
Christianity in Late Antiquity

300–450 C.E.

A READER

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Gregory preached a series of five theological orations in 381 soon before Theodosius convoked the Council of Constantinople and reinstated Nicene orthodoxy in the capital (see Text 34).

As this third oration, "On the Son," demonstrates, Trinitarian debate had evolved into a complex array of philosophical propositions and contradictions, often propped up by endless strings of scriptural citations. Gregory's own discussion of the relation between Father and Son (focused particularly on the notion of "begetting" and foreshadowing the Christological debates of the next century) is heavily informed by Platonic, Stoic, and Aristotelian argumentation (such as the famous "liar's paradox" found in section 9). The importance of logical argumentation and terminological specificity—equally prized by both sides of the debate—almost overtakes substantive argument in this oration, as Gregory tears down the "logic choppers" who twist scriptural interpretation and philosophy (as Gregory charges) to their own ends. Gregory himself must concede that the precise nature of the Son's "begottenness" is a mystery that philosophy will never fully disclose: "faith," he concludes, "gives fullness to our reasoning." He is content to deconstruct his opponents' so-called logic and reiterate the mystery of Trinitarian consubstantiality and coeternity.

(1) Yes, these are the replies one can use to put a brake upon this hasty argumentativeness, a hastiness that is dangerous in all matters, but especially in theological topics. To censure, of course, is a trivial task—anyone so minded can do it quite easily. But to substitute one's own view takes a man of true religion and sound sense. So, come now, let us put our confidence in the Holy Spirit *they* dishonor but we worship. Let us bring our convictions about the Godhead—convictions of some significance and standing—into broad daylight, like an offspring of good stock ripe for birth. Not that we have held our peace at other times—here is the one point we become brash and arrogant on—but now we express the truth even more outspokenly, in order that, as Scripture puts it, we may not suffer the condemnation of God's disfavor by balking the issue (cf. Heb 10:38).

Every speech has two parts to it. One part aims at establishing one's own position; the other refutes the opposing case. This is the method we shall try, expounding our own before refuting our opponents' arguments. Both parts will be as brief as possible, so that there may be as good a conspectus of our views as the introductory treatise they have invented for the deception of simpler or more gullible souls provides. Besides which, we do not want our thoughts to be

dissipated through the length of discussion, like water without a channel to hold it in, running to waste over flat ground.

(2) The opinions about Deity that hold pride of place are three in number: atheism, polytheism, and monotheism. With the first two, the children of Greece amused themselves. Let the game go on! Atheism, with its lack of a governing principle, involves disorder. Polytheism, with a plurality of such principles, involves faction and hence the absence of a governing principle, and this involves disorder again. Both lead to an identical result—lack of order, which, in turn, leads to disintegration, disorder being the prelude to disintegration. Monotheism, with its single governing principle, is what *we* value—not monotheism, defined as the sovereignty of a single person (after all, self-discordant unity can become a plurality) but the single rule produced by equality of nature, harmony of will, identity of action, and the convergence toward their source of what springs from unity—none of which is possible in the case of created nature. The result is that though there is numerical distinction, there is no division in the being. For this reason, a one eternally changes to a two and stops at three—meaning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a serene, *nontemporal*, incorporeal way, the

Father is parent of the "offspring" and originator of the "emanation"—or whatever name one can apply when one has isolated them from things visible. We shall not venture, as a non-Christian philosopher rashly did, to talk of an "overflowing of goodness," "as though a bowl had overflowed—these were the plain terms he used in his disquisition on primary and secondary causes." We ought never to introduce the notion of involuntary generation (in the sense of some sort of unrestrained natural secretion), notions that are completely out of keeping with ideas about the Godhead. This is why we limit ourselves to Christian terms and speak of "the Ingenerate," "the Begotten," and (as God the Word himself does in one passage) "what Proceeds from the Father" (cf. John 15:26).

(3) *So when did these last two originate?*

They transcend "whenness," but if I *must* give a naive answer—when the Father did.

When was that?

There has not been [a time] when the Father has not been in existence. This, then, is true of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Put another question, and I will answer it.

Since when has the Son been begotten?

Since as long as the Father has *not* been begotten.

