

IN PRAISE OF BLESSED THEODORE, THE GREAT MARTYR

INTRODUCTION

This panegyric by Gregory of Nyssa was delivered in Amaseia whose capitol was Euchaita, the location of Blessed Theodore's remains or in what is now modern Turkey. Jean Danielou ascribes the date of its address to 7 February 386¹. Furthermore, the text indicates that the bishop of Nyssa had delivered his homily during the winter as the following two excerpts reveal:²

Is it not the season of winter which is untroubled by war, when armed soldiers are not present, sailors set sail over the foamy [waves] and the farmer puts to rest the ox used for plowing in the stall? (J.61.8-11).

However, a list of armed men is taken from that vicinity when their regiment is transferred to our religion where its leaders post them to rest during the winter. (J.65.4-6)

Another means of dating the text is mention of the war against the Sythian barbarians who did not show any respect for Christian churches or devotional practices. The incursion of these hostile forces help to further assign Gregory's sermon to the year 381 when Theodosius of Constantinople had brought the war against these invaders to a successful end in the previous year.³

The style of Gregory's address is reminiscent of his other panegyrics devoted to St. Stephen the Protomartyr and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, both of which are included on the CD-ROM. The concept of a panegyric had pagan precedents, notably Menander, as Martin Esper has pointed out: "Das Schlüsselwort bei Menander und, wie zu zeigen sein wird, auch bei Gregor für die Anlage des epideiktischen Prooemiums ist die *auxesis*, die Mehrung des Ruhms für den Gepriesenen, womöglich noch mit Beispielen, die die

¹*Chronologie des Sermons de Saint Gregoire de Nysse*, an article taken from *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* #29 (Paris, 1955), pp. 355-6. Danielou notes that "Il existe une autre fête de Theodore le 9 novembre. Mais Delehaye a montré que c'était la fête de la dédicace de son église à Rome. Quasten donne à notre sermon la date du 27 décembre 386." (p. 355)

²For the historical background to Blessed Theodore, refer to *Acta Sanctorum* by H. Delehaye, November ix (Brussels, 1925). Also, a brief mention of the martyr is made in Bulter's *Lives of the Saints*, vol. ii (New York, 1929), pp. 105-5.

³Cf. J.62.15-J.63.2 and J.70.22-6. Danielou attributes this victory to 7 February 381. Cf. *Chronologie...*, p. 356.

Unfassbarkeit des Ruhmes unterstreichen.”⁴ Another influence upon Gregory’s style of recounting the martyrs’ glorious deeds is the school of the Second Sophistic. IN the words of Hippolyte Delehaye, the homily on Blessed Theodore is “un de ceux ou l’on suit le plus aisement la marche de *l’egkomion* sophistique”⁵. This school was fond of paradox as a rhetorical device, a tool which Gregory of Nyssa uses abundantly, for example, his juxtaposition of corruptibility with incorruptibility as noted a few pages below: “the body is a deserving and immaculate vehicle which never allows the harm originating from its own passions to reside with incorruptibility.” The larger context of this use of paradox is brought out in Gregory’s concept of discovering and then losing Jesus Christ who is often perceived as a bridegroom⁶.

Since Theodore was a soldier in the Roman army, a fact which Gregory notes when making use of Eph 6.11 and 2 Tim 4.8, verses rich in military terms borrowed from St. Paul. The bishop of Nyssa employs this terminology with regard to a Christian’s victory against evil spiritual powers: “This soldier, poor man and conscript and whom Christ as crowned with victory” (J.64.17-19). Due to the importance of martyrdom in the early Church, it is not at all surprising that Gregory of Nyssa, being a bishop and therefore an official ecclesiastical representative, spent considerable time pondering over what it means to witness to Christian principles. Like many other writers of the time, he not only composed texts about the actual martyrdom of individual persons but applied their testimony to the faith as examples for others to follow. We see this familiar theme in an excerpt taken from his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

⁴An article entitled *Enkomiaстик und Christianismos in Gregors Epideiktischer Rede auf den Heiligen Theodor in The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa: Proceedings of the Fifth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa* (Cambridge, Ma, 1984), pp. 145-59. Esper also draws the following outline with regard to Menander’s concept of panegyric, pp. 152-3:

I “Ursache für die Versammlung; Preis der Versammlung; ihr Eifer
 II Hervorhebung des Orts, an dem diese Versammlung stattfindet
 III Preis des Geladenen; er gipfelt in der *ekphasis* seiner glorreichen Tat
 IV Abschliessende Bitte um das Erscheinen des Geladenen und seinen weiteren Beistand.”

