

CONCERNING HIS OWN ORDINATION: TO EUAGRIUS, CONCERNING THE DIVINITY¹

[M.543 & J.331] The celebration of a spiritual feast has come upon us in order that we partake of benefits other than those which please ourselves. I certainly have considered myself imperfect in such tributes because of my inability to speak, a fact which is in accord with the custom of drinking songs. I am aware of those persons who live daintily; whenever they enjoy good cheer from sharing a common meal, custom maintains that the meal is incomplete if there is a needy person among the guest list. And so I have desired to have abundant food. But since the noble, wealthy lord of the banquet spares nothing on our behalf, he bids us to serve and I say to him, "Friend, lend me some of your bread" [Lk 11.5]. I call bread that assistance which comes from prayer. How can your voices relish these spiritual honeycombs and accept them with impoverished and miserable speech? Perhaps we need here as in the case of gymnastic contests (the stadium is only for those who are strong) a spiritual [J.332] stadium for those endowed with a capacity to speak and who strip down for the contest; if I with my grey hair happen to be one of them and whose strength has faded with time and my speech has begun to tremble and halt, this is a delight for the contestants in their tournaments.

Brethren, let us not prolong our introductory words because your wonderful remarks which had been said earlier had absorbed my attention. You are already content and satiated with wealth after our earlier remarks had provided nourishment. Perhaps a worthless satiety is added to yet another one, having brought to memory such golden words along with leaden coins except in those cases when beauty is a contributing factor and inferior material is mixed with something better. Here is the explanation without delay: Do you see the lovely sight of a [M.545] roof over our heads where gold subtly appears with graven work? Such gold is outstanding in that it is completely visible to our sight with many facets in dark blue. What, then, is the dark blue which the artisan has incorporated? It seems to me that the gold is more radiant when offset by other colors. Thus if the dark blue combines with gold, its brightness is enhanced; and so, it is not unseemly that our darkness is added to the brightness of the words already proclaimed. Although our introductory words may seem as idle chatter, I ask that you pay attention.

[J.333] I understand that when the great Moses erected a tent for the Israelites, Bezalel [cf. Ex 35.30-3], whom the divine Spirit endowed with architectural wisdom which he had taught himself, made his work available to both the wealthy and poor. He choose the gold of opulence, purple and precious stones yet did not reject the lesser value

¹The critical text prepared by Ernest Gebhardt may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni Opera**, volume ix (Leiden, 1967), pp.331-41. The text prepared by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca**, #46, (Paris, 1858), columns 554-53.

of wood and goat skins. Recollection of this account is not untimely, for a thought comes to mind which I wish to make known. Bezalel who was unskilled became wise by the divine Spirit. Therefore let him who fights against the Spirit [*pneumatomachos*] pay attention: Since the person claiming that the Holy Spirit is divine, whose trace in the soul signifies the grace of wisdom, can such a person dishonor the Spirit's sanctity by applying the term divine? Can the Spirit's divinity be conceived as something newly acquired? Is not a certain doubling and composition perceived here with regard to that which is simple and uncomposite? Such notions are inadmissible yet they confesses the Spirit is truly divine by nature. Do you see how naturally the truth is revealed to you? The Christian message admits of no plurality with regard to the divine nature because this would result in manufacturing many gods. We cannot consider many gods unless the multitude **[J.334]** of gods we attribute to it belong to another nature. If everyone believes in one divine nature, the Holy Spirit is divine by nature; why, then, do you divide what is joined by nature? Who will give me the power of that word whose object is salvation for its hearers [cf. Rom 1.16]? Peter send one voice to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this fisherman captured a thousand men in his net with just one casting of the word [cf. Acts 2.41]. Numerous teachers brought us their message, and who from among the saved is added? "That which falls, let it fall, and that which is to perish, let it perish" [Zach 11.9] says the prophet. What has been led astray cannot return [cf. Ezk 34.4]; the bond of love is loosened and peace **[M.548]** is wrenched from our treasure houses [cf. Col 2.3].

