

One title belonging to Christ is "head of his body, the Church" (J.175). With Christ's appearance, the Church-form is posited: "If we consider the head as pure, it befits each limb (that is, the members of the Church) to be united with the head in purity; if we consider the limbs to be pure by reason of the head's essence, this purity is indeed perfected under such a head" (J.198-99). Christ's form is not seen in isolation much like a painting, for the vertical form of Christ's descent is illegible without the horizontal form of the Church which is metamorphosed, like Paul himself, "from glory to glory." Shortly after Gregory treats of the connection between head and members, he refutes those heretics who "maintain that the Only-begotten God...is a work of God" (J.200). The eschatological theme of head/limbs makes no sense if its form is broken or misinterpreted by heretics or those who make a selective disjoining of parts (limbs). They may carefully analyze each part in itself, such as one aspect of Christ's form, but they cannot make a

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<sup>12</sup>12 This quotation from Phil 2.6 cited in **On Perfection** contains the dynamism of descent and ascent in *morphe*: "He humbled himself" (descent)... "wherefore God also has highly exalted him" (ascent).

whole from these disjointed parts.

Close to the beginning of **On Perfection** Gregory singles out Christ's kingly power, for it sets the stage upon which the Church's mystical body is developed later in J.197-200: "Thus all the power of these other names [of Christ] is contained in the word 'kingship,' and he who understands the elements contained in it knows the force which encompasses them individually" (J.177). The problem of Christian living is metaphysical: a name does not determine what an object really is, rather its underlying nature is made known by a suitable name. "A name has no substance in itself, but the underlying nature--whatever that happens to be--is signified by the appropriate meaning of a name...If anyone names himself after Christ, it is necessary to see what this name demands for persons taking it upon themselves and then to be conformed to it" (J.177-78).

*Apatheia* lies at the center of Gregory's insight of being conformed to Christ, the goal or habitual participation in the divine life<sup>13</sup>. In the treatise **On Perfection** *apatheia* represents the divinity in a creature: "But a state free from passion (*apatheia*) looks to the author of detachment" (*apatheia*)<sup>14</sup> (J.212). While the presence of *apatheia* lets us know that God's essence is inaccessible, here it serves to manifest our "likeness to the prototype." Gregory's words from **On Perfection** may be compared to what he has to say on the subject in his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:<sup>15</sup>

For the rays of that true, divine virtue shine forth in a pure life by the outflow of detachment (*apatheia*) and make the invisible visible to us, and the inaccessible comprehensible by depicting the sun in the mirror of our souls...from the virtues we obtain knowledge of the good which transcends all understanding just as the beauty of an archetype can be inferred from its image.

Jean Danielou points out<sup>16</sup> two forms of *apatheia*: one is eschatological or the stripping of mortality and sexuality on the biological level; the other is not destructive but uses passions for the restoration of the destroyed order in the soul, that is, to submit them to *nous* (mind, intelligence). Thus in the words of the **Life of Moses**, "what is mutable

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<sup>13</sup>13 "...the human person might be espoused to God by becoming a pure virgin instead of a bridegroom and by clinging to the Lord become one spirit through a union with what is pure and free from passion (*apathes*)," First Homily, **Commentary on the Song of Songs**.

<sup>14</sup>14 Walther Volker points out the similarity between *apatheia* and virginity in **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker**, p.259-64.

<sup>15</sup>15 Third Homily, **Commentary on the Song of Songs**.

<sup>16</sup>16 **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** (Paris, 1944), p.68.

and subject to passions was transformed into impassibility through its participation in the immutable"<sup>17</sup>.

At first sight this passage looks as if Gregory had in mind Plato's ascent from the material existence to the world beyond this one which is not subject to corruption. Within Plato's doctrine we find alongside the contemplation of beauty in its corporeal form the contrary tendency to ascend from all incarnational forms in order to attain beauty in itself. This anti-incarnational trend of spiritualization is offset in **On Perfection** (J.197) by Gregory's admirable depiction of Christ's passion which anticipates medieval writers in their devotion to his humanity. Christ, the "archetypal image of God," allows us to behold all his qualities and adorns us with its "splendid form" to express the invisible God through patience. Our (Christian) contemplation of this image is opposed to the distanced (Platonic) consideration of the world of the forms. Paul states that such theopia is the metamorphosis of the beholder into the image he beholds (2Cor 3.18, 'from glory to glory,' cited in J.214). *Theopia* occurs when our human existence is spread out, so to speak, under the image offered by God and Christ, the image of the invisible God, and unfolds *into* the person contemplating it with the consequence of our being established in *apatheia* or virtue. Such was the metamorphosis of Paul who assumed Christ's form.

**On Perfection** explicitly asserts that Christ, "mediator between the Father and those who have lost their inheritance" (J.205), did not only receive the "first fruits of our common nature through his soul and body, "but he will also admit us "to share in his divinity" if we are clean from sin. No mention is made here of any physical contact<sup>18</sup> between limbs and head, but assimilation is made on the basis of the mediator's purity: "(the Christian) will be admitted to partake of the divinity by the mediator after having become pure to receive its purity" (J.205). This assumption of human nature as "first fruits" shows that Christ had a concrete human physis, an individual manhood which extended to all our human nature. As Reinhard Hubner has pointed out, the Incarnation touches all humanity by means of Christ as *aparche*<sup>19</sup>. Just as Adam had imperfectly

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<sup>17</sup>17 **Life of Moses**, p.61.

<sup>18</sup>18 The union is effected by "Christ's own divine power," *dunamis* (J.204-05).