⁵*Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires* (Bruxelles, 1966), p. 145.

⁶“Gregor vesteigt sich bis zu dem Satz: *ou he heuresis estin auto to aei zetein* [cf. **Commentary on Ecclesiastes**, PG44.720C]. Zu diesem Paradoxon [which Volker refers to a few lines above with regard to the Second Sophistic]: das Suchen ist das Finden—gesellt sich ein zweites, ihm verwandtes: *to aei prokoptein en to zetein...toutestin he alethes tou pothoumenou apolausis*” [cf. **Song Commentary**, PG44.1037B]. Walther Volker, **Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker**, (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 189-90.

When the support of the wicked soldier is taken away, the well-armed soldier of virtue takes his place. He is clothed with the breastplate of righteousness, has the sword of the Spirit, the protective covering of armor, the helmet of salvation and the shield of faith: thus he has the full spiritual armor [Eph 6.14-17]. Then will the body, his servant, fear his master, that is, his mind, and it will readily take orders from its master who applies virtue which is put at the body's service. The text indicates this saying, "And to my servant I say, 'Do this,' and he does it." (J.298).

Here we have an important reference to Ephesians which treats spiritual combat. Another significant passage with the same quotation may be seen in Gregory's **Commentary on Ecclesiastes**:

No one would be courageous against the enemy's battle array without the Apostle's armor [Eph 6.14]. Indeed, everyone is familiar with that divine armor, an inflexible phalanx against our adversaries' weapons. The Apostle divides the virtues into various kinds and fashions the proper armor from each one. By faith he entwines righteousness and fortifies the breastplate with heavy armor to protect the soldier. One piece of armor cannot be disjointed from another, for the entire suit provides safety. Neither can faith save without works of righteousness, nor does justice provide salvation unless yoked to faith. Therefore, the armor about the heart is entwined with faith and righteousness for the soldier's protection. We may understand the heart as this breastplate. A valiant man arms his head with hope, signifying a sublime hope for the good soldier like a helmet crest held on high. The shield covering the weapon is faith which arrows cannot penetrate. Without a doubt, the arrows which our enemy casts are the various assaults of the passions. The defensive arms fortifying us against the brave enemy's right hand is the Holy Spirit who strikes fear into the adversary yet saves the person who puts him on. The Gospel's entire teaching secures our feet, leaving no part of the body bare and susceptible to blows. (J. 433-4)

The discourse on Blessed Theodore should be viewed in light of several other addresses delivered by Gregory of Nyssa, namely, his two homilies **Concerning the Forty Martyrs** and two homilies **Concerning Saint Stephen, Protomartyr**. In the Gregory sets forth his principles of testimony to the Christian faith. In the short First Homily from **Forty Martyrs**, Gregory borrows the words of Ps 18.4 ("There are no speeches nor words.") to attest that the martyrs have no use for verbal expression; their unwavering confession in Christ's divinity is sufficient (cf. J.141). The Second Homily

which is considerably longer goes into greater detail about the soldiers' struggles and is interesting to compare with the shorter treatise about Blessed Theodore. Some parallels may be drawn such as their comparison with Job (**Forty Martyrs**, J.147.15-20 and **Theodore**, J.64.23-65.2). In the former, Job's sufferings are mentioned whereas in the latter, Gregory observes a point not usually associated with this biblical person, namely, his fidelity to "those customs with which he was acquainted." The bishop of Nyssa makes this contrast simply to demonstrate that Theodore "possesses the entire earth and every citizen who dwells under the sun."

Both texts are riveting in that they are set within a military context where harsh treatment towards soldiers was common. As I had mentioned above, Gregory takes this opportunity for applying military terms to spiritual warfare. Consider the following passage which also makes use of Eph 6.11:

How wonderful is their training when applied to combat against the devil! They are not armed with swords, shields, helmets nor leg protection; rather, they are armed with the full armor of God which the divine Apostle, the leader of the Church, illustrates: a shield, breastplate, helmet and sword. These weapons are used against the enemy's forces, but divine grace supports them against the devil's troop which has the power to inflict death. (J.149.11-17)