Since when has the Spirit been proceeding?

Since as long as the Son has *not* been proceeding but being begotten in a non-temporal way that transcends explanation. We cannot, though, explain the meaning of "supra-temporal" *and* deliberately keep clear of any suggestion of time. Expressions like "when," "before x," "after y," and "from the beginning" are not free from temporal implications however much we try to wrest them. No, we cannot explain it, except possibly by taking the world-era as the period coinciding with eternal things, being a period that is not, as "time" is, measured and fragmented by the Sun's motion.

How is it, then, that these latter are not like the Father ir-having no origin, g they are coeternal with him?

Because they are *from* him, though not *after* him. "Being unoriginate" necessarily implies "being eternal," but "being eternal" does not entail "being unoriginate," so long as the origin referred to is the Father. So because they have a cause they are not unoriginate. But clearly a cause is not necessarily prior to its effects—the Sun is not prior to its light. Because time is not involved, they are to that extent *unoriginate*—even if you do scare simple souls with the bogey-word; for things which produce Time are beyond time.

(4) *How, then can the process of begetting not involve subjection to change?*

Because a body is not involved. If corporeal begetting implies subjection to change, an incorporeal one must be free of it. Let me put a question to you in return: how can he be God if he is a creature? What is created is not God. Not to mention the fact that if "creating" is given a corporeal interpretation, emotion and change are to be found here as well—for instance, time, desire, imagination, thought, hope, distress, risk, failure, and success. All these factors, and more besides, as everybody knows, are involved in creating. I wonder why you do not go the full length of envisaging mating, periods of gestation and risks of miscarriage as necessarily involved if he were to beget at all, or why you do not list the ways in which birds, beasts, and fish produce offspring and put the divine and unutterable generation down on one of these, or else use your new-fangled scheme to get rid of the Son. You are incapable of understanding that one who has a distinctive fleshly birth—what other case of a Virgin Mother of God do you know?—has a different spiritual birth, or rather, one whose being is not the same as ours has a different way of begetting as well.

(5) *Can anyone be a "father" without beginning to be one?*

Yes, one who did not begin his existence. What begins to exist begins to be a father. *He* did not begin to be Father—he did not begin at all. He is "Father" in the true sense because he is not a son as well. In our case, the word "father" cannot be truly appropriate because we must be fathers *and* sons—the terms carry equal weight. We also stem from a pair, not a

¹ Gregory may be referring to the nee-Platonic philosopher Plotinus.

single being, making us be divided and become human beings gradually and maybe not even human beings of the kind we are intended to be. The ties are dissolved by one side or the other, so that only the relationships remain, bereft of the realities.

But, it may be said, "he begat" and "he has been begotten" can and must bring in the idea of a beginning of this process of generation.

Why not say then instead, "he has existed as begotten from the beginning," and so avoid your labored objections with their penchant for time? Will you accuse us of falsifying a scriptural truth? Is it not clear to everybody that there are plenty of examples of tenses being employed in an opposite sense, especially in biblical usage? This is true not only of the past tense, but of the present and the future as well. For example: "Why did the heathen rage?" (Ps 2:1)—the raging had not yet occurred, and. "They will cross the river on foot" (Ps 66:6)—which means, "they have gone through it." It would be a long task to list all the expressions of this kind on which scholars have bestowed their attention.

(6) So much for that objection! This next one of theirs is like it in being outrageously provocative.

Has the Father; they ask, begotten the Son voluntarily, or involuntarily?

They now bind us round with what they think are strong cords, but are really feeble ones.

If, they say, it was involuntary, he was in someone's power: Who exercised the power? How could God be under someone's power? But if it was voluntary, the Son is son to a will; so how can he stem from the Father?

They make the will into a new kind of mother in place of the Father.