<sup>19</sup>19 "Nicht die physische Konsubstantialität des Erstlings und Breis ist, wie es hatte scheinen können, der die Universalität des Heils verbürgende Grund, sondern die Angleichung an die Reinheit des Mittlers, die eine neue, gestige Konsubstantialität begründet. Bezeichnenderweise besteht die 'naturgemasse' Homouseität des Hauptes des Leibes der Kirche mit seinen Gliedern...in Reinheit, Unvergänglichkeit, Fried, Heiligung, Wahrheit...Die eschatologische Einheit des Leibes, die in dem universalen Besitz der ursprünglichen Gottenbildlichkeit liegt, wird durch die Tugend ewahrleistet." **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), pp.200-1.

showed the ideal man, Paul's thought as later developed by Irenaeus and Gregory manifests the tendency to stress humanity as a whole, not the individual. Just as all mankind has partaken of Adam's sin, so is it restored in Christ:

Christ brought the Spirit's grace upon the first fruits of our nature so that all those born into life from a spiritual rebirth might bear the name of "brothers of the first born" through water and the Spirit. **On Perfection**, J.202.

As well as treating the relationship between head and limbs (member of the Church) in **On Perfection**, Gregory's other short treatise<sup>20</sup> treats the matter more carefully with regard to the notion of subjection (*hupotage*). Here is a parallel two passages from both treatises:

### **A Treatise on First Corinthians 15.28:**

Unity then means to be one body with [Christ], for all who are joined to the one body of Christ by participation are one body with him. When the good pervades everything, then the entirety of Christ's body will be subjected to God's vivifying power. Thus the subjection (*hupotage*) of this body will be said to be the subjection of the Son himself as united to his own body, that is, the Church. (PG44.1317A)

### **On Perfection:**

The entire head has the same nature and substance as the body under its subjection (*to hupokeimeno*), and the individual members as a whole partake of a single unity effecting a full cooperation among the limbs in every activity. (J.197)

The first passage stresses subjection of the Church's body to Christ with the good pervading all limbs or members to make them equal. This equality means that each limb retains its proper distinction or function in Christ yet all are the same in relation to the head. Once all the limbs are pervaded by Christ, a "second subjection" occurs, that is, of Christ to the Father: "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" (**A Treatise on First Corinthians 15.28**, M.1320A). Gregory thus interprets

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<sup>20</sup> ***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 by Saint Gregory of Nyssa***, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 28 (1983), pp.1-25.



Paul's notion of subjection as "human nature in its entirety" (1320B) under the twofold subjection of Christ and to the Father. Christ comes *from* his vision of the Father and always has it "at his back," so to speak, while he is always on his way *back* to the Father. As coming from the Father, he is always caught up in the act of incarnation or bringing vision into existence and of contemplation into action. As returning to the Father, Christ is forever handing man over (subjecting) to God. Being this twofold movement from God to man and from man to God, Christ is the very center of the New Covenant, the perfect correspondence between God and man.

The second passage (**On Perfection**) stresses the unity of head and body which cooperate in action. Each limb as *eikon* is the expression or "equipment"<sup>21</sup> of man with the divine power signifying the original perfection of each one's *phusis* so that *eikon* and *homoiosis* become synonymous: *Homoiosis* as applied to man is clear, that is, it is the sum of the uttermost possibilities of man's likeness to God not only by nature but the whole supernatural life of which man is capable. A quotation from **On Christian Profession** clarifies this:

If we who are united to him by faith in him are called by a name (Christian) surpassing those which explain his incorruptible nature by means of this name, it must in consequence be identical in us. (PG 46.241D-44)

Gregory then proceeds in this treatise, which is akin to **On Perfection**, to speak of links of a chain joined together with Christ as link forming a circle and identifies the meaning of Christianity as "imitation of the divine nature" (244C). The notion of a circle (perfection) may also be equated with the balance between *eikon* and *homoiosis* in each limb: such is another way of looking at subjection and the modelling of ourselves on Christ's form (*morphe*) with its twofold composition of descent and ascent. This keeps in line with the theme dear to the Greek Fathers of knowing God's incorruptible nature. "The word 'kingdom'" contains the reality of all the other names (of Christ, J.177)." Gregory singles out this term in **Perfection** which is consistent with the notions of subjection and balance of *eikon* and *homoiosis*. His stress on the development of *eikon* and its consequence for his teaching on virtue rests not so much on individual persons but on humankind as a whole as *eikon*, the subject of **On the Making of Man**. The main ingredient of knowledge of God through our *eikon* is faith leading to a relationship with Christ: "The beginning of erecting this exalted life is faith; upon such a foundation we lay the principles of our life" (**On Perfection**, J.193). This life is a succession of inner ascents from which new horizons continually open out from our practice of asceticism. Thus while Gregory makes a distinction between asceticism and mysticism, he sees a

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<sup>21</sup>Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker, p.67.

continual passage from one to the other<sup>22</sup>.

Gregory ends his treatise **On Perfection** with the very word "perfection" just as he began it (in verbal form). In his **Life of Moses**, the bishop of Nyssa points out the similarity between "end" and "goal" (*telos*), a term closely connected with "perfection" (*teleiotes*):

I mean by "goal" that for the sake of which everything is done; the goal of agriculture is the enjoyment of its fruits; the goal of building a house is living in it; the goal of commerce is wealth; and the goal of striving in contests is the prize. In the same way, too, the goal of the sublime way of life is being called a servant of God<sup>23</sup>.

The *telos* of life according to virtue is beatitude, but since God is "blessed" in the truest sense, we are blessed by participation in him, and both the definition of human beatitude and the *telos* of life according to virtue consists in assimilation to God: "the characteristics of the true Christian are the same we apply to Christ. We imitate those characteristics we can assume while we venerate and worship what our nature cannot imitate" (J.178). The "restless concentration"<sup>24</sup> upon our heavenly goal restores us to the angelic life (*isaggelos*, or better, life on the same plane as the angels). Such is the dynamic, on-going process of our *epektasis*, a movement toward the good which is not circumscribed by any limit<sup>25</sup>. **On Perfection** closes with mention of a "wing," our mutable human nature, which serves "for flight to better things" (J.213). We may parallel such a wing with the angels' wings who continually fly upward "from glory to glory" (J.214). While Gregory may present himself to the monk as an unworthy example of perfection, he suggests that the ideals of the Christian life, while lofty, are attainable but only with a genuine struggle. The Christian must take courage, for change is a guarantee of progress in the spiritual life: by daily growth (the Christian) always becomes better and is always being perfected (*aei teleiounenos*) yet never attains perfection's goal (*pros to peras tes teleiotetos*)<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup>Gregory stresses this inner relationship with Christ in his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**. Although the ascetical aspect gets due attention, he develops Origen's Christological teaching, that is, participation in Christ's sonship which makes us children of God. As a result of the Christological controversies of the fourth century, Gregory refined it further, seeing the spiritual life as an organic whole whose germ lies in the mystery of baptism.