While the forty martyrs were condemned by a tyrant whose name was not omitted, the **Theodore** text clearly refers to a certain Maximianus who was "then king whom these leaders served" (J.66.2-3)⁷. Both despots considered it their duty as defenders of the Roman Empire to condemn persons faithful to Christ, and in the words of the **Theodore** text, are "reminiscent of Herod and Pilate who condemned the Lord to be crucified" (J.65.16-18). To Gregory's eyes as well as those of the early Church, this imitation of Christ in his sufferings is the closest possible way to follow him and therefore to achieve victory over death. Since the conquest of physical and psychological afflictions was valued so highly, Christians of those periods prior to Constantine were fondly devoted to the martyrs' physical remains, a fact well documented by the Roman catacombs. Compare two passages where Gregory reflects the popular belief of the martyrs' intercession:

I will share in their merits by placing my parents' bodies beside the remains of these soldiers. In this way they will rise at the resurrection with those who are filled with greater confidence. I know they will prevail because I

⁷Maximianus ruled with Diocletian in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, Nicomedia.

have witnessed their courage and faith before God. **Forty Martyrs**, J.166.9-14

If anyone takes dust from the martyrs' resting place, it is a gift and a deserving treasure. Should a person have both the good fortune and permission to touch the relics, this experience is a highly valued prize and seems like a dream both to those who were cruel and whose wish was fulfilled. **Theodore**, J.63.17-22

Note that Gregory situates the custom, still alive today in many quarters of the Eastern and Western Churches, of venerating a saint's relics. They are considered to be a physical link between their faith in Christ and the power of his resurrection from the dead because just as the martyrs shared his death, so they hope to share his resurrection. In other words, this practice has a charming human touch brought out by the passages in that proximity to a person who has imitated Christ through suffering is believed to have a powerful influence with him in heaven. Associated with this notion is that the resurrection is common to everyone in that believers will form a single divinized body of Christ. For example, consider some of Gregory's reflections on this matter:

From all this, oh devout people, learn that "the death of his holy ones is admirable before the Lord [Ps 115.6], for all men comprise one and the same body; they share the same substance as one dough and are carried off to death. However, the martyr's suffering bestows grace which is lovable, joyful and undeniable...Therefore, we believe that appearances hold out the promise of future blessings procured from trials endured in the world. **Theodore**, J.64.3-10

A key term Gregory employs to describe this common inheritance is "dough," *phurama*. Intimated here is leaven, the agent which makes dough rise and is an obvious allusion to the resurrection. One place where the bishop of Nyssa more fully develops this theme is his short treatise on **First Corinthians 15.28** or **In Illud: Tunc et Ipse Filius**, which deals with the Son's subjection (*hupotage*) to his Father. Compare the above mentioned text related to "dough" with one taken from the Corinthians treatise:

He [Paul] said that the pure and undefiled divinity of the Only-Begotten assumed man's mortal and perishable nature. However, from the entirety of human nature to which the divinity is mixed, the man constituted according to Christ is a kind of first fruits of the common dough (*oion aparche tis tou koinou phuramatos*). It is through this [divinized] man that all mankind is joined to the divinity. PG44.1313B

Here Christ as dough effects subjection to his Father which implies both his coming from the father and the submission of his human nature to him. Intimately bound up with such *huptage* is the resurrection as seen from the “saint’s [Theodore] uncommon example” (J.64.20):

Again, brothers, enjoyment of the good occurs when the martyrs’ memory illuminates the Lord’s day of resurrection. Through these preceding remarks the brilliance belonging to the glory of Christ’s Gospel has illumined our minds in which the rays of salvation invigorate justice and banish the gloom of impiety once they have shed light upon souls by knowledge of the truth. To me this is especially wonderful and noteworthy. We feel the sun which rises early and whose rays foreshadow the coming of day by casting its rays upon everything under heaven. **St. Stephen, Protomartyr, J.101**

Note the emphasis upon brightness: “illuminates,” “brilliance,” “has illumined,” “rays of salvation,” “light,” “sun.” According to Gregory, the chief means for imparting this radiance is through “Christ’s Gospel.” The Good News can remain just another document, albeit an inspiring one, but it assumes special prominence by reason of those persons who have followed it literally to death. An attractive feature of Gregory’s teaching is the rich imagery he employs to make the Gospel message appealing. Although most persons do not have the opportunity for physical martyrdom, the lofty manner in which he describes its glories better enables us to transpose them onto the spiritual plane where we can incorporate their essential meaning. He follows this principle when describing in detail the horrible sufferings of the forty martyrs along with St. Stephen and blessed Theodore. The torments endured by all three is for training “us in piety that we might escape the grips of spiritual adversaries” (*pneumatomachoi*, **St. Stephen, J.89.5-7**).⁸