First, it is certainly a point in their favor if they say this. It means that they are deserting passivity to take refuge in the will. Volition is not, after all, a passive experience. Second, let us take a look at what they put as their strong point. They had best now be grappled with at closer quarters. You who coolly assert what you will, did *you* come into existence as a result of your father's willing it or without his will? If without his will, he must have been in someone's power. What an act of violence! And who exercised that

power over him? You cannot answer, "Nature"—nature is also capable of self-control. If it was voluntary, a few syllables have lost you your father—you are evidently a son of his will, not of your father. Let me pass on to the subject of God and creatures and address this question of yours to your own intelligence. Did he create the universe voluntarily or under compulsion? If it was under compulsion, then external domination and a dominator are involved. If voluntarily, then creatures have been deprived of their God, and you most of all who invent sophistries of this kind. God is walled off from his creation by his will. No, if we are sober, we make a distinction. I think, between "willing" and "a will," between "begetting" (as a participle) and "begetting" (as a noun) between "speaking" and "speech." The participles refer to a subject of motion, the nouns designate the motion itself. What is willed does not *belong* to a will—it is not a necessary concomitant of it. Nor does what is begotten *belong* to a begetting, nor what is heard to an act of speech. They belong instead to the subject who willed, who begat, who speaks. What belongs to God transcends all these cases even. For him, begetting may well just be the will to beget—but without any superiority of begetting to willing either. If we accept this last proposition without reservation, nothing will intervene.

(7) Do you want me to take the game on to the Father? You make me do rash things like that! The Father is God either voluntarily or involuntarily. Now (if you do not want to be trapped by your own expertise) when, if it was involuntary, did he begin to will it? Not, of course, before he actually was God—there being nothing prior to that. Or is he partly the subject, partly the object of an act of will? In that case, he must be divided. According to you, there is a problem how he can avoid belonging to a will. But if it was involuntary, what forced him into being God? How can he be God if he is forced, forced into nothing less than being God?

How, then, has the Son been begotten?

How has he been created, if, as you say, created he has been? Indeed, this is part of the same puzzle.

Perhaps you will answer: *by his will and his reason.*

But your explanation is so far incomplete, for how will and reason can have the power to effect anything remains unexplained—in the case of human beings, after all, they do not.

(8) How, then has he been begotten? This begetting would be a triviality if it could be understood by you, who have no knowledge of how you yourself procreate and are ashamed to explain in full the limited understanding you have. Do you really think you know it all? It will cost you much effort before you discover the principles involved from conception through formation to delivery and the linking of soul to body, of intellect to soul, and of reason to intellect, and can explain the rest of your makeup—movement, growth, assimilation of food, perception, memory, and recollection and what belongs jointly to soul and body, what separately to one, and what involves their interplay. Faculties, after all, whose maturity belongs to a later stage, have principles that accompany the procreative process. Explain these, and even then you are not able to treat of God's begetting. That would be risky. For if you know your own, it by no means follows that you know God's, and unless you know your own, how could you know God's? The heavenly begetting is more incomprehensible than your own, to the same extent that God is harder to trace out than Man. If you make its incomprehensibility a ground for denying the fact, it is high time you ruled out as nonexistent a good number of things you do not understand, the chief of which is God himself. However audacious, however enthusiastic you are, you cannot explain what *he* is at all. Drop your ideas of flux, division, and cleavage. drop the habit of treating the incorporeal nature as if it were a body, and you might well get a worthy notion of God's begetting. How has he been begotten?—I reutter the question with loathing. God's begetting ought to have the tribute of our reverent silence. The important point is for you to learn that he has been begotten. As to the way it happens, we shall not concede that even angels, much less you, know that. Shall I tell you the way? It is a way known only to the begetting Father and the begotten Son. Anything beyond this fact is hidden by a cloud and escapes your dull vision.

(9) *Well then, he either existed or did not exist when the Father begat him?*

What drive! That dilemma might have relevance to you and me. Like Levi in Abraham's loins (cf. Heb 7:9–10) we did have some sort of being, and yet we have *come* into being as well, so that, in a certain fashion, our condition is a product of being and non-being. This is the opposite of primeval matter, which obviously came into existence from nonbeing, despite the fact that some people imagine it to be uncreated. In the present case, being begotten coincides with existence and is from all eternity, so where are you going to put this cleft stick of a question? What point is there prior to eternity to fix the existence or nonexistence of the Son? Either way the notion of eternity will be destroyed. Unless, when we put the question whether the Father comes from being or nonbeing, you risk the answers *either* that he has a double being, partly existing, partly preexisting, *or* that he is in the same case with the Son, being a product of nonbeing. This is what your puerile conundrums lead to. Sandcastles, they cannot stand a puff of wind.