<sup>23</sup>**Life of Moses**, p.136.

<sup>24</sup>**Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker**, p.233.

<sup>25</sup>"Der stufenformige Aufstieg zur Vollkommenheit ist also zugleich eine immer reinere Aufprägung der *isaggelos*-Wurde." **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker**, p.245.

<sup>26</sup>Note the dynamic thrust of *pros*, "towards, in the direction of," as in Jn 1.1: "and the Word

The critical text, **De Perfectione**, may be found in vol. 8, #1, edited by Werner Jaeger (Leiden, 1952), pp.173-214. The text by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca**, vol.46, cols. 252-85 (Paris, 1858).

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was *with* God," *pros ton Theon*.

## THE TEXT

**[J.173 & M.252]** You manifest a determination to know how you can perfect your life in accord with virtue so that through all events you may succeed in being blameless in life. I would especially like good examples to be found in my own life for offering instruction in facts rather than in theory. I wish this to be eventually accomplished, even though I do not see such a thing happening in me, and to give my life as an example instead of mere words. In order that it might not appear entirely imperfect nor an unprofitable example for you, I thought of suggesting an outline for right living which begins as follows.

Our good Lord Jesus Christ offered us fellowship in **[J.174]** his name so that anything else we can name is of no profit to us, whether riches, a noble family, being low-born, poor, or any dignity resulting from pursuits or honors. One name is worthy of our belief, the one by which we are called Christians. Once we have received this favor from above, we must first consider the greatness of this gift. Having been made worthy of showing the same name of the Lord of our lives, it is clear that we recognize it as symbolic of Christ's name. Furthermore, when we call upon the Lord of the universe **[M.253]** in our prayers, we are including such a meaning in our minds, for we believe we are piously calling upon him by this name while contemplating it. By assuming this name as a teacher and guide for our lives, we will learn to manifest progressively through the determination of our lives how we should act. We will have the blessed Paul for **[J.175]** a sure guide whose example will clarify the object of our inquiry. Of all persons he is exceptionally noteworthy: he understood who Christ is and those requirements needed by the person named after him. Paul spoke of what he himself had accomplished and accurately imitated him in a manner to show the Lord expressed in his own person. By careful imitation Paul became a model so that no longer is Paul perceived as living and speaking but Christ lives in him. He who had well perceived his own good said so well, "You seek proof that Christ is speaking in me" (2Cor 13.3), and that "I live no longer; Christ lives in me" (Gal 2.20).

Paul's words show us the significance of Christ's name when saying that he is the power and wisdom of God. But he also called Christ peace, inaccessible light where God dwells, sanctification, redemption, the great high priest and Pasch, propitiation of souls, splendor of glory, stamp of [God's] substance and maker of the ages, **[J.176]** spiritual food and drink, rock, water, foundation of faith, chief cornerstone, image of the great and invisible God, head of his body the Church, first-born among many brothers, mediator of God and of men, only-begotten Son crowned with glory, the principle of created beings which he, the beginning, said about himself (Col 1.18). Christ is the beginning, king of righteousness, king of peace and in addition to these, king of all things with his infinite power of lordship; he has many other names which cannot be easily numbered. Since all

these titles are related to each other, understanding each one by itself contributes to manifest its meaning and the significance of Christ's name in as much as we can comprehend it for revealing God's ineffable greatness. Since the dignity of [God's] kingdom transcends every honor, power and sovereignty, the name of Christ rightly and above all designates **[J.177]** God's kingly power (for it precedes the king's anointing as we have learned in the historical books, 1Sam 9.16) while the word "kingdom" contains the reality of all the other terms.

Thus the word "kingship" sums up these other names, and he who understands its meaning knows their individual significance. This is the kingdom indicated **[M.256]** by the name of Christ. Since the good Lord has allowed us fellowship in the greatest, most divine and first of names to make us worthy of being called Christians by Christ's name, we must realize every term explaining this name so that the name given us is not false but is borne out by our lives. A name has no substance in itself but the underlying nature--whatever that happens to be--is signified by the appropriate meaning of a name. I give an example: if the name "man" is attributed to a tree or a rock, will a man be a plant or stone because of a name? No, but it is necessary for a man to first exist, and he can then assume the appropriate the name of his nature. Names are not applied on the basis of similarities, as if one calls a man a statue or a horse its image; yet if anyone accurately bestows a name on an object, its true nature will correspond with the name. If a material imitates any substance it takes this name: bronze, stone, or **[J.178]** whatever that art has imposed on it and has given shape to its appearance.

If a person names himself after Christ we must see what this name demands and then conform to it. This resembles a distinction made from properties between the picture and the true man where the distinction is made from the properties of each (for the rational animal is called intellectual while the other is an inanimate material taking on an image by imitation). Thus we recognize both the true and apparent Christian by the properties of their respective manifestations. The characteristics of the true Christian are the same we apply to Christ. We imitate those qualities we can assume while we venerate and worship what our nature cannot imitate. A Christian life must radiate with all the names describing the meaning of Christ: those we imitate and those we worship if the man of God is to be perfect and does not mutilate the good with anything evil as the Apostle says (2Tim 3.17).

For instance, mythical stories are constructed either through literature or works of art such as beasts with a bull's head, centaurs, serpents with feet, or anything **[J.179]** fashioned from different kinds of animals. They do not resemble the archetype in nature but manifest it through a confused idea: they give shape to something else, not a man, bestowing reality to unreality. No one can say that man was formed through this absurd composition even if part of the image should resemble an aspect of the human body.