When seen in the light of faith, the torments experienced by the martyrs are intended to make their bodies fit for the kingdom a heaven, a theme reminiscent of Gregory’s treatise on First Corinthians. As a consequence of the rending and tearing of their physical bodies, they become like Christ the first fruits (*aparche*) of the new creation:

When we are removed from evil in imitation of the first fruits [Christ], our entire nature is mixed with this same fruit. Our body has been formed with

⁸The term *pneumatomachoi*, literally, “fighters against the [Holy] Spirit,” refers to a heretical sect which denied the Holy Spirit’s divinity and ultimately the Trinity itself.

the good as dominant; our body's entire nature is united to the divine, pure nature. This is what we mean by the Son's subjection (*hupotage*): when, in his body, Christ rightly has the subjection brought to him, he effects in us the grace of subjection. (PG44.1316BC)⁹

Furthermore, their heroic deeds are "like a book skillfully interpreting by means of colors which express the martyr's struggles and glorify the temple with resplendent beauty" (**Theodore**, J.63.9-12). This eloquent description is reminiscent of stained glass windows used by later generations as visual aides, as it were, for presenting various aspects of the Christian faith. The chief goal of such pedagogy is piety or *eusebeia*¹⁰, a word difficult to translate since it implies more than a devotional attitude towards religious practice as revealed by the following passage:

...the thrice blessed [Theodore] reveals his piety [*eusebeia*] and gives witness everywhere to his faith in Christ in addition to being inscribed upon the forehead with a confession. He is no longer a novice nor untried by battle and combat but has fortified his soul to resist dangers; he is neither afraid nor a coward reluctant to speak. (J.65.9-15)

Such *eusebeia*, far from being piety in the conventional sense, is at the heart of mature Christian life. Consider the following words taken from Forty Martyrs:

Beholding their example is fine, but it is better to hear about them because words enable their teaching to enter the soul. However, we are in danger of receiving either a good or unsatisfactory report. I have heard it said that such accounts produce images by giving rise to thoughts; concepts and reflections belonging to the mind to bestow fitting honor upon the blessed martyrs. In this way their memory will teach you about piety (*eusebeia*)

⁹With regard to this notion of "first fruits" and the unity of Christ's body, Reinhard Hubner says, "Die Tragweite der leib-Christi-Theologie Gregors hangt ab von der Tragweite der Theologie der Gottebenebildlichkeit des Menschen, denn der Leib Christi der Endzeit ist die Vollzahl der in ihrer ursprunglichen Gottahnlichkeit Widerhergestellten, das Endstadium der Ruckfuhrung aller aus der Entfremdung in ihre naturliche erkenntnismassige und willentliche Verhaftung im allein Seienden und Guten, das ihr Seinsgrund ist, die Zentrierung des Blickes aller auf das eine Ziel." **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregory von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), p.231

¹⁰For a fuller treatment of *eusebeia*, refer to *Naturaleza de la Eusebeia en Gregorio de Nisa*, an article by J. Ibanez and F. Mendoza in **Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie**, edited by H. Dorrie, M. Altenburger, U. Schramm (Leiden, 1976), pp. 261-77.

and the love of God. (J.159-60)

This “memory” is crucial to Gregory’s address when at the beginning of his homily he convenes all sorts of people who form a “holy flock, a royal priesthood” (J.61.4) that they never forget to celebrate Theodore’s memory. The bishop of Nyssa seems to draw a parallel between these “the people who belong to Christ” (J.61.4) and that place of assembly: “where the memory (*mneme*) of the just and the rest of the saints is present¹¹, first consider this house’s great dignity to which souls are led” (J.62.26-63.1). Again keeping in mind the fact that martyrs resemble a book of instruction (cf. above, J.63.9-12), the temple of God “exhibits images of flowers made in the likeness of the martyr’s virtues” (J.62.5-6). In other words, Gregory sees a close identification between the people assembled, Theodore for whom they have come to venerate and the physical attributes of God’s temple. Because the local church of Euchaita in Ameseia is the resting place of the martyr, it is sanctified with the remains of his physical body which “appears as if it were alive and healthy” (J.63.22-3). Most likely Gregory is alluding to the miraculous preservation of Theodore’s body, a phenomenon not uncommon among the remains of certain saints down through the ages.

