

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES NUMBER TWO HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE

# Gregory the Great

Moral Reflections on the Book of Job

Volume 4

Books 17–22

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# Gregory the Great

Translated by

*Brian Kerns, OCSO*

Introduction by

*Mark DelCogliano*



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# Abbreviations

## **Publications: Books and Series**

- CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1954–.
- CS Cistercian Studies series. Kalamazoo, MI, and Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications.
- LXX Septuagint
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latinae. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris.
- Praef Praefatio
- SCh Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

## **Augustine's Works**

- Conf *Confessions*
- De doc chr *De Doctrina Christiana*

# Introduction

*Mark DelCogliano*

**T**he fourth of the six parts of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* contains six of its thirty-five books, namely, books 17–22. We are now moving past the halfway point, which is also a turning point. The first three parts display considerable variety in approach and style as Gregory worked out his exegetical methodology and later encountered difficulties in his compositional process. By the time Gregory begins the fourth part, however, he has long figured out a manageable way to conduct his interpretation of Job and has settled into it without further second-guessing. He was also able to employ a consistent process of composition in parts 4–6. Thus the final three parts are characterized by evenness and stability in approach and style.

In books 1–3 of part 1, for example, Gregory sticks to his original plan of interpreting each verse three times: first the historical or literal interpretation, then the typical interpretation (geared toward what Christians believe or need to believe), and finally the moral interpretation (what Christians need to do).<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of part 1 (books 4–5), however, he starts to abandon this plan, for the most part jettisoning the historical interpretation and focusing chiefly on the typical or moral interpretation (and sometimes both). This revised approach is solidified in parts 2 and 3, and so by the time the second half of the *Moralia* begins with part 4, the approach is well established.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the coverage of verses varies widely in the

<sup>1</sup> On Gregory's exegetical practice, see Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, trans. Brian Kerns, CS 249 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2014), 1:17–26.

<sup>2</sup> See vol. 2:1–3 (CS 257, 2015).

first three parts: 84 verses (Job 1:5–5:2) in part 1 (books 1–5); 179 verses (Job 5:3–12:5) in part 2 (books 6–10); and 324 verses (Job 12:6–24:20) in part 3 (books 11–16). While the greater coverage in part 2 in comparison to part 1 is the result of his revised exegetical approach, which allowed for a quicker pace, the greater coverage in part 3 in comparison to part 2 is a consequence of Gregory's not having had the opportunity to revise his originally spoken comments.<sup>3</sup>

In parts 4–6, however, the number of verses covered falls into the same range: 173 verses (Job 24:20–31:40) in part 4 (books 17–22); 165 verses (Job 32:1–37:24) in part 5 (books 23–27); and 145 verses (Job 38:1–42:16) in part 6 (books 28–35). This consistency is probably (though it remains a conjecture) due, at least partially, to parts 4–6 having been originally dictated—that is, orally communicated to scribes with the specific intention of composing a literary work. The compositional process used in these parts was therefore different from that used in the first three parts, which were originally spoken—that is, delivered orally to an audience and recorded by notaries, and only later edited and recast into a literary work.<sup>4</sup> (As was mentioned above, Gregory did not have the opportunity to do this recasting for part 3.) And so, in addition to his having settled on a workable method of exegesis, using the same method of writing in parts 4–6 must have contributed to his consistency in terms of verse coverage.

Returning in part 4 are the long digressions, excurses, and mini-treatises that were absent in part 3. Their absence in part 3 indicates that in parts 1–2 these were something Gregory added when he revised the notaries' transcriptions. As he dictated parts 4–6 (probably), the digressions, excurses, and minitreatises in them were probably part of his interpretation from its initial stages. As in parts 1–3, these digressions, etc., afford Gregory the chance to delve into subjects of special concern to him. In these sections he really shines, as he

<sup>3</sup> See vol. 3:1–3 (CS 258, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> On the distinction between speaking and dictating, as well as Gregory's compositional process, see vol. 1:9–10.

is able to break free of the limits he placed on himself through his exegetical method and expound topics in greater depth with his characteristic spiritual, theological, pastoral, and psychological insight. These digressions, excurses, and minitreatises also exhibit Gregory's literary skill, as they interrupt the potential monotony of his line-by-line exegetical method with little treatises whose contents are sometimes only loosely or tangentially related to the subject dictated by the verse of Job.