Thus the Christian with an irrational beast's head would not be properly named, that is, if he is not attached in faith to the head of the universe which is the Word. **[M.257]** Although perfect in other parts, he does not fittingly show the body's manner of life by having faith in the head. He has the same nature as wild serpents and has become like reptiles or lustful horses in human form or like a centaur with a double nature, rational and irrational. One can see many people like this with the head of a calf, that is, a system of idolatrous belief for directing their lives--such persons depict the Minotaur--or those with a Christian face who conform their bodies to a beast-like existence; they form centaurs or serpent-footed creatures. Just as with regard to the human body, the Christian should be recognized as fully equipped with every endowment proper to Christ: the **[J.180]** characteristics of his life signify his faith. If one part wishes to have this name [that is, Christian], the others must be declined; no alternative exists except to destroy in oneself through virtue the enemy's host and the implacable, irreconcilable revolt of evil. As the Apostle says, "What fellowship does light have with darkness" (2Cor 6.14)?

Because what is opposed to the light cannot be mixed or joined with it, the person having both elements (that is, light and darkness) does not eliminate one of them by setting them in opposition to each other; he is divided because light and darkness are simultaneously present in his life. While faith lets in light, a dark life obscures one's splendor. Light's fellowship can neither be joined nor reconciled with darkness; for this reason the person embracing one of these opposing elements has war within himself. He has a division between virtue and evil drawn up in himself much like a hostile battle-order. Just as two enemies fighting each other cannot share the victory (for the victory of one brings about the ruin of the other), the **[J.181]** better part has no victory with regard to this domestic struggle arising from a composite life unless the other side is utterly destroyed. For how can the army of true religion prevail against evil while the force of wickedness fights against it? If the good is to conquer, the adversary must be annihilated. Thus virtue will be victorious against evil when the entire army is destroyed in combat with the assistance of good thoughts. The words of God spoken in prophecy will then be fulfilled: "I kill and I will make alive" (Dt 32.39), for the good in me cannot otherwise live unless brought to life by the enemy's death. As long as we have these two elements (good and evil) in opposition to one another, it is impossible to partake **[M.260]** of them both, for when we lay hold of evil virtue slips from our grasp.

Let us once again return to the beginning of our discussion because there is one path to a pure, divine life for lovers of virtue, and that is to know the meaning of Christ's name to which our life must be conformed and shaped according to virtue through the manifestation of his other names. We will mention such words and names at the beginning of our treatise explaining the significance of Christ from the saintly Paul. By presenting these words to stimulate us, we will make a sure path for a life according **[J.182]** to virtue by imitating, worshiping and revering them. Let the enumeration of

such terms form an order for us, and we can begin with the first names: Paul says that Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1Cor 1.24). These words first teach us about those notions befitting God through Christ's name which becomes worthy of our adoration. Since all creation is known by sense perception and both its origin and constitution transcends sense understanding being, wisdom is by necessity united to power for defining the meaning of Christ who made the universe. This is what we understand by the union of these two terms, power and wisdom. The great, inexpressible marvels of creation would not exist unless wisdom intended their birth while power accompanied wisdom to perfect [wisdom's] designs, thereby bring this intention to fulfillment.

The significance of Christ is two-fold, wisdom and power. When considering the great order of living beings, we understand God's immense power through what we comprehend. When we take into **[J.183]** account that things without being came into existence while nature's multiformity is invested with being through the divine command. Only then can we worship Christ's incomprehensible wisdom who has them in mind and whose thoughts effect action. It will be to our advantage to believe Christ as power and wisdom for creating what is good. For the person who prays calls upon him; looking with his soul's eyes, he is drawn near him through prayer. He is strengthened by power according to the inner man, as the Apostle says, and looks upon the power [that is, Christ]. He becomes wise as Proverbs says (2.2), by invoking wisdom which is again understood as the Lord. Therefore he who has assumed Christ's name--for he is wisdom and power--and shares this name by reason of power, fights valiantly against sin and will manifest wisdom in himself by choosing the good. When wisdom and power are manifested in us by choosing the good and by strengthening its perception, life, which is composed by these two elements, achieves its goal. By understanding Christ as peace we will manifest the true name of Christian if we show Christ in **[M.261]** our life by his peace: he destroyed the enemy, as the Apostle says (Eph 2.14). Let none of us hand over life to this enemy; rather, let us exhibit his death in our lives.

**[J.184]** Let us never incite to our soul's detriment what God has slain for our salvation through anger and the recollection of injuries. If we followed this path, we would bring about a bad resurrection of what has been put to death. But if we have Christ who is peace, let us kill the enemy in ourselves; by believing in him we will follow him in our lives. Christ destroyed the intervening wall and formed one man in himself out of two, thereby making peace (Eph 2.14). Let us hasten to reconcile not only those fighting outside us but those rebelling within, that the flesh may no longer lust against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh (Gal 5.17). With the flesh's prudence subjected to the divine law, we may enjoy peace within, having been transformed into one new peaceful man and with the two becoming one. The definition of peace is harmony of discordant elements. When the civil war in our nature is destroyed, we become peace by cultivating

it and by showing the true, proper name of Christ. By understanding Christ as the true light (Jn 1.9) which has no part in falsehood, we learn that **[J.185]** the rays of the true light must enlighten our lives. Virtues are the rays of the sun of righteousness emanating for our illumination. They banish works of darkness enabling us to walk becomingly in the day (Rom 13.12-13) after having renounced hidden, shameful works. With all our actions done in the light we become light itself so that we may illumine others about what befits the light. If we understand Christ as our sanctification (1Cor 1.30) and reject every unholy, impure deed and thought, we will truly show ourselves as sharing his name. We will confess the power of his name and the power of his sanctification not by words but by our lives' good deeds.