Such a calamity forces me to emit a deep groan. Our possession was once love, and the Lord told us through the disciples to treasure up this patrimony when he said, "I give you a new commandment, love one another" [Jn 13.34]. Although those sons who came after their fathers had received this inheritance and passed on it to our fathers, this generation has not safeguarded it. How has the wealth of love been seized from our hands and suffered destruction? We are poor with regard to this love and enemies are conceited over our good possessions. "I have been zealous with regard to the iniquitous" says the psalmist [Ps 72.3]; I modify **[J.335]** the statement as follows: I have been impassioned with regard to the iniquitous; I have been zealous upon seeing the peace of sinners, those enjoying union with each other while we are separated; they are comrades while we allow our fellowship to disintegrate. The thief of souls accosts our possession and bring it to the enemies of truth and not for their benefit. Let no one think this as true (for the inventor of evil cannot be a benefactor); rather, "what have I with judging outsiders" [1Cor 5.12]? How do I bear the alienation of brothers without tears? How is this young brother left deprived of his paternal substance [cf. Lk 15.11-32]? If gray [hair] conceals the soul's youth, then how did that other [brother] who is revealed in the Gospel come to dwell in a distant region as a fugitive from the faith? He has he departed, the father's substance is divided, the loftiness of teachings is cast down to humble, sullied opinions and heretical prostitutes have dissipated his wealth. A prostitute is heresy

beguiled by deceptive pleasures. If a person comes to his senses like that man, he has again desired food from his father, has run to the full table which contains an abundance of supersubstantial [*epiousios*] bread which the Lord provides for his hirelings [cf. Mt 20.1-15] (all hirelings are those who work God's vineyards on account of the hope which had been promised), and his **[J.336]** return does not belong to just one father but those fathers who ran out to greet, embrace and welcome him with a kiss.

Here we have an example of the first garment of faith which the thirty-hundred and eighteen souls have woven in the Church. We also have the finger in a hand which has expressed the seal of faith, choruses, the calf, harmony and everything else which the Gospel notes except the brother's jealousy. But why in vain do we form dreams for ourselves? The hearts of brothers are obdurate and belligerent; they spurn their common fathers and do not accept their inheritance. They lay claim to a **[M.549]** common nobility and are alienated from our kinship, set themselves against us as enemies to have power over us as though we some kind of border, have become enemies, are on our flanks, do not subscribe to orthodox preaching and deny that they are heretics. What an unheard of situation! They have made war against both truth and falsehood, resemble a tree lacking roots and are easily inclined to **[J.337]** contradictory opinions. I have heard John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse speaking in mysterious fashion that such persons either seethe or are cold; indeed one seethes by the Spirit and is cold by sin. Would that you were either cold or hot" [cf. Apoc 3.15]! They are neither but fasten upon both, thereby acting in a nauseating fashion by going after their own vomit. When the disciples were alive, what brought a multitude to the Church a long time ago through the Lord, whereas we now have lengthy, ornate words from teachers which have no effect?

Someone may ask that the miracles wrought by the Apostles were inestimable and that divine gifts have contributed to trustworthiness by their preaching. I say that the force of their deeds is just as great as their persuasive words. What need do we have to consider what has been done? Do you not see similar wonders of faith? I mean our fellow servants' good deeds which are in accord with the same spirit such as the ability to effect healing. Men from abroad who have paid attention bear witness to the truth include citizens of our father Abraham from Mesopotamia and those sharing the same region have flocked from every location throughout the entire world; they all look to heaven, are in a certain sense exiles from human life, are not captivated by passions and realize this type of life as far as possible. They are practiced with regard to a higher value **[J.338]** in incorporeal virtues, have the appearance of old age, seem venerable, are splendid in gray hair, seal their mouths with silence, do not know controversy and are unfamiliar with disputes. They have power against spirits [cf. Mt 10.1], effect results solely by their deeds and resist demons not by syllogisms but by the power of faith; they do this not through contorted refutations but by expelling what is exterior into darkness.