No, I allow neither supposition. I say that the question presents an absurdity, not the answer a difficulty. If you follow your logical presuppositions and hold that in every case one of the pair of alternatives must be true, then I shall put you a little question. Is Time *in* Time, or not? If it is, what is the Time it is in? What is the difference between them? How does one contain the other? If Time is not in Time, how acute your wits are to get us nontemporal Time! What about the proposition: "I am now making a false statement"? You must concede one of the alternatives; it is either true or false—we cannot allow both. But that is impossible. If the statement is false, it will be true, and if it is true, it will be false, by logical necessity. Is there anything remarkable then in the fact that two contradictories can both be true in the case under discussion, just as they are both false here, and thus your sophistry will be shown up for the silliness it is? Here is another teaser for you to solve: were you present to yourself when you were being begotten, and are you present to yourself now, or are both propositions false? If you were and are present, who

is present to whom? How did the pair of you come to be a single whole? If both alternatives are false, how is it that you came to be parted from yourself, and what caused the separation? No, it is stupid to stir up a dust about whether a thing is present to itself or not. The expression "is present" is used to imply a relationship with other things not with itself. You must appreciate that it is even stupider to be correcting people on the subject of whether or not what has been begotten from eternity existed prior to its begetting. That question only arises in connection with temporally determined beings.

(10) But, it may be said, the ingenerate and the generate are not the same thing. *If that* is the case, the Father and the Son cannot be the same thing.

It goes without saying that this argument excludes either the Father or the Son from the Godhead—if ingeneracy is the essence of God, generacy is not his essence, and vice versa. There is no gainsaying this, is there? Make your choice of the alternative blasphemies, you empty-headed theologian, if you are fully intent on blaspheming. Still, what are your grounds for denying that ingenerate and generate are the same? If you had said uncreated and created, I should agree—what has no origin and what is created cannot be identical in nature. But if you are talking about begetter and begotten, this is a false statement—these must be the same; it is in the nature of an offspring to have a nature identical with its parent's. Here is another objection: what do you mean by "the ingenerate" and "the generate"? If you mean ingenerateness and generateness—no, these are not the same thing, but if you mean the things that have these properties in them, why should they not be the same? Lack of intelligence and intelligence are not identical, but they can be predicated of the same thing, a man. They do not mark out separate beings, they are separate qualities of the same being. Do immortality, purity, and immutability each constitute God's being? No, if that were so, there would be a plurality of "beings" of God, not a single being. Or is Deity a composite resulting from these?—if these are "beings" or substances, there would have to be composition.

(11) They do not hold that view because these are properties of other beings besides God. The substance of God is what belongs to him particularly and uniquely. The people who allege that "matter" and "form" are ingenerate would not agree that ingeneracy is uniquely a property of God—we will put the Manichean darkness in the further background. But suppose it does belong uniquely to God, what was Adam? Was he not uniquely a creation formed by God?

Yes, you will say.

Was he a unique human being as well?

Of course not.

Why?

Because manhood does not consist of being formed by God; what has parentage is also man.

In the same way, it is not the case that the ingenerate and only the ingenerate is God (though only the Father is ingenerate) but you must allow that the Begotten too is God. The Begotten stems from God, however fond you are of unbegottenness. Next, how are you to talk of the being of God, when what is said about that being is not a positive assertion but a negation? "Unbegotten" means that he has no parent. It does not state his nature, but simply the fact that he was not begotten.

So what is the being of God?

You must be mad to ask the question, making such a fuss about begottenness! We count it a high thing that we may perhaps learn what it is in the time to come, when we are free of this dense gloom. That is the promise of one who cannot lie (cf Tit 1:2). Yes, this is what men, who purify themselves for it, must think of and hope for. As for us, we can confidently affirm that if it is a high thing for the Father to have no origin, it is no lesser thing for the Son to stem from such a Father. He must share in the glory of the uncaused because he stems from the uncaused. That he has been begotten is a further fact about him, as significant as it is august, for men whose minds are not totally earthbound and materialistic.