Part 4 contains a minitreatise in *Moralia* 22.XV.30–34 that could be titled “On the Good of Admitting Sin.” Here Gregory ostensibly comments on Job 31:33, “Did I hide my sin like a human being or conceal my iniquity in my bosom?” Apparently the verse's mention of hiding sin and concealing iniquity reminded Gregory of the sin of Adam and Eve and their subsequent hiding from God among the trees of Paradise, as narrated in Genesis 3. The making of such verbal connections and their exploitation in biblical interpretation is typical of Gregory's exegetical practice. In the present case, this verse of Job provides him with an opportunity to describe a pattern of sinning that he views as a consequence of original sin and now endemic to the human race.

Upon the commission of sin, writes Gregory, instead of humbly acknowledging one's sin and admitting it by confession, the human race generally tends to hide sin by denying it and then even to multiply one's sin by justifying or defending it. This is nothing more than proud self-isolation, a cutting oneself off from the only relationship that really matters, the one with God, from whom one cannot actually hide. Gregory likens such a person to a corpse locked in the tomb of his or her own mind, buried under the weight of his or her wickedness, alienated from God. The idea that sin separates one from God is surely traditional, but Gregory elaborates the point in a striking way, as he depicts one sin's proliferating additional sins that widen the chasm between the sinner and God.

As for acknowledging one's sin, Gregory teaches that it brings about the realization of how distant one has become from God.



Admission of one's sin is thus the beginning of enlightenment; it is a kind of spiritual resurrection. It is a restoration to life, as Christ called Lazarus from death to life out of the tomb. Gregory is clear that the acknowledgment and admission of one's sin, which restores one to relationship with God, is primarily a function of the humility that such actions require or presuppose. Because of his ascetic and monastic background, Gregory recognized that humility, the acceptance of our profound need of and dependence on God, our source and destiny, in whom ultimate human felicity resides, is the quintessential Christian virtue. Only the humble are capable of intimacy with God. Sin is rooted in pride; seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with God requires humility.

In addition to describing this pattern of sinning, Gregory offers a theological explanation: it is one of the consequences of the original sin of Adam and Eve. It is they, he says, who established this deleterious pattern. To make this point, he provides a brief exegesis of Genesis 3. Here Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, lured by the serpent's promise that they will become like gods, and then they hide themselves from God among the trees of Paradise. When discovered by God, each refuses to accept the responsibility for his or her sin: Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. In effect, suggests Gregory, both of them, in acts of brazen self-defense, blame God for their sins, since it is he who made Eve and put the serpent in Paradise. Unable to be like God in his divine nature, as the serpent had falsely promised, Adam and Eve, remarks Gregory, have tried to make God like themselves, that is, guilty of wrongdoing! Thus, Adam and Eve have not only denied their sin by hiding among the trees but also engaged in self-justification by refusing to accept responsibility and putting the blame elsewhere. This same propensity to increase one's sinning by refusing to acknowledge and admit it, and even to defend it, is thus part of the fallen human condition inherited from Adam and Eve.

With his typical psychological insight into human nature Gregory makes another point: it is possible to acknowledge and admit one's sin proudly. Gregory notes that there are sinners who acknowledge

their sin to themselves and even admit it privately to God, but if they are accused of wrongdoing or faults by others, they immediately defend themselves against the charge because they do not want to have the appearance or reputation of being sinners. For Gregory, the move to quick self-defense demonstrates that the original acknowledgment and admission were motivated by pride and not by true humility. This is but another example of Gregory's deep familiarity with the mixed motivations that characterize human beings in their fallen state: we can even perform what seem to be objectively good acts—acknowledgment and admission of sin—for the wrong reasons or in the wrong way, to our detriment. The way of true humility is the only way to God.

Eventually, however, Gregory brings the *minitreatise* back to Job himself. He praises him for displaying great humility by living among adversaries while being unafraid to confess his own faults and by allowing others to know them. Gregory concludes with these words in praise of Job's humility:

Let this man seem great in his virtues to whomever you please; to me he certainly seems high-minded even in his sins. Let those who wish continence and chastity wonder at him, let them wonder at his integrity and justice, let them wonder at his deep piety; I myself do not wonder any less at his humble confession of sin than at so many sublime virtuous acts. I know it is often a much greater struggle to admit sins we have committed through fear and weakness than to avoid committing them, and practically any kind of evil, however strongly it is voiced, is nevertheless admitted with greater humility. Blessed Job then, supported by so many virtuous acts, was not ashamed to confess his fault, and he displays humility in his virtues. (22.XV.34)

Humility is thus the queen of the virtues. Because of his humility, then, Job is, for Gregory, once again, the model Christian.