Marvelous as this physical preservation may be, Gregory wishes to draw attentions to the fact that Theodore’s body is an enduring token of that incorruptibility (*aphtharsia*) typical of a Christian life well lived:

For the soul which is ascending is fond of residing in its own inheritance and converses in an incorporeal manner with its own brethren; the body is a deserving and immaculate vehicle for that purpose which never allows the harm originating from its own passions to reside with an inestimable treasure reserved for the time of regeneration (*paliggenesia*) and share the uniqueness with regard to other bodies. (J.62.13-19)

Here emphasis is upon the physical body (*soma*) which is “a deserving and immaculate vehicle,” a fact made more conspicuous by Theodore’s horrible bodily sufferings. The theme of incorruptibility runs through virtually all the writings attributed to Gregory and assumes special significance not only in the case of physical martyrdom but in a life which resembles it as closely as possible. By this I mean a life devoted to prayer or contemplation which for the early Church usually took place within the framework of consecrated virginity or monasticism. It is as though the afflictions endured by such persons as Theodore, the Forty Martyrs and St. Stephen were an

¹¹Gregory could be alluding to the remains of other saints buried in the same place as Theodore or simply that the martyr is in the company of fellow saints: “whether you dwell in the air above or in some celestial circle or angelic chorus” (J.70.11-12).

archetype of those immaterial or psychological and spiritual afflictions concomitant with a life devoted to contemplation. Furthermore, note the important phrase, “the soul which is ascending” (*psuche men gar anelthousa*), which introduces a concept central to Gregory of Nyssa’s thought, perpetual ascent or the continuous reaching out to deeper levels of spiritual reality as signified by term *epektasis*¹². Such stretching forth for Gregory is essential to our participation in Christ’s resurrection as depicted in his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**:

After the resurrection the body which has been transformed into incorruptibility will again be joined to the soul. The passions now disturbing us because of the flesh will not be restored with those bodies; rather, we shall become tranquil. No longer will the flesh’s prudence dispute with the soul. No longer will there be civil war with the passions set against the mind’s law where the soul is overcome and taken captive by sin. Nature will then be cleansed from all such things, and one spirit will be in both (I mean both in the flesh and in the spirit), and every corporeal disposition will be banished from human nature. Thus the text of the Song exhorts us, even if we now live in the flesh, not to turn to it in our thoughts; rather, we should only regard the soul and attribute all manifestations of affection in the text to the surpassing goodness of God as pure, undefiled offerings. For God alone is truly sweet, desirable and worthy of love. The present enjoyment of God is the starting point for a greater share of his goodness, and it increases our desire for him. (J.30-1)

Since Gregory of Nyssa identifies the death of Blessed Theodore with that of Jesus Christ when he appeared before the tribunal which condemned him¹³, he automatically shares the same powerful intercessory role as the Apostles, especially Peter, Paul, James and John. Gregory makes this same identification in **Saint Stephen, Protomartyr**, and it therefore is helpful to compare the two texts:

Remember, Peter, awaken Paul, along with John the theologian and beloved disciple, who are solicitous on behalf of the churches which they have founded and on whose behalf they endured dangers and death...But by the power of your intercession and those with you...the young shoot will return to you. **Theodore**, J.71.4-7, 11-12, 13.

¹²For a fuller description of *epektasis*, refer to **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** by Jean Danielou, (Paris, 1944) pp.291-307.

¹³“The evil spirits have convened a court along with their leaders and taxiarchs, a fact reminiscent of Herod and Pilate who condemned the Lord to be crucified by a similar judgment.” (J.65.15-18)

The Apostles of the Savior were neither lamps, lights nor stars but messengers of light not illumining one region or area but brightening every place under heaven. The most important leaders were Peter, James and John who were designated as witnesses by Christ, running to the end of their lives and expending themselves by various forms of witness. For he whom the Lord designated as leader of the apostolic chorus obtained proper glory. **Stephen**, J.102.10-19

This association with the founders of the Church towards the end of the homily on Blessed Theodore is meaningful in that Gregory of Nyssa elevates his protagonist to an intercessory role for the local church of Euchaita where his remains are venerated. Furthermore, through the heavenly intercession of Theodore, the “fruitful field of faith in Christ [will] always bear the fruit of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (J.71.14-16). Gregory thus comes full circle when he fittingly associates this “fruitful field” at the conclusion of his panegyric with the faithful people mentioned at the very beginning: “You, the people who belong to Christ, a holy flock, a royal priesthood.”