(12) But, they say, *if* the Son is the same in substance as the Father, and the *Father is unbegotten*, then the Son *must* be unbegotten, *too*.

True—provided that ingeneracy constitutes God's being. That would give us an outlandish mixup—an unbegotten-begotten. But supposing the difference lies outside the substance of God, what validity has your argument got? Must you be your father's father if you are to avoid missing anything he has, when you are the same in being as he? Surely it is clear that when we are looking, if look we can, for what God's being consists of, a personal characteristic must be left out of account. This is the way to find out that God and ingeneracy are not identical. If they were identical, both "God" and "ingenerate" would have to be relational terms, or, since "ingenerate" is an absolute term, "God" would have to be one, too, seeing that logical equivalents can be used interchangeably. But what does "ingenerate" relate itself to, what is it the ingenerate of? God has such terms—he is God of all. So how can "God" and "ingenerate" be identical? And again since ingeneracy and begottenness are mutually opposed, as condition and privation, it follows that mutually opposed beings or substances have been brought in—which is impossible. Or again, since conditions are prior to privations, and privations take away conditions, not only must the Father's substance be prior to the Son's, but it must also be in the process of destruction by the Father on your presuppositions.

(13) What is left of their invincible arguments? Perhaps they will take a last refuge in this argument:

Unless God has ceased to beget, the begetting must be *unfinished* and at some time stop, but *if* it has stopped, it must have started.

Here again we have crude, bodily ideas from crude, bodily people. For my own part, I am not committing myself to saying whether or not the process of being begotten is eternal until I have made a close examination of the text: "Before all the hills, he begets me" (Prov 8:25). But I see no necessity in their argument.

If, as they say, what is going to stop must have started, what is not going *to stop* cannot have started.

What, on that showing, will the soul or angels be? If they have a beginning, they must cease, but if they are not going to end, obviously, according to these people, they have no beginning either. But in fact

they did begin, and they will not end. Their argument then, that something that is going to end requires a beginning, is untrue. Our position, of course, is that horses, man, oxen, and each item that comes under the same species have a single concept. Whatever shares in the concept is rightly called by that name, and whatever does not share in it is not properly called by the name. Thus in the same way there is a single being, nature, and name of God, even though the titles are distinguished, along with the distinct ideas about him. Whatever is properly called "God" is God, and whatever he is in his nature is a true name for him—granted that real truth is contained in facts, not in names. These people, though, act as if they were afraid of leaving any opposition to the truth untried. They acknowledge the Son as "God," when forced by reason and proof-texts to do so, but only in an equivocal sense. He shares the name and the name alone!

(14) When we make them the rejoinder, "Well, do you really mean that the Son is not 'God' in the proper sense of the word, in the same way that a picture of an animal is not an animal? In that case, how can he be God, supposing he is not 'God' in the proper sense?" they answer,

Why should *not* the names be the same and used in the proper sense in either case?

They instance the Greek word for "dog," which can be used in the proper sense to mean both a dog and a shark² (there being this sort of case of equivocal terms) and any other case where something bears the same title it shares equally with something else of a different nature.

In these instances, dear fellow, you are putting two natures under the same name, not making one superior to, or prior to, the other or one more true to its name than the other. There is nothing attached to the names to force that conclusion—the animal and the fish are equally entitled to the same Greek name, "dog^x"—and why not? No, things of the same and things of different status can have the same name. Yet

²The Greek *kuōn* means "dog" and "dog-shark."

when it comes to God, you attach an awe-inspiring solemnity to him, a transcendence of every essence and nature that constitutes the unique nature of God's deity, so to say. You ascribe this to the Father but then rob the Son of it and make him subordinate. You give the Son second place in reverence and worship. Even if you endow him with the syllables that make up the word "similar," you in fact truncate his godhead and make a mischievous transition from parity to disparity in the usage of a common name. The result is that a pictured and a living man are apter illustrations for you of the Godhead of Father and Son than the dog and shark you used. Alternatively, you must concede that the fact that they have a common name puts their natures on the same level, even if you are making out that they are different; in that case, you have ruined your "dog" example, which you hit on to illustrate a disparity of natures. What does it matter that the animals you distinguish have the same name, "dog," if they are on the same level? The point, after all, of having recourse to "dogs" and ambiguous names was to prove disparity, not parity. How could anyone stand more clearly convicted of self-confuting blasphemy?