Christ as our redemption who gave himself as a ransom for us teaches that just as he granted us immortality by becoming a kind of payment for each soul, he made as his own those he redeemed from death through life (1Tim 2.6). If we have become servants of him who redeemed us, we look to him who rules over us; no longer do we live for ourselves but for him who acquired us when he exchanged his life (1Cor 6.20). No longer are we masters of ourselves but he who purchased us is the Lord of his own possessions and we are his own property. Therefore, the law of our life is his governing will. While death held us in its grasp, **[J.186]** the law of sin prevailed (Rom 8.2); since we have **[M.264]** become the possession of life, our mode of living must conform to his governing authority. In this way we will not deviate from the will of life and never again fall subject through sin to our souls' wicked tyranny which I call death.

Consideration of these things unites us to Christ provided that we are attentive to Paul who calls him the Pasch (1Cor 5.7) and high priest (Heb 4.14). Christ the Pasch was truly sacrificed for us, but the priest offering sacrifice to God is no other than Christ himself: "He gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice" (Eph 5.2). Christ who gave himself as an offering and the sacrifice became the Pasch and presented himself to God as a sacrifice: living, holy, acceptable, and a spiritual worship (Rom 12.1). However, this kind of sacrifice must no longer conform to the present age but must be transformed by the renewal of one's mind for proving what is the good, **[J.187]** acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12.2). God's good will is not manifested in the life of the flesh unless the flesh is sacrificed according to the spiritual law; the flesh's prudence is inimical to God and is not subject to his law (Rom 8.7). While the flesh is alive--for it is to be sacrificed through a living victim by the mortification of our bodily limbs (Col 3.5) which bring about passions--it is impossible for the acceptable, perfect will of God to be accomplished without impediment in the life of believers. By understanding Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice with his own blood, Paul teaches that we all may become a propitiatory sacrifice by purifying our souls through the mortification of our limbs. When Christ is mentioned as the "splendor of glory and stamp of God's nature" (Heb 1.3), we recognize his majesty as worthy of adoration. As truly inspired and



divinely instructed, Paul searched in the depths of the wealth of wisdom and knowledge of God for his hidden, secret mysteries (2Cor 12.4). He was divinely illumined with regard to the perception of unsearchable, unutterable matters because his tongue was too weak for his thoughts. Upon hearing [what was unutterable] he comprehended the mystery **[J.188]** as through sparks, and he expressed himself as much as speech could serve his thought. Although our human constitution can recognize whatever pertains to the divine nature, God's transcendent essence is totally incomprehensible to human reasoning.

What we have considered in connection with the divine nature--peace, power, life, righteousness, light, truth and so forth--declares that God can never be comprehended. Paul says that God can never be seen nor gazed upon: "Whom no one has seen nor can see" (1Tim 6.16). **[M.265]** In seeking a name for what cannot be grasped by concepts he did not find a name to express the incomprehensible. As a result Paul names "glory" and "substance" that which transcends every good and can never adequately be understood nor expressed. Paul said that the transcendent "substance of beings" has no name. In explaining the Son's inseparable union with his Father and envisioning him together with the limitless, eternal Father as boundlessly eternal, Paul calls him the "splendor of glory" and "very stamp of the Father's substance": "splendor" shows union and equality reveals **[J.189]** "stamp." Nothing lies in between the Father's light and his splendid nature, nor is there any diminishment of the stamp with respect to his substance stamped by the Son; instead, he who understands God's splendid nature has also comprehended his splendor, and he whose spirit comprehends the substance's greatness measures God's substance in his manifested stamp. For this reason Paul calls the Lord "the form of God" (Phil 2.6); he does not diminish the Lord by any form, but by showing God's greatness in a form to make the Father's majesty comprehensible, his majesty does not exceed its own form nor is it found apart from his stamp: there is nothing formless and unbecoming to the Father who makes himself known by the Only-begotten Son's beauty. The Lord says, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14.10). This statement shows neither lack nor excess [on the Son's part].

By saying that God bears everything by the word of his power (Heb 1.3), Paul dispels the perplexity persons have about uninvestigated matters. While seeking the reason for material existence they do not show curiosity when asking "How does matter come from what is immaterial?" And, "How does quality come from what lacks quality, form from formlessness, color from what is invisible and the limited from the unbounded? **[J.190]** If no quality pertains to what is simple and uncompounded, why is matter subject to measurement?" The person asking these questions finds a solution because the Word bears everything by his word of power from non-existence into existence. Everything with a material or immaterial nature has one cause, the Word of inexpressible power. This teaches us to look to him, the source of created beings. If we

have come into existence and are established in him, we must believe that nothing lies outside his knowledge in whom we are, from whom we have come into existence and to whom we return. With this in mind, it is possible to retain our innocence. What person who believes to live from, through and in him (Rom 11.36) dares to give witness by an unsuitable life to him who embraces all persons?

The divine Apostle names the Lord spiritual food and **[M.268]** drink (1Cor 10.3-4). Here Paul is suggesting that human nature is not simple, but he considers that the spiritual is mixed with the sensible in us with the food appropriate to each element: corporeal food strengthens the body while spiritual food gives health to our souls. But just as the combination of solid and moist food preserves our human nature after they **[J.191]** have been properly digested, in a corresponding manner Paul combines spiritual food: he calls food and drink the same and fittingly adapts them for use by those to whom they have been given. Bread is for the weak and tired since it strengthens man's heart; wine is for those wearied from this life's hardship gladdens thirsty hearts (Ps 103.15).

These words teach us the power of scripture which nourishes the soul in its need after receiving grace from God according to the mystery expressed by the prophet (Ps 22.2) who indicates consolation by a place of green grass and restful waters for those laboring. If anyone pondering this mystery says that the Lord is rightly named food and drink, this does not detract from its proper meaning, for his flesh is truly food and his blood is truly drink (Jn 6.55). But the sense expressed here is participation in the Word by each person according to his capacity; it becomes food and drink offered without discrimination after it is received by those seeking him. In **[J.192]** another sense participation in this food and drink requires a careful, thoughtful examination of oneself. The Apostle states more specifically, "Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1Cor 11.28-9). To me the Evangelist (Lk 23.53) confirms this statement when at the time of Christ's mystical passion that noble member of the council [Nicodemus] received the Lord's body in a spotless, pure linen cloth and placed him in a new, unused tomb. Therefore, every law of the Apostles and observance of the Gospel becomes our norm to receive Christ's holy body with a pure conscience; if anyone has a blemish due to sin, he cleanses it by the water of tears.