The critical text of **In Praise of Blessed Theodore, the Great Martyr** was prepared by John P. Cavarnos, **Gregorii Nysseni Opera, Sermones, Pars II, Vol. X, Tomus I** (Leiden, 1990), pp. 61-71. The text of J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graecae** (Paris, 1858), vol. 46.736-48

THE TEXT

[J.61 & M.736] You, the people who belong to Christ, a holy flock, a royal priesthood which had come from every place, city and the countryside, what is the source of that sign which brought you to this sacred place? Who are you who hasten here and planned this [journey] beforehand? Is it not the season of winter which is untroubled by war, when armed soldiers are not present, sailors set sail over the foamy [waves] and the farmer puts to rest the ox used for plowing in the stall? It is not clear that the holy martyr sounded the trumpet from among the roster of warriors, rouses people from diverse regions to a place of rest, **[M.737]** proclaims a home, not in preparation for war but to a sweet and attractive peace for Christians? We believe that in the year when the barbarian invasion stopped and the horrible war against the savage Sythians came to an end we witnessed no frightening, terrible war, no triple crested helmet nor a brandished sword glittering in the sun, **[J.62]** but the all-powerful cross of Christ which wards them off, the means by which he obtained glory through his suffering.

I ask you to consider closely those who keep blameless religious observance such as the martyrs who compose an outstanding assembly of the just as well as those deemed worthy of recompense while still in the world, [Jms 1.27]. Let me affirm that they are still with us. Their great honor is open for all to see: by recognizing the fruit of piety, you must strive to share in their reverence. Desire the honors which Christ dispenses according to the worthiness of his athletes. But if it pleases him that we may enjoy future benefits which a pure hope offers to the just when the judge of our lives comes to us, we may see the company of the saints which is so magnificent and glorious. For the soul which is ascending is fond of residing in its own inheritance and converses in an incorporeal manner with its own brethren; the body a deserving and immaculate vehicle for that purpose which never allows the harm originating from its own passions to reside with incorruptibility. Enwrapped with much honor and solicitude, it dwells in this holy place as an inestimable treasure reserved for the time of regeneration and shares the

uniqueness with regard to other bodies. For this common death which is similar in nature has no comparison. There are other abominable matters, for example, no one should lightly disregard the tomb but if this person opens himself to persuasion, he is liable to have no share in the repugnance of this present age, thereby avoiding the burden of the human condition.

Should a person come to a place similar to our assemble today where the memory of the just and the rest of the saints is present, first [J.62] consider this house's great dignity to which souls are lead. God's temple is brightly adorned with magnificence and is embellished with decorations, pictures of animals which masons have fashioned with delicate silver figures. It exhibits images of flowers made in the likeness of the martyr's virtues, his struggles, sufferings, the various savage actions of tyrants, assaults, that fiery furnace, the athlete's blessed consummation and the human form of Christ presiding over all these events. They are like a book skillfully interpreting by means of colors which express the martyr's struggles and glorify the temple with resplendent beauty. The pictures located on the walls are eloquent by their silence and offer significant testimony; the pavement [M.740] on which people tread is combined with small stones and is significant to mention in itself.

These spectacles strike the senses and delight the eye by drawing us near to [the martyr's] tomb which we believe to be both a sanctification and blessing. If anyone takes dust from the martyr's resting place, it is a gift and a deserving treasure. Should a person have both the good fortune and permission to touch the relics, this experience is a highly valued prize and seems like a dream both to those who were cured and whose wish was fulfilled. The body appears as if it were alive and healthy: the eyes, mouth, ears as well as the other senses are a cause for pouring out tears of reverence and emotion. In this way one implores the martyr who intercedes on our behalf [J.64] and is an attendant of God for imparting those favors and blessings which people seek.

From all this, oh devout people, learn that "the death of his holy ones is admirable before the Lord" [Ps 115.6], for all men comprise one and the same body; they share the same substance as one dough and are carried off to death. However, the martyr's suffering bestows grace which is lovable, joyful and undeniable as the text above teaches. Therefore we believe that appearances hold out the promise of future blessings procured from trials endured in the world. Many are those who pursue [pleasures of] the stomach, vainglory and the rubbish of all this world's charms while neglecting that which is to come; rather, such persons believe that death puts an end to all these things [Phil 3.19]. But a thoughtful person will learn about great matters from that which is small and about archetypes from shadows. To whom will the honor of kings go? Who will be remembered among men with regard to that arrogance resulting from visible reality?