(15) If we say that the Father is *qua* cause superior to the Son, they add the minor premise *but he is cause by nature* and hence conclude that *he is superior by nature*.

I do not know whom the fallacy misleads — themselves or their opponents. For it is not the case that all the predicates affirmed of some particular being can be affirmed without further qualification of his basic substance. No, plainly they are affirmed of some particular thing, in some particular respect. Is there anything to stop me also taking as my minor premise, "but 'being superior by nature' does not entail 'being Father'" and then concluding either that "being superior" does not entail "being superior" or that "being the Father" does not entail "being Father." Or take another example: God is being, but being is not necessarily God. Draw the conclusion for yourself — God is not necessarily God. No, the fallacy here arises from arguing, as the logicians call it, "from the particular to the general." We concede, of course, that it belongs to the nature of the cause to be superior, but

they infer that the superiority belongs to the nature — which is like our saying "X is a dead man" and their drawing the inference that "Man," without qualification, is dead.

(16) How could we bypass this next point of theirs, which is quite as dumbfounding as the rest of what they say?

"Father," they say, *is a designation either of the substance or the activity; is it not?*

They intend to impale us on a dilemma, for if we say that it names the substance, we shall then be agreeing that the Son is of a different substance, there being a single substance and that one, according to them, preempted by the Father. But if we say that the term designates the activity, we shall clearly be admitting that the Son is a creation not an offspring. If there is an active producer, there must be a production, and they will declare themselves surprised at the idea of an identity between creator and created. I should have felt some awe myself at your dilemma, had it been necessary to accept one of the alternatives and impossible to avoid them by stating a third, and truer, possibility. My expert friends, it is this: "Father" designates neither the substance nor the activity, but the relationship, the manner of being, which holds good between the Father and the Son. Just as with us these names indicate kindred and affinity, so here, too, they designate the sameness of stock, of parent and offspring. But to please you, let it be granted that "the Father" names a substance. That idea will bring in the Son along with it, not alienate him, if we follow common sense and the meaning of terms. Suppose, if you like, it stands for his activity; you will not catch us out that way either. He will actively have produced that very consubstantiality, even if the assumption of active production's being involved here is decidedly odd.

You see how we get clear of your twists and turns, even though you mean to fight foul. Now that we know just how invincible you are in logical twists, let us see what strength you can muster from Holy Scriptures. Perhaps you may undertake to win us over with them.

(17) We, after all, understand and preach the Son's Godhead on the basis of their grand and sublime lan-

guage. What do we mean here? Expressions like "God," "Word," "he who is in the beginning," who was "with the beginning," who was "the beginning." "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1) and "with you is the beginning" (Ps 109:3 [LXX]) and "who calls it the beginning from the generations of old" (Isa 41:4). Then he is the Only-begotten Son: "The Only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (John 1:18). He is "way," "truth," "life," and "light:" "I am the way, the truth, and the life" and "I am the light of the world" (John 14:6, 8:12). He is "wisdom" and "power:" "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). He is the "effulgence," "stamp," "image," and "seal:" "Who being the effulgence of his glory and the stamp of his person" (Heb 1:3) and "image of goodness" (Wis 7:26) and "for him did God the Father seal" (John 6:27). He is "Lord," "King," "he who is," and "almighty:" "The Lord rained down fire from the Lord" (Gen 19:24) and "A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom" (Ps 45:6) and "who is and was and is to come and the almighty" (Rev 1:8). Plainly these, and all the expressions synonymous with them, refer to the Son. None of them is a later acquisition, none became attached at a later stage to the Son or to the Spirit any more than to the Father, for perfection does not result from additions. There never was [a time] when he was without his word, when he was not Father, when he was not true, or when he was without wisdom and power, or when he lacked life, splendor, or goodness.