Because Christ is a rock (1Cor 10.4), our lives should be firm and stable according to virtue, and we should firmly endure sufferings, resist every **[M.269]** assault of sin and manifest a constant, steadfast soul. These and similar qualities transform us into the rock imitating the Lord's immutability and constancy as far as possible for our mutable nature. If the rock is named the foundation of faith (Eph 2.20) and chief cornerstone (Lk 20.17) by the wise architect (1Cor 3.10), it will show us that a life according to virtue is

profitable. These examples **[J.193]** teach us that the Lord is both beginning and end of every good manner of life, knowledge and undertaking (Col 1.27). The hope we understand as the head to which all our virtuous undertakings look receives its name by Paul (2Cor 1.7). The beginning of erecting this exalted life is faith (Lk 14.28) in Christ; upon such a foundation we lay the principles of our life, and it effects noble thoughts and deeds in our daily affairs. The head of the universe becomes our head fitting itself to the two walls of our lives--body and soul--which are built by correct behavior and purity through the cornerstone's unity. If any other part of the building is deficient because it is not constructed in accord with a lovely, pure soul or does not manifest the soul's virtue, Christ would not be the head of this half-completed life. He fits himself to the building by an angle consisting of two parts only, for it is impossible to have an angle without two walls touching each other. Then the cornerstone's beauty will be set upon our structure when on **[J.194]** both sides this two-fold life which has nothing crooked or bent will be fittingly extended according to the straight norm of life with the cord of virtues.

Paul calls Christ the image of the invisible God (Col 1.15), the God who is over all things and the great God (With these words he proclaims the true God's greatness saying "of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ"--Tit 2.13, and "from whom is Christ according to the flesh who is God over all, blessed forever"--Rom 9.5). Paul teaches us here that God is the one who eternally exists (He is the one who alone is greater than human comprehension; if a person understanding the things above constantly draws near to him, God remains forever transcendent by equal measure). The One who is unutterable, ineffable and indescribable transcends all knowledge and comprehension for the purpose of **[J.195]** making you God's image. He became the image of the invisible God out of love so that in his own form which he assumed, you might be conformed through him to the stamp of archetypal beauty for becoming what he was from the beginning. If we are to become the invisible God's image, we must model the form of our life upon the pattern given us (Jn 13.15). What is this model? He who **[M.272]** lives in the flesh does not live according to it (Rom 8.12). That prototype is the image of the invisible God; having become man through the Virgin, he was tempted in all things according to the likeness of human nature yet did not experience sin. "He committed no sin, neither was any guile found in his mouth" (1Pt 2.22).

If we learn the art of painting, our teacher gives us a certain beautiful form on a tablet: each person's painting must imitate that form's beauty so that all our tablets might share the model **[J.196]** of beauty set before us. If each picture is one's own life while the choice of this work is the artist's and the colors are virtues which express the image, there is a danger that the archetypal beauty's imitation can be remodeled into an ugly, deformed face; instead of the Lord's form we shadow it over with the marks of evil by means of unattractive colors. But it is possible for the virtues' pure colors skillfully combined with each other to imitate beauty that we might be an image of the Image, expressing through

our works the prototype's beauty by imitation, as it were, as Paul has done who had become an imitator of Christ by a virtuous life (1Cor 4.16)? If we must distinguish the colors in scripture which present an imitation of the image, one is humility: "Learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11.29). Another color is patience: How is it manifested in the image of the invisible God?: swords and cudgels, chains and whips, blows [J.197] on the cheeks, face spat upon, a wounded shoulder, a wicked judgment, harsh decree, soldiers enjoying their hostile remarks with mockery, sarcasm and blows from a reed; they offer him nails, gall, vinegar and unimaginable horror, especially in exchange for his innumerable benefits. What defense do we have? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23.34). Was it impossible to rend heaven against them, to destroy their violence by splitting the earth open, to cast upon them a rain of fire as upon Sodom and to bring grievous afflictions against them? But Christ bore these afflictions with meekness and patience and gave you an example of patience for your life. By considering all the other aspects pertaining to the archetypal image of God and by adorning oneself according to its splendid form, patience expresses the invisible God's image.

[M.273] He who teaches Christ as the head of the Church (Eph 5.23) holds this observation as most important: the entire head has the same nature and substance as the body under subjection, and the individual members as a whole share a single unity effecting cooperation among the limbs in every activity. If anything is external to the body, it does not belong to the head. Therefore [J.198] the head has the same nature as each member in order that they may conform to it. But we are the limbs which contribute to Christ's body. Should anyone who has become a limb of Christ do evil (1Cor 6.15) by taking up the sword of unbridled rage, this wicked passion has severed the limb from its head. Thus the remaining organs of evil become swords which sever limbs from the body's unity, and all the limbs are severed from the head as if the passions had made the cut.

In order that the entire body might have the same nature, each limb must be united to the head; if we consider the head to be pure by reason of its essence, the [J.199] limbs must be made pure under such a head. If we understand the head as incorrupt, the limbs are necessarily incorrupt. As for the other notions with regard to the head, it follows that they are likewise perceived in the limbs: peace, purity, truth and so forth. This example and similar elements manifested in the limbs show an affinity with the head. The Apostle says that Christ is the head from whom the entire body is fit together and connected by every joint performing its task and which makes the body grow according to each member's capacity (Eph 4.16). The term "head" also applies to animals as the principle for their bodies' actions; the eye and ear effects movement and action of their feet and limbs. Neither does the eye know its actions nor does the ear obtain guidance as it ought when things are brought to its attention: every impulse and action of our bodies must be

moved in accord with the true head to wherever he who formed the eye or planted [J.200] the ear directs it (Ps 93.9). When the head looks above, the limbs ought to be united under the head's direction and have their impulse directed on high.