With the publication of this volume, the fourth of a projected six containing a new translation of the *Moralia* by Br. Brian Kerns, OCSO, we are two-thirds of the way to the project's completion. I

commend Br. Brian for continuing to produce a high-quality translation that preserves the complexity of Gregory's Latin without loss of clarity and readability. I continue to be grateful to Dr. Marsha Dutton for her editorial oversight of the project and to Cistercian Publications for their willingness to publish this monumental achievement. In the middle of part 4, at the beginning of book 20, Gregory remarks, "The more we meditate on Holy Scripture, the more we love it" (20.I.1). So too it is with his *Moralia*.

Mark DeICogliano  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
April 21, 2017  
Friday of the Easter Octave

## BOOK 17

I. 1. As often as we attempt in our story of the blessed man to expound the mystery of the typical sense for a new volume, we must offer the mystical explanation principally from the person or suffering of the man himself, inasmuch as, by the analogy of houses of residence, when we inscribe the name on the front of the doorpost so that we may know whose house it is, we may the more securely enter. I remember that I have spoken numerous times about this matter: namely that blessed Job symbolizes by his person and suffering the sufferings of our Redeemer and of his body the church. Job's name is indeed interpreted *sorrowful*, and who else is prefigured by this sorrowful man than he of whom it is written, *He really bore our weariness, and he took on himself our sufferings.*\* He says again, *we were healed by his sores.*\* His friends, on the other hand, play the role of the heretics, who, as we have often said, pretend to defend God but really offend him.

\*Isa 53:4

\*Isa 53:5

The holy man accordingly tells his own story through his wounds and speeches, so that he may also signify ours, and he often recounts future happenings through the spirit of prophecy, going beyond the present events. Sometimes, however, he discusses the present in such a way that he may be silent about the future. So once we have realized his care and prudence in this matter, our understanding should alternate along with the modulation of his voice, in order that it may correspond all the more accurately with the meaning he intends the more it changes according to his words. So with the words he already spoke, the holy man made

known the sins of any evil person through eloquent phrases and skilled prudence, and he showed that such actions should be condemned. He forthwith adds words concerning the penalty for such actions:

**II. 2.** *Let him not be remembered, but let him be broken up like an unfruitful tree.*\* No one who remains subject to vices until the end of life has a place in the Creator's memory. If the memory of God's notice did touch such a person, it would no doubt recall him from his evil ways. Beyond any doubt, the deserts of such a one exact the result that he should be entirely erased from his Maker's memory. It must be established, however, that to say *God remembers* is not entirely appropriate. In what way could the one remember who cannot forget? Because, however, we embrace those whom we remember and avoid those whom we forget, by analogy with the ways of humans God is said to remember when he bestows his gifts and to forget those whom he abandons to their sins.

Yet because God weighs all things, he considers them all without any break or change. Thus he remembers good people, whom he yet never forgets, and he remembers bad ones, upon whom he nevertheless always looks in Judgment. It is as though he returned to the memory of good people, whom however he never abandoned, and as though he never looked upon evil ones, whose deeds he still observes. Concerning the latter, however, he keeps his judgment of condemnation for the last day. That is why we read, *The eyes of the Lord look on the good and the evil,*\* and the psalmist says, *The Lord's countenance is upon those who do evil, that he may rid the earth of their memory.*\* Accordingly God observes those he punishes, but he does not see beforehand those he does not know. He is going to tell certain ones in the end, you know, *I do not know where*

\*Job 24:20

\*Prov 15:3

\*Ps 33:17

*you come from. Get away from me, all you evildoers!\**

\*Luke 13:27

Consequently he sees in a wonderful way the life of the depraved ones, and he also forgets, because as far as his remembering mercy is concerned, he does not know those whom he judges with a strict sentence.

**3.** Because they do not touch his memory, they are broken up like an unfruitful tree by his Judgment. Assuredly the earth supported them temporarily with its substance, and the rain of preaching fell on them from above, but their life never brought forth any fruit of good works, so the husbandman was angry with them and broke off their life, so that according to the sentence passed by Truth they should no longer occupy the ground that another tree could hold and bear fruit.\* John too mentions this unfruitful tree: *The axe is ready to strike the roots of the trees. Every tree accordingly that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.\** In this passage of Job, however, we are dealing with the tracing out of eternal punishment; he does not say “cut down” but *broken up*, because, you see, death of the flesh indeed cuts off the depraved ones, but the punishment that follows death breaks them up. It is as though they were cut down here when they were separated from the present life, but they are broken up in hell when they are tortured with everlasting damnation. Because, however, the holy man has recounted the case of the depraved sinner’s strict penalty, he forthwith returns to that sinner’s offense, so that he may use the sinner’s long record of injustice to show that this complete condemnation was not unjust. The next verse:

\*see Luke 13:7

\*Luke 3:9

**III. 4.** *He fed the barren and childless woman, and he did not benefit the widow.\** Who is it that he names barren in this passage but the flesh? The flesh desires only the present reality and cannot bring forth good thoughts. Who is called widow if not the soul? Because

\*Job 24:21

\*Ps 18:6

the Creator wanted to join the soul to himself, he came to the bridal chamber of a womb of flesh, as the psalmist testifies: *He is like a bridegroom coming out of the bridal chamber.*\* She is rightly called a widow, because her husband suffered death for her, and he is now hidden from her eyes in the innermost heaven; it is as if he lived in a region of another country. Bad people accordingly feed barren women but neglect kindness to the widow, since they are enslaved to desires of the flesh and disdain the care and life of the soul. All their concentration and zeal are focused on the flesh doomed to die, which they want to live on and to have no troubles. For the care and life of the soul, however, they have only scorn, but it is the soul that definitely lives forever, either in death or in the blessed state.

Job said, *He fed the barren* and forthwith added *childless*, and he was right. We know of certain women in sacred history who were barren, but they did finally bear children. The flesh, however, is not only barren but childless as well, because it cannot even at the end bring forth good thoughts from its perception. Its primitive vitality is already exhausted, and yet it still does not give up on passing desires. Its early strength has already run out, and it is almost cast out by the world it loves, yet it still tries with evil intent to snatch up passing goods. It is no longer able to do evil, yet it does not stop thinking about the evil, even if it does not do it. Rightly therefore is it called not only barren but also childless, because not even when weakened, as we have said, is it pregnant with offspring of good thoughts conceived of its own perception.

**5.** The same meaning can also be understood concerning those who preach heresy. Every single erroneous preacher, you see, teaches people who live outside the unity of the church and are absolutely barren. The

childless woman he feeds, because he offers the benefit of his labor to her who never brings forth any spiritual fruit. He does not benefit the widow, because he obviously disdains the life and service of the holy universal church, whose husband suffered the adversity of death. To benefit the widow means to labor to comfort her who is hard pressed for the love of her deceased husband. This same widow, who is obviously Holy Church, complains in the words of the psalmist, *I looked for someone to comfort me, and I found none.*\* Then only will she definitely find consolation when because of that death her husband suffered she sees many of her members within herself rise to life. The erroneous preacher, however, often unites himself with those who are rich in this world, those who, because they are engrossed with earthly occupations, do not know how to comprehend cunning words. These rich people go around canvassing for external power, so they easily fall into the trap set by crooked preaching. So Job adds,

\*Ps 68:21

**IV. 6.** *He pulled down the powerful ones with his own power.*\* With the power of his own base behavior he pulls down each one of the powerful ones when he seizes the powerful ones of this world through his cunning error. Against the powerful ones Paul said, *God chose the weaklings of the world to shame the strong.*\* The power of the crooked preacher is his lofty skill in speaking, with which he expands himself and disdains others. He is extraordinarily skillful in his own eyes, and in his expansion he has only contempt for everybody else. Thinking himself great while he is ignorant of God's truth, he is far away from the knowledge of faith, and yet he tries to look like a preacher of faith. So Job again adds,

\*Job 24:22

\*1 Cor 1:27

**V. 7.** *Yet now he stands up and despairs of his own life.*\* Every crooked preacher stands up in this world,

\*Job 24:22



wherever he lives in an earthly body, but he refuses to trust his own life, because he disdains the true knowledge of God. He would trust his own life if he had a correct perception of the nature of his Creator. Such is the way we have spoken above about any well-known evil person, but now we quickly turn our thoughts to the preacher of error. So we must know that we are led to the particular in such a way that we never completely lose sight of the general.