(18) Count up the phrases that in your ignorance you set over against these — "My God and your God" (John 20:17), "greater" (John 14:28), "he created" (Prov 8:22), "he made" (Acts 2:36), and "he sanctified" (John 10:36). Reckon in, if you like, "slave" (Phil 2:7) and "obedient" (Phil 2:8), "he gave" (John 18:19), "he learned" (Heb 5:8), "he was commanded" (John 15:10), "he was sent" (John 5:36), "he could do nothing" (John 5:19), "speak nothing" (John 12:49), "judge nothing" (John 8:15-16), "give nothing" (Mark 10:40), "will nothing of himself" (John 5:19, 30; 8:28). You may add these: his "ignorance" (Matt 24:36), his "subjection" (Luke 2:51),

his "praying" (Luke 3:21, 6:12), his "asking" (John 11:34; Luke 2:46); his "progress" and "growing up" (Luke 2:52). Put in, if you like, all the even lowlier expressions used about him — the fact that he "slept" (Matt 8:24), "was hungry" (Matt 4:2), "got tired" (John 4:6), "wept" (John 11:35), "was in agony" (Luke 22:44), was subject to things (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). Maybe you reproach him for his cross and death — I expect you will let his Resurrection and Ascension go free, seeing that here there is something on our side. You can pick up many more scraps besides these if you mean to go on fabricating this intruder of yours, this namesake of God. For us he is true God and on the same level as the Father. Yes, one could easily go through each of these expressions in detail and give you the truly religious interpretation. It is not a hard task to clear away the stumbling block that the literal text of Scripture contains — that is, if your stumbling is real and not just willful malice. In sum: you must predicate the more sublime expressions of the Godhead, of the nature that transcends bodily experiences, and the lowlier ones of the compound, of him who because of you was emptied became incarnate and (to use equally valid language) was "made man" (cf. Phil 2:7). Then next he was exalted, in order that you might have done with the earthbound carnality of your opinions and might learn to be nobler, to ascend with the Godhead and not linger on in things visible but rise up to spiritual realities, and that you might know what belongs to his nature and what to God's plan of salvation.

(19) He whom presently you scorn was once transcendent over even you. He who is presently human was incomposite. He remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed. No "because" is required for his existence in the beginning, for what could account for the existence of God? But later he came into being because of something, namely, your salvation, yours who insult him and despise his Godhead for that very reason because he took on your thick corporeality. Through the medium of the mind he had dealings with the flesh, being made that God on earth which is Man. Man and God blended; they became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent

that he was made man. He was begotten—yet he was already begotten—of a woman. And yet she was a virgin. That it was from a woman makes it human, that she was a virgin makes it divine. On earth he has no father (Matt 1:20), but in heaven no mother (cf. Ps 2:7). All this is part of his Godhead. He was carried in the womb (cf. Luke 1:31), but acknowledged by a prophet as yet unborn himself, who leaped for joy at the presence of the Word for whose sake he had been created (Luke 1:41). He was wrapped in swaddling bands (Luke 2:7, 12), but at the Resurrection he unloosed the swaddling bands of the grave (cf. John 20:6–7). He was laid in a manger (Luke 2:7, 16), but was extolled by angels, disclosed by a star, and adored by Magi (Matt 2:2, 7, 9–11). Why do you take offense at what you see, instead of attending to its spiritual significance? He was exiled into Egypt (Matt 2:13–14), but he banished the Egyptian idols. He had "no form of beauty" (Isa 53:2) for the Jews, but for David he was "fairer than the children of men" (Ps 45:2), and on the mount he shines forth, becoming more luminous than the Sun (Matt 17:2), to reveal the future mystery.

(20) As a man he was baptized (Matt 3:16), but he absolved sins as God (John 1:29, Matt 9:2); he needed no purifying rites himself—his purpose was to hallow water. As man he was put to the test, but as God he came through victorious (Matt 4:1–11)—yes, he bids us to be of good cheer because he has conquered the world (John 16:33). He hungered (Matt 4:2)—yet he fed thousands (Matt 14:20–21). He is indeed "living, heavenly bread" (John 6:51). He thirsted (John 19:28)—yet he exclaimed: "Whosoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). Indeed, he promised that believers would become fountains (cf. John 7:38). He was tired (John 4:6)—yet he is the "rest" of the weary and the burdened (Matt 11:28). He was overcome by heavy sleep (cf. Matt 8:24)—yet he goes lightly over the sea, rebukes winds, and relieves the drowning Peter (Matt 14:25–32). He pays tax—yet he uses a fish to do it (Matt 17:24–27); indeed, he is emperor over those who demand the tax. He is called a "Samaritan, demonically possessed" (John 8:48)—but he rescues the man who came down from Jerusalem and fell