Which general who has captured fortified cities and has enslaved many peoples is celebrated as this soldier, poor man and conscript whom Paul has armed [Eph 6.11] and whom the angels have anointed for combat and whom Christ has crowned with victory [2Tim 4.8]? Since these words unite you to the martyr's trials, follow the saint's uncommon example and forsake any useless pursuit because everyone loves such things.

The fatherland is majestic by reason of beholding the sun. Job [J.65] is noble because he came from the [land of the] sun's rising and continued to observe those customs with which he was acquainted [Job 1.3]. On the other hand, the martyr possesses the entire earth and every citizen who dwells under the sun. However, a list of armed men is taken [M.741] from that vicinity when their regiment is transferred to our region where its leaders post them to rest during the winter. But when war suddenly arises not by an incursion of barbarians but by Satan's ordinance and decree which God opposes (for every Christian is put under the ban of a severe prescription and is condemned to death), the thrice blessed [Theodore] reveals his piety and gives witness everywhere to his faith in Christ in addition to being inscribed upon the forehead with a confession. He is no longer a novice nor untried by battle and combat but has fortified his soul to resist dangers; he is neither afraid nor a coward reluctant to speak. The evil spirits have convened a court along with their leaders and *taxiarchs* which is reminiscent of Herod and Pilate who condemned the Lord to be crucified by a similar judgment. They said, "What is the source of your courage, you who dare to mock the king's decree? Do you [J.66] not submit in trembling to those royal decrees? Do you not worship the authorities who are in power?" Maximianus was then king whom these leaders served.

With stern countenance and resolute mind [Theodore] responded to their charges by saying, "I do not know the gods because they are false, whereas you err by honoring and addressing them, having been influenced by demons who have deceived you from [the worship of] God [cf. Jn 3.18]. But as for me, Christ is God, the Only Begotten Son of God. Therefore on behalf of the true religion and by confessing him, let him who inflicts wounds go ahead and cut; let him who strikes thrash; let him who burns lead to the flame, and let him who is grieved by my words cut out my tongue. Each member of the body needs patience bestowed by the Creator." The tyrants were at a loss by these words and could not sustain the first refutation of his integrity because this youth was bursting with passion and sought death as if it were a sweet drink.

For a brief period the [persecutors] were at a loss and took counsel with regard to future action. One of the military leaders with a refined demeanor scorned the martyr by the following response: "Theodore, are you the Son of God? Was he born to suffer as a man? My god was not born for this purpose, but I believe that he is a son and that his birth befits his divinity. But you and your childish, pathetic reasoning should make you

blush and hide due to your profession in an effeminate god whom, like a mother, you worship her twelve sons who gave birth to [J.67] a multitude of demons just like a hare or a sow which effortlessly conceive and give birth!"

The tyrants mocked the saint by this two pronged attack of idolatry and under the guise of clemency said, "Give us a short time to consider such madness. Perhaps by giving him [M.744] a brief rest he might change his mind for the better." These [despots] called wisdom insanity, reckoned madness and label derangement eloquence just like drunks who vehemently berate sober persons. However, this pious man and soldier of Christ made full use of manly behavior in the respite allotted to him.

What did he do? You certainly have enough time to ponder over his tale with joy. The gods' temple erected to their mythical mother was located in the capitol city of Amasea by a river bank where such mislead persons devised their folly. But the noble man remained fearless while his detractors watched for an opportune moment and a occasion because they yearned to accuse him of setting a fire and impatiently expected him to admit it. Once everyone learned of this incident (for a blazing fire started in the midst of the city), [Theodore] did not disclose the deed nor hasten to speak about it. However, it was certainly clear to [his accuser's] arrogance and to the confusion of their great joy that this incident was a source of distress for the temple and its graven image. It was reported to the magistrates that he was responsible for burning the temple and a judgment more fearful than the first resulted due to his provocation.