Whenever we hear Christ called the "First-born of creation" (Col 1.15), the "First-born from the dead" (Col 1.18) and "First-born among many brothers" (Rom 8.29), we should first refute any heretical opinions so that according to Paul, their fabricated doctrine may have no excuse for evil. Next let us consider what he has to say about our ethical life. Since [M.276] heretics maintain that the Only-begotten God, the Creator of the universe from whom, through whom, and in whom are all things (Rom 11.36), is a work of God as well as a creature and something made, they define the First-born of all creation as the brother of creation preceding his elders in time. Such was the case of Reuben and his brothers (Gen 29.32): he was not predetermined by nature but preceded his elders in time. First, it must be said against the heretics that they do not believe Christ to be the Only-begotten and First-born, for neither does the Only-begotten [J.201] have brothers nor does the First-born lack them. If Christ is the Only-begotten, he does not have brothers; if he is the First-begotten of his brothers, neither is he the Only-begotten, nor can this be said of him.

Since these names are incompatible and have nothing in common as pertaining to Christ, it is impossible to call him the two names, that is, the Only-begotten and First-born. But when scripture speaks of the Word existing in the beginning, he is the Only-begotten of God; Paul says that he is the First-born of all creation (Col 1.15). It behooves us to judge name to accurately understand the Only-begotten as the Word who existed before the ages; however, all creation was made in Christ, the Word who became the First-born by his incarnation. If we understand Christ as the First-born from the dead and First-born among many brothers, we will comprehend that he is the First-born of creation. [J.202] Therefore, Christ is the First-born from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1Cor 15.20) for the purpose of resurrecting all flesh. When we who were first children of wrath (Eph 2.3) were about to be made sons of day and sons of light (1Ths 5.5) by a rebirth from above through water and the Spirit (Jn 3.3-5), Christ became our guide to such a birth in the Jordan River. He brought the Spirit's grace upon the first fruits of our nature so that all those born into life from a spiritual rebirth might bear the name of "brothers of the First-born" through water and the Spirit. We stay within the bounds of reverent opinion by understanding the First-born of creation as begotten in Christ. Since the old creation has passed away as having been rendered useless through sin (2Cor 5.17), the new creation of life constituted by a rebirth and resurrection from the dead succeeded the passing away of those things which had been destroyed. The leader and author of this new creation is the First-born of creation and bears this title. But we must answer our adversaries to adequately defend the truth against persons wishing to cause trouble.

**[J.203]** In order to clarify these words which contribute to a virtuous life, let us briefly explain them. Reuben was the first-born of the brothers born after him (Gen 29.32), but he testified to his kinship for those born after him and was a clear sign to his status of first-born **[M.277]** so that a similarity of [bodily] form testifies to knowledge of his brethren. If we have become brothers of the Lord who became the First-born among many brothers through a similar rebirth by water and the Spirit, certain characteristics in our lives should manifest a close relationship to him, the First-born of creation, who was conformed to our life. What characteristics of that form has scripture taught us? We have often said that "He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth" (1Pt 2.22). If we are to be named brothers of him who brought us into birth, innocence of life will constitute our relationship with him provided that no impurity separates us from a union in innocence. The First-born is justice, holiness, love, redemption and so forth. If these qualities characterize our lives, we will manifest **[J.204]** the brilliant marks of our nobility that they may bear witness to that fact that we are Christ's brothers. He is the one who opened the door to our resurrection, and due to this he has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Because we all will rise in a twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet blast (1Cor 15.52), Christ showed the resurrection in himself and then in other persons under death's sway.

Not everyone rising from the earth's sepulcher will have the same state of life. As Christ says "Those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (Jn 5.29). If a person regarding that formidable judgment bears false witness to Christ's name--even if he happens to be counted among the Lord's brothers by a birth from above--he has denied his close relationship with the First-born by assuming an evil form. However, the mediator of God and man (1Tim 2.5) who joined the human race to God through his own person brings into union with God only that person who is worthy of it. When Christ united man to himself by the power **[J.205]** of his divinity, he assumed part of our common nature not subject to nature's passions which excite us to sin (for it says "He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth"). Christ will unite each person with his divinity provided that they have no hindrance preventing their union with God. Should a person be a temple of God (1Cor 3.16) and has no idol nor image of evil, he will be admitted to partake of the divinity by the mediator after having become pure to receive his purity (Wisd 1.4). As scripture says, wisdom will not enter a wicked soul (Mt 5.8), nor will the pure in heart see in himself anything other than God; by clinging to him through incorruptibility, this person has received every good kingdom.

What has been said might will become clear if we **[M.280]** include an interpretation of the Lord's words which he spoke through Mary to the Apostles: "I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God" (Jn 20.17). The

mediator between the Father and those who have lost their inheritance (Jas 4.4) speaks these words; he reconciled through his own person God's enemies to the true, sole divinity. According to the prophetic word (Ps 57.4) men were alienated through sin from the life-giving womb and wandered from this womb **[J.206]** in which they have been formed; they now speak lies instead of the truth. Because Christ received the first fruits of our common nature through his soul and body, he made it holy and kept it in himself as unmixed and uncontaminated with any evil; by offering [the first fruits of our common nature] through incorruptibility to the Father of incorruptibility, he might draw all those of the same kin and race (Eph 1.5) and adopt the disinherited and God's enemies to share his divinity. Just as purity and detachment united the dough's first fruit with the true Father and God, we, the mass of dough, should cling to the Father of incorruptibility by imitating the mediator's detachment and immutability as far as possible. We will be the crown of the Only-begotten God made from precious stones, having become his honor and glory through our lives. Paul says "You have made him a little less than the angels" (Heb 2.7-9) through death's sufferings. After having transformed those of a thorny nature which resulted from sin, Christ fashioned a crown for himself through the dispensation of his death; he changed the thorn into honor and glory by his suffering. Once Christ bore the world's sin and received on his head a crown woven from thorns in order to make a crown of honor and glory, there is no small danger of finding a burr and thorn **[J.207]** resulting from an evil life which was then inserted in the Lord's crown by union with his body. The righteous voice says "How did you get in here without a wedding garment" (Mt 22.12)? How were you, a thorn, woven with those fixed to my crown through honor and glory? "What accord has Christ with Belial? What has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What fellowship has light with darkness" (2Cor 6.15)? That these words might not reprove us, we must be attentive for warding off every thorny deed, word and thought. Then we might crown the head of the universe as the Lord's valuable possession by having our honor and glory through a pure, detached way of living, for the Lord of glory allows nothing dishonorable to share in his glory (1Cor 2.8). Thus the person who does not accept anything unseemly and abominable both interiorly and exteriorly sets the Lord of glory over himself--not dishonor--for he is the Lord both in substance and in name.