among thieves (cf. Luke 10:30). Yes, he is recognized by demons (Luke 4:33–34), drives out demons (cf. Matt 8:16), drowns deep a legion of spirits (Mark 5:9), and sees a prince of demons falling like lightning (cf. Luke 10:18). He is stoned, yet not hit (John 11:35); he prays, yet he hears prayer (cf. Mark 1:35; Matt 8:13). He weeps (John 11:35), yet he puts an end to weeping (cf. Luke 7:13). He asks where Lazarus is (John 11:34)—he was a man, yet he raises Lazarus (John 11:43–44)—he was God. He is sold, and cheap was the price—thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:15), yet he buys back the world at the mighty cost of his own blood (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pet 1:19). A sheep, he is led to the slaughter (Acts 8:32; Isa 53:7)—yet he shepherds Israel (Ps 80:1) and now the whole world as well (cf. John 10:11, 16). A lamb, he is dumb (Isa 53:7)—yet he is "word" (John 1:1), proclaimed by "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness" (John 1:53). He is weakened, wounded (Isa 53:5)—yet he cures every disease and every weakness (Matt 9:35). He is brought up to the tree (1 Pet 2:24) and nailed to it (cf. John 19:17)—yet by the tree of life he restores us (cf. Gen 2:9; Rev 2:7). Yes, he saves even a thief crucified with him (Luke 23:43); he wraps all the visible world in darkness (cf. Matt 27:45). He is given vinegar to drink (Matt 27:48), gall to eat (Matt 27:34)—and who is he? Why, one who turned water into wine (John 2:7–9), who took away the taste of bitterness (cf. Exod 15:25), who is all sweetness and desire (Song 5:16). He surrenders his life, yet he has power to take it again (John 10:17–18). Yes, the veil is rent, for things of heaven are being revealed, rocks split, and dead men have an earlier awakening (Matt 27:51–52). He dies (Matt 27:50), but he vivifies (John 5:21) and by death destroys death (2 Tim 1:10). He is buried (Matt 27:60), yet he rises again (John 20:8–9). He goes down to Hades, yet he leads souls up (cf. Eph. 4:8–9), ascends to heaven (Mark 16:19), and will come to judge quick and dead (2 Tim 4:1) and to probe discussions like these. If the first set of expressions starts you going astray, the second takes your error away.

(21) This is the answer we make perforce to these posers of puzzle. Perforce—because Christian people find long-winded controversy disagreeable and

one Adversary (cf. 1 Pet 5:8) enough for them. Yet our attackers made it essential, since remedies, too, must be made for diseases if they are to learn that their wisdom is not complete and that they are not invincible in their lavish attempts to nullify the Gospel. For when we abandon faith to take the power of reason as our shield, when we use philosophical inquiry to destroy the credibility of the Spirit, then reason gives way in the face of the vastness of the realities. Give way it must, set going, as it is, by the frail organ of human understanding. What happens then? The frailty of our reasoning looks like a frailty in our creed. Thus it is that, as Paul, too, judges, smartness of argument is revealed as a nullifying of the Cross (1 Cor 1:17). Faith, in fact, is what gives fullness to our reasoning.

But may he who "expounds hard questions and solves difficulties" (cf. Dan 5:12), who puts it into our minds to untie the twisted knots of their strained dogmas, may he, above all, change these men and make them believers instead of logicians, Christians instead of what they are currently called. Indeed this is our entreaty. "We beseech you, for Christ's sake; be reconciled to God and quench not the Spirit" (2 Cor 5:20; 1 Thess 5:19)—or rather let Christ be reconciled with you, and may the Spirit at long last illuminate you. Bent on quarrel though you may be, yet we have the Trinity in our safekeeping and by the Trinity can be saved, abiding pure and blameless (Phil 1:10) until the more complete revelation of what we long for in Christ himself, our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.