Once the [judges] took their seats in court, the magistrate eloquently questioned Theodore who stood in their midst [J.68] and who quickly turned the interrogation into a confession [of faith]. Since they could not accuse him and their fearful threats had no effect, they changed their tactics and benignly attempted to withdraw the accusation by offering him promises. "If you wish to submit to our counsel," they said, "we will at once reinstate your renown from such disgrace, change your ignominy into honor and will swear that you share in the glory which belongs to the office of chief priest." When he heard of this honor, the thrice-blessed [Theodore] said, "I judge the priests of idols as wretched men and pity the attendants of such vain practices. I both greatly feel for and loath the chief priest. He is among the worst and most miserable of men, a fact which is more unimaginable than any unjust circumstance; he is the cruelest of murderers and is more wanton than any dissolute person. Therefore let your devastating actions run their course. Tell me, you who make such depraved promises, by choosing a life of piety and righteousness with respect to God, it is better to be a outcast in God's house than to dwell in the tents of the wicked [Ps 83.11]? I pity the kingdom's subjects to whom you continuously read the iniquitous law because its authority is considerable. They can keep the title of chief priest for themselves, cloth themselves with dark purple in imitation of

evil chief priests and wrap their melancholy with bright dignity. When approaching the impure altar, [M.745] they sacrifice butchered birds before kings, [J.69] examine the entails of wretched cattle, sell meat stained with blood and defile their clothing."

After the just man had uttered these words, the leaders no longer feigned goodwill but accused him as being most disrespectful of the gods, contemptuous of kings and a blasphemer. First they tortured him by tearing his body which they had suspended upon a tree. While the executioners were vigorously at work, he remained steadfast, constant and sang about his torments from the Psalm, "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise ever in my mouth" [Ps 33.2]. Those torments of the flesh diminished while he sang and were as though another man were being mistreated. In this fashion the prison sanctioned his punishment. Another phenomenon occurred with regard to the saint: at night he heard a multitude singing, and those outside saw their radiant splendor in the dead of night. This marvelous visitation troubled the prison guard and a sound emanated from inside the cell; no one was present except the martyr who remained at peace with the other sleeping prisoners.

After many such events, [Theodore] was strengthened by his confession and piety, and they brought a vote of condemnation upon him. He was ordered to be burned and in the way finished his wonderful, blessed journey to God. However, [Theodore] left behind a lesson from his agony: he summoned the people, taught the church, put demons to flight, brought angelic peace, implored benefits from God, healed various illnesses in that place, provided a safe haven for those tossed by afflictions, was a rich treasury [J.70] for the poor, a quiet inn of rest for travelers and a continuous festal celebration. If we keep the yearly festival, an enthusiastic multitude will always be in attendance; the highway leading there bore them along like ants with some going and other departing.

Therefore, oh blessed anniversary graciously provided by the Creator, we flock to your festival with the martyrs' holy band which worships a common God. By recalling the victory of our many struggles, you return to us, and when you arrive, you provide us with a day of celebration. We beseech you, whether you dwell in the air above or in some celestial circle or angelic [M.748] chorus, that you assist the Lord or worship him as a faithful servant with the powers and virtues. Come from that place to those who beseech you, invisible friend! You have learned of his death, a means by which you might give double thanks to God who conferred this favor through one passion and one pious confession that you may rejoice in the blood he shed and in the grievous fire he endured. As a result you will have as worthy ministers those who witnessed the spectacle. We lack many benefactors. Intercede on behalf of the people that they may share one kingdom because the martyr's country is one of affliction whose citizens and brethren and kinsmen have died and have been honored. We fear afflictions and expect danger because we are

close to the ungodly Sythians who grieve us with war. As a soldier, fight for us; as a martyr, grant courage to your fellow servants. Since you have prevailed over this life yet are familiar with humanity's sufferings and needs, grant peace that the festivals may continue, that the furious, insolent, mad barbarians might not triumph over the temples or altars and that they might not tread the holy place.

We who have been kept safe and unharmed ponder [J.71] your beneficence and implore protection for the future. Should we experience stress and dishonor, let your people beseech the chorus of your fellow martyrs; the prayers of many just people will exonerate sin. Remember Peter, awaken Paul along with John the theologian and beloved disciple, who are solicitous on behalf of the churches which they have founded and on whose behalf they endured dangers and death. They did not engage in idol worship which was inimical to our head [Christ] in order that heresy may resemble thorns to pluck out vines, that weeds might not suffocate wheat, that no rock hinder the true, rich dew and that anything without root may show the power of the fertile word [cf. Mt 13.25, 7, 20]. But by the power of your intercession and those with you, oh marvelous and most bright among the martyrs, the young shoot will return to you, the flourishing citizenship of Christians will endure to the end in the splendid, fruitful field of faith in Christ which always bears the fruit of eternal life in Christ Jesus Lord. To him with the Father and Holy Spirit be glory, power and honor now and forever. Amen.