Christ is the origin of every creature and is associated with those beings which come from him (Col 1.18). If **[M.281]** life is defined as the beginning, it is understood as coming after the beginning; if light is the beginning, it too comes after the beginning. What profit, then, is there to believe **[J.208]** Christ as the beginning? Indeed he is our beginning as we have believed. Light is not named the beginning of darkness, nor have we understood that death existed with the beginning when life had been constituted. But if anyone similar in nature has not been joined through detachment and virtue to the beginning, it would be other than the one belonging to all things. The principle of a dark life (Eph 6.12) is the ruler of the world of darkness who has the power of death or fatal

sin. The beginning who called himself the principle of every good is not under the realm of darkness by a wicked manner of life: those persons who correctly understand the divine names calls Christ "king of justice" and "king of peace" (Heb 7.2). Paul implores the kingdom of God to come upon him according to the discipline of prayer, teaching us that the king of justice and of peace is in his own life and might reign there.

Each virtue constitutes the king's army; for this reason we should perceive all the virtues **[J.209]** by means of justice and peace. If a person in God's army deserts to the enemy's side, he has become a soldier of the inventor of wickedness, having rejected the breastplate of justice and the armor of peace. How is such a person established under the kingdom of peace after casting off the shield of truth? It is clear that the armament's insignia will manifest his ruler instead of showing his leader in the characteristics of one's life since his image has been overshadowed by arms. How blessed is that man who is enrolled among those countless thousands and who is armed in God's army against evil by the virtues which show the king's image when he is clothed by them!

Why should we speak further about those terms signifying Christ's name and which enable us to lead a life according to virtue since each one serves to perfect our life? But I say our recollection of these names is intended to help us achieve the goal we have sought to establish from the outset, namely, how a person might bring about **[J.210]** perfection in himself. If one realizes that he participates in this adorable name by bearing the name of Christian in accord with the Apostles' teaching (Acts 11.26), he will show the power of the other names which reveal Christ since he participates in each of them.

**[M.284]** A Christian has three characteristics: deed, word and thought. First among these is thought. Reason is the beginning of every thought; next comes speech which reveals one's mind by words. Action is third in order after thought and word, bringing thought to realization. When one of these moves the course of our life, it possesses divine insights with regard to every word, deed and thought by which Christ is understood and named. It does us well to be carefully attentive so that our thoughts, words and deeds may participate in these lofty names. Paul says that everything not proceeding from faith is sin (Rom 14.23); as a result, he clearly states that every word, deed or thought which does not look to Christ is **[J.211]** contrary to him; whatever does not partake of light nor life shares in darkness or death. If any word or thought according to Christ is contrary to the good, that which is manifested through these three elements becomes clear: whoever separates himself from Christ does not belong to him, whether in thought, deed or in speech. The prophet's divine voice says "I have reckoned all the sinners of the earth as transgressors" (Ps 118.119). He who denies Christ in persecutions is transgresses Christ's rightful name. If anyone denies truth, justice, sanctity, incorruptibility or anything else in accord with virtue, he rejects life when he must surmount his passions; the prophet calls him transgressor by reason of these violations



against life.

How, then, should the person worthy of Christ's great name behave? What can he do except to always discern his thoughts, words and deeds, and to see whether or not they are of Christ or are alien to him? Much skill is needed here for discernment. Anything effected, **[J.212]** thought or said through passion has no association with Christ but bears the adversary's mark; smearing the soul's pearl with passion as if with mud, it corrupts the precious stone's brightness. But a state free from every passion looks to the author of detachment, Christ. He who draws to himself thoughts as from a pure, incorruptible fountain will resemble the prototype as water drawn into a jar resembles water gushing from a fountain. Christ possesses one pure nature which is the same for anyone who participates in it. However, one springs up while the other, while a part of it, is drawn from the fountain and adorns his life in thoughts. As a result, the hidden man conforms with the manifest when life concurs and is conformed **[M.285]** to thoughts activated according to Christ.

In my judgment this is the perfection of the Christian life: the name of Christ which demonstrates all his other names shares in our soul, words and life's activities so that the holiness praised by Paul (1Ths 5.23) may be **[J.213]** constantly kept in the entire body, mind and spirit with no admixture of evil. If anyone says that the good is difficult to attain--for the Lord of creation is alone immutable while human nature is mutable and inclined to change--how can a mutable nature realize what is fixed and stable in the good? My response is that a person who does not lawfully strive in a contest cannot be crowned (1Tim 2.5); he would not be a legitimate athlete if an opponent were lacking. Without an opponent there is no crown, for victory against oneself is lacking if there is no weakness. Hence, let us struggle against our nature's mutability as though against an adversary; wrestling with our reason makes us victors not by casting it down but by not consenting to the fall. Man can change not only for evil; if he had a natural inclination only to evil it would be impossible to turn to the good. Now the most beautiful effect of alteration is growth in the good since change to a more divine state is always remaking the man changing for the better. 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. No one should lament his mutable nature; rather, by always being changed **[J.214]** to what is better and by being transformed from glory to glory (2Cor 3.18), let him so be changed. By daily growth he always becomes better and is always being perfected yet never attains perfection's goal. Perfection consists in never stopping our growth towards the good nor in circumscribing perfection.