Thus the Christian knows how to employ syllogisms which are helpful for our faith. Why do we not believe if the grace of healing abounds and if teaching flourishes? "All these are effected by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills" [1Cor 12.11]. Why do not those who are saved multiply? No one should think that I consider the present grace as insignificant.

I see luxuriant vine abounding and flourishing with branches and fruit; I see a swelling field with much corn; it is deep with crops, well-grown sheaves and an enormous harvest. But why am I in pain? Such observations leave me unfulfilled because they cause suffering through much avarice. [M.552] Desire for abundance has no bounds; it always continues to inflame us and is fuel for greater desire. Sights delight me [J.339] yet they cause grief; I rejoice at what is present and am grieved at what is absent. Any new suffering combined from contradictory elements embraces the soul when, for example, pleasure mixes with anguish. If I direct my eyes to you, I greatly desire you; if I consider what I do not have, I groan over this calamity. People do not find joy in the Lord and relish the Church's peace; they prefer to engage in evaluating magnitude, measuring the Son with the Father and delight in what exceeds the Father's measure. Who says that what lacks quantity cannot be measured, the eternal cannot be pondered, the incorporeal cannot be measured, the unbounded cannot be compared and that which cannot be compared is immune from greater or less? We will recognize what is greater when comparing the same things which are bounded whereas [God] is incomprehensible; any concept of quantity cannot be applied to him. I have heard the Psalm which everyone joins in singing, "Great is our Lord and his strength, and his wisdom cannot be numbered" [Ps 146.5]. What does this mean? These words can be numbered, and you understand the mystery. "Great is the Lord;" he did not say that his quantity is great (it is impossible to speak of quantity), but he leads the mind to unboundedness by that which is unbounded. Similarly [the psalmist] says, "Great is his strength;" understand strength as power. "Christ is the power and wisdom of God" [1Cor 1.24]. But his understanding has no boundary. Isaiah wisely explains this when he says "the spirit of wisdom and of understanding" [Is 11.2].

I have heard that among those counted blessed are persons who thirst after the Lord [cf. Mt 5.6]. Therefore desire may not exist outside time; show me, then, whether the present appears as a separate entity. If the hot sun's rays boil over one's head at midday and dry up bodily fluids (for example, consider let the harsh, unyielding arid earth), a fountain whose stream is lovely and lucid brings forth abundant refreshment. One then sits down by the water and philosophizes about its nature, source, cause and similar inquiries. Persons accustomed to such vain questioning enjoy this activity. Any moisture dispersed in the earth's abyss becomes water which leaps up and is under pressure because veins are diffuse in the earth's depths and gush forth water upon opening

its mouth. On the other hand, if the water is deflected into streams, it brings relief to thirsty lips, refreshes the tongue, [M.553] gives rest to passion and bestows its gift to who receives it. Therefore imitate this thirst since it will be said of you as [the Lord says], "Blessed are those who thirst" [Mt 5.6].

Once you have learned about the various benefits which the Holy Spirit causes to spring up, obey the prophet who says "I have opened your mouth and have drawn [J.341] breath" [Ps 118.131] and "Open wide your mouth and fill it" [Ps 80.1] when you have power to receive such gifts. Do you wish to learn those benefits coming from the Spirit's fountain? I mean immortality for the soul, eternal life, the kingdom of heaven, unceasing joy and happiness without end. But upon seeing that which is present, I count as little the loss of what I have left behind. The house is filled with all sorts of good things for me, the treasures of Arabian gold are full [cf. Ps 71.15] and ambassadors have rushed from Egypt. They anticipate raising their hands to God along with the earth's kings who with us and who will sing a triumphal hymn including all who have been called to his kingdom [cf. Ps 67.32-5], to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.