All crooked people, then, even if they seem to hold correct faith in the bosom of the universal church, stand up and do not trust their own life. Their thoughts are admittedly correct when they think about the Creator by faith, but they disdain the works of faith. Their unbelief contradicts them, because that in which they maintained their belief condemns their life. That is why John says, *He who says he knows God but does not keep his commandments is a liar.*\* So also Paul says, *They declare their knowledge of God, yet they deny Him by their actions.*\* So also James says, *Faith without works is dead.*\* Here, however, we see the Creator's wonderful implementation of his counsel, when he looks upon our misdeeds and lengthens our lifetime, in order that a longer life might grant help to the penitent and to the unrepentant an increase of condemnation. Whereupon Job again adds,

\*1 John 2:4

\*Titus 1:16

\*Jas 2:20, 26

**VI. 8.** *God gave him room to repent, but he haughtily abused it.*\* Regarding those who sin and go on living, God's providence puts up with their actions for this reason: that he might restrain their wickedness. Those however who are borne with over a long period of time but still do not restrain their wickedness certainly receive the gift of God's patience, but they draw the chains of their guilt still more tightly around themselves precisely because of that gift. Because the time they had

\*Job 24:22

received for repentance they instead turned to blame, the strict Judge changes the instances of mercy bestowed into a penalty at the end.

That is why Paul says, *Do you not know that God's patience calls you to repentance? You, however, with your obduracy and impenitent heart, are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revealing of the just judgment of God.\** So also Isaiah says, *A boy dies a hundred years old, and the sinner will be cursed at a hundred years old.\** It is as if he would scare us openly, saying, "The life of a child is made long, so his boyish actions can be corrected, but if he does not restrain himself from committing sin even over a long period of time, this very length of life that he has received out of mercy grows for him into a heap of curses." Consequently it is necessary for us that when we notice that God has been waiting for us a long time, we should fear that time previously granted by God's kindness, as if it were grounds for condemnation, lest from the Judge's clemency the sinner's punishment should increase, and from the source where each one could be freed from death we would go to a more unrelenting death. Accordingly that is what often happens, because the mind's eye is never cut off from present reality. Sinners, you see, neglect the ways of the Redeemer, and therefore in their own journey they never stop growing old. So Job again adds,

\*Rom 2:4-5

\*Isa 65:20

**VII. 9.** *His eyes are on his ways.\** Sinners attend to their ways, because they want to think only and to see only what favors their own temporal advantage. That is why Paul says, *Everybody seeks his own convenience, not that of Christ Jesus.\** The way of the haughty is pride; the way of the robber is avarice; the way of the sensual person is concupiscence of the flesh. On their ways, accordingly, all evil people fasten their eyes,

\*Job 24:23

\*Phil 2:21

because they aim only at vices, in order to satiate themselves with them. That is why Solomon says, *The eyes of fools are on the ends of the earth.*\* He means that fools set their eyes on that alone with all their heart's attention through which they might be led to the goal of their earthly desire.

Sinners, however, would never fix their attentive gaze on the earth if they lifted their mind's eye to the sacred journey of their Redeemer. So Solomon again says, *The eyes of the wise man are on his head,*\* obviously because all wise people contemplate with their whole attention the one whose member they count themselves through faith. However, the one could only have seen with contempt these ways of human interaction who said, *I will train myself in your commands, and I will consider your paths.*\* It is as if he openly pledged himself, saying, "I now shrink from seeing the things that are mine, because I yearn to follow the path of life by imitating your ways."

Those who already deny the present world, you see, hold their Redeemer's ways before the eyes of their hearts by a love that is continually stirred up, in order that the mind might escape prosperity and prepare itself for adversity, that it might desire nothing soothing, that it might not be terrified at anything held to be frightening, that it might count sadness as joy, that it might estimate the joys of the present life as injury and sadness, that it might fear no damage or despair, but that it should seek through them the place of abiding glory. Truth pointed out these ways to the eyes of his followers when he said, *If any man would serve me, let him follow me.*\* He called the swollen hearts of his disciples back to these ways when they were already seeking a place of glory, while they were ignorant of the path of that glory, asking, *Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?\**

\*Prov 17:24

Ecll 2:14

\*Ps 118:15

\*John 12:26

\*Matt 20:22

They were looking for loftiness and a seat at his right hand and his left, but they did not see how narrow the road was that led to that point. So he forthwith placed before their eyes the imitation of the cup of the passion, obviously in order that, aiming at the enjoyment of a lofty place, they should first find the path of lowliness. Accordingly, since sinners neglect the consideration of the Lord's ways but aim at those alone that please their flesh, Job rightly says here, *His eyes are on his ways*. The next verse:

**VIII. 10.** *They are raised up for a limited time, and they will not stand.\** The renown of the wicked people often lasts for many years, and the minds of the powerless evaluate their fame as long-lasting and stable. When, however, a sudden end cuts off the wicked, that end finally contradicts them and says that their renown was of brief duration; that end limits their renown and proclaims that since it could pass away, it was restricted. They are accordingly raised up for a limited time, and they will certainly not stand, because by the very fact that they longed to seem elevated, they found themselves far from the true essence of God through haughtiness. Indeed they cannot stand, because they are cut off from the stability of that eternal essence, and they are the first to sustain collapse, because they fall against themselves through their private glory. That is why the psalmist says, *You hurled them down when they were lifting themselves up,\** because they collapse internally at the same time as they wrongly rise up externally. The psalmist saw the brevity of worldly glory, so he spoke again: *I saw a wicked man overbearing and towering above the cedars of Lebanon; I passed by again, and he was gone.\** He said again, *Just a little while and the sinner will be gone.\** So also James says, *What is your life? It is a breath abiding for a moment.\** The

\*Job 24:24

\*Ps 72:18

\*Ps 36:35-36

\*Ps 36:10

\*Jas 4:14

prophet too weighs the brevity of the glory of the flesh and declares, *All flesh is grass, and its boasting is like the flower of the field.*\*

\*Isa 40:6;  
1 Pet 1:24

The power of evil people is assuredly compared to the flower of grass, because even as the fame of the flesh clearly glows it falls; while it exalts its own worth, it is stopped dead by a sudden end and disappears. Stubble is seized by a blast of wind and whipped up high in the air, but just as sudden is its fall to the ground. In the same way is smoke lifted up to the clouds, but it quickly expands, is scattered, and is lost. In the same way a cloud collects from the lowest regions, thickens, and rises, but a single ray of the rising sun strikes it, and it is wiped out as if it did not exist. In the same way the dampness of nocturnal dew is sprinkled on the surface of the grass, but it is quickly dried by the heat of daylight. The swelling foam of water is eagerly stirred up from its hidden depths when the rain starts, but the higher it expands and increases, the more quickly it is scattered and disappears. So when things grow in order to be seen, by the same act of growing they pass on, lest they stand. It may be correctly said therefore about the wicked who are swollen with the pride of worldly magnificence, but who nevertheless have no permanence and do not last, *They are raised up for a limited time, and they will not stand.* About them he again adds,

**IX. 11.** *They will be cast down just like everything else and taken away.*\*

\*Job 24:24

The aim of contemplation should be such that it passes from the consideration of the few to the many and from the many to all things, inasmuch as it is led to move gradually, and by embracing all that is transitory it determines them and, itself nearly incomprehensible, goes on growing. So when the holy man dismissed the fame and failure of crooked people, he forthwith turned his mind's eye to everything that

exists and said, *They will be cast down just like everything else and taken away.* Obviously he meant all that is of the earth. It is as if he said, “They cannot in any way stand, because those things on which they lean also pass away, and because they love the things that pass away, they also pass away along with them; such is the inconstancy of time.”

However, we may ask why, since Solomon says, *A generation passes, and a generation arises, but the earth remains forever,\** blessed Job asserts that everything is cast down and taken away. However, we easily resolve this difficulty if we distinguish in what way heaven and earth either pass away or remain. Both of them, you see, have a present image through which they pass away, but their essential being subsists forever. That is why Paul says, *The shape of this world is passing away.\** Truth himself also says, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.\** So also John is told by the angel’s voice, *There will be a new heaven and a new earth.\** He does not mean that others will be created, but that they themselves will be renewed. Heaven and earth accordingly both pass away and will be, because both that appearance they now have is wiped out by fire, and their own nature is preserved.

That is why the psalmist says, *You will change them, and they will be changed.\** That indeed is their last change, which they announce to us now by their very alterations, by which they ceaselessly change to fit the uses we make of them. For example the earth’s appearance grows wan in the dryness of winter, but it grows green again in the wetness of spring. Every night the sky is covered with darkness, but it is seen again clearly by day. Consequently let every faithful soul gather from this both the death of these creatures and their being made anew, which even now are constantly remade as

\*Ecc1 1:4

\*1 Cor 7:31

\*Matt 24:35;  
Mark 13:31;  
Luke 21:33

\*Rev 21:1

\*Ps 101:27

if they had failed. The holy man accordingly gazes on the life of depraved people in this context, and he makes known under what terrible judgment they are one day to fall, when he forthwith adds,

**X. 12.** *Like the crests of the ears of grain, so will they be rubbed out.*\* The crests of the ears of grain are of course beards, and the beards come out joined in those ears, but little by little as the plant grows higher, the hairs grow rigid and separate. That is just how the depraved rich people arise for the glory of this world. They are connected with each other by a common nature, but as they grow they cut themselves off from each other. One of them absolutely despises the other, and one of them burns with the fire of envy against the other. Those whose minds are puffed up separate themselves from the unity of love, just like the crests of grain, and stand rigid against one another. What should I call the depraved rich men of this world, if not some kind of beard on the head of the human race? They grow proud against one another, but they agree in their affliction of the lives of good people; they are really divided against one another, but together they press down the grain.

\*Job 24:24

**13.** Consequently the beards are now blown up on high, but the grain is hidden, because the power of the blameworthy is uppermost, and the glory of those who are chosen is hidden. The former show off their dignity and pride, while the latter humbly repress their feelings. But harvest time will arrive, the rigid beards will break, and the whole grain will not be rubbed away. Then indeed the pride of the wicked will be brought down when it is revealed how brightly the life of the chosen ones shines, because when the unrighteous ones fail, their beards break and the hidden grain shows up. Yes, the beards will break and the white grain will shine, because when the wicked fall into eternal punishment,

the justice of the saints will be revealed and show itself dazzlingly white. That is why John also correctly says, *His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean his threshing floor; the grain he will store in his barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.*\* So let blessed Job behold by how severe a judgment the pride of the crooked is broken; let him compare them to the beards of grain plants, and say, *Like the crests of the ears of grain, so will they be rubbed out.* Their rigid pride is absolutely broken by the power of the final harvest, although it now lifts itself up and has only contempt for the life of the chosen ones. The next verse:

\*Matt 3:12

**XI. 14.** *If this is not the truth, who will be able to accuse me of lying and present my words before God?\**

\*Job 24:25

If it is not truth that he speaks, certainly all people can accuse him of falsehood. Why, then, does he say, *If this is not the truth, who will be able to accuse me of lying?* Do we not obviously know that it is open to anyone to reprove falsehood? However, if we distinguish the meaning of the speaker with careful interrogation, we will find out sooner how correct are the words that he utters. Even if the just man, you see, was ever found wanting in what he said, it is not fitting that he be judged by unjust people and by those who live crooked lives. So the holy man puts down the pride of his friends, questioning not only whether he spoke the truth but also whether he spoke falsely, and he is confident that he can absolutely not be censured, because they certainly have a right to blame falsehood who cannot act falsely. Those who still live falsely lose the initiative to correct falsehood. That is why he says, *If this is not the truth, who will be able to accuse me of lying?* It is as if he said openly, “All that I have said is true, but even if it were not true, I could never be blamed by you, because as long as you yield to your own falsehood, you cannot reprove someone else’s.”



**15.** Likewise, he is correct in saying, *Will he present my words before God?* Anyone you see who truly re-proves lying words thinks over what he has heard and weighs it against the rule of truth. That is what presenting words before God means. He examines within himself in the presence of truth what he declares externally against falsehood. To present words before God surely means that having regarded the internal judge carefully, we weigh the external words. The holy man therefore does not believe that his words can be presented to God by his haughty friends. It is as if he said, “You cannot present my words to the Judge, because you hide his face from yourselves by sinning.” There is nothing wrong, however, with understanding this situation in the light of the typology of Holy Church. When she is reprovved and mocked by the heretics on account of her weaker members, she pours scorn on the very craftiness with which they mock her, because God is more patient with anyone who grovels in weakness and ignorance accompanied by humility than with anyone who is haughty but grasps what is elevated. But now the holy man has declared many things against those who are haughty with their fleeting power and are puffed up with windy honors, so Bildad the Shuhite takes advantage of the censure of God, in whose sight he knows true power lies, and says,

**XII. 16.** *Power and dread are in his sight, and he creates harmony in his loftiness.\** He might as well have said, “He alone really frightens mortal hearts, and he is the one who really possesses them, because he has the power of divinity.” What dread does human power inspire? Human nature does not know when it may lack the right to any such power. He is right to say, *He creates harmony in his loftiness.* There is much discord, you see, in the lower creation, yet the creatures hasten

\*Job 25:2

towards the full concord of the higher creation, and internal peace often composes the differences of those creatures that lack external peace. Almighty God also inclines good people to meritorious action when he allows bad people to rage against their lives. The higher creation is also set in order and concord while the lower creatures are confused, because there in the heavenly places God associates his chosen ones with the angelic choirs, while below on earth he bears the behavior of reprobate sinners who oppose his will.

17. On the other hand, we may inquire concerning this matter why, if perfect peace is kept in the highest heaven, Daniel is told by the angel, *I have come because of your words, but the prince of the Persian kingdom withstood me for twenty-one days; then Michael, one of the highest princes, came to my aid.*\* Then a little later he said, *Now I will return to fight the prince of the Persians. When I left, you see, there was the prince of the Greeks approaching.*\* Whom do you think he calls national princes if not the angels, who could oppose his departure? Accordingly, what peace could there be in the highest heaven, if between the angelic spirits themselves battle is waged, those who always stand in the sight of truth? However, some of the services the angels render consist in leading and governing each of the various nations, and the behavior of their subjects against one another demands the ministry of the spirits placed over them. That is why the guardian spirits themselves are said to attack one another.

\*Dan 10:12-13

\*Dan 10:20

We know of course that this angel who is talking to Daniel is the spirit who presides over the captive people of Israel located in Persia. Michael, on the other hand, is the one who presides over those of the same people who had remained in the land of Judea. So the angel we just mentioned now tells Daniel, *No one helps me*

\*Dan 10:21 *against all these except Michael, your prince.\** About him, as we have already mentioned, he spoke before: *Then Michael, one of the highest princes, came to my aid.\** Although this Michael is never said to be present, but to be coming to help, it is well known that he is put in charge of that people held captive in another place. What does it mean therefore when the angel says, *I have come because of your words, but the prince of the Persian kingdom withstood me?* It must be that he came to declare his works to his subject people.

\*Dan 10:13

It is as if he said outright, “The claims of your prayers demand that the people of Israel should be freed from the yoke of their captivity. But there is still something in that people that needs to be purged under the dominion of Persia. That is why the prince of Persia legally contends with me against their freedom, even if your prayers help and also the tears of the people left in Judea.” That is why he also adds these words we mentioned before: *Michael your prince comes to help me.* When he goes to fight the prince of Persia, the prince of Greece also shows up and comes to meet him. This latter event signals the fact that Judea had also done something against the Greeks, and it was because of them that the prince of Greece opposed the rescue of Judea. Accordingly the angel hears the prophet’s prayers, but the prince of Persia opposes him, because even if the life of the just intercessor now demands the rescue of the people, nevertheless the life of the same people still tells against rescue, so that because those who had been led into captivity were not yet completely purified, they were still legally under Persia’s domination.

Michael helps the angel, but the prince of the Greeks is coming to do battle, because although the oppressive captivity of Judea had now lasted so long as to deserve forgiveness, their crime against the Greeks stood against

this benefit of freedom. He is right therefore to say that angels are coming against him, because in both cases the merits of the people subject to him stand against them. The heavenly spirits, you see, who are princes over the nations, never fight for those who behave unjustly, but they do consider their actions and judge them rightly. When the sins or righteousness of every single nation are brought before the tribunal of the heavenly court, the prince of that nation is said to have won a battle or to have lost it. However, one identical victory of each one of these nations is the supreme will of their maker who presides over them, and they always aspire towards his will, but what they have not the power to obtain they have not the will to obtain. So Bildad is right to say, *He creates harmony in his loftiness.*

**XIII. 18.** *Is not his army innumerable?\** The number of heavenly spirits is not found in the conception of human reason, because reason does not know the greatness of that concourse of the invisible army. The prophet Daniel spoke of it thus: *A thousand thousands served Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him.\** The number of heavenly citizens is described as both infinite and definite. God can count them, but we are shown that we cannot. However, it is one thing to stand around in God's presence, but something else to serve him. Those powers doubtlessly stand around in his presence, and do not leave that presence to make some announcement to mankind. On the other hand, those who serve him come forward to perform the function of messengers, but even they contemplate God deeply and do not leave his presence. Since there are more of those who serve than of those who mainly stand near, the number of those who stand near is represented as definite, but the number of those who serve is represented as infinite.

\*Job 25:3

\*Dan 7:10

19. We rightly call angelic spirits God's army, because we know very well that they fight the powers of the air. They fight these battles, however, not by force, but by mastery, because they can achieve whatever they want against the unclean spirits with the help of him who rules over all. It is written about this army, you see, on the occasion of our King's birth, *Suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army.*\* A number of the chosen people, whose sublime spiritual desire frees them from the slavery of a worldly way of life, joins this army. Paul says about these people, *No soldier of God gets involved in civilian affairs.*\* The people seem now to be few in number, but they reign in the invisible homeland, and there they are uncountable. Even if they are few compared to the evildoers, in their own crowded assembly they can by no means be numbered. The strength of this army, however, does not come from any power of their own, but from the inspiration of heavenly grace, so Bildad correctly adds,

\*Luke 2:13

\*2 Tim 2:4

\*Job 25:3

**XIV. 20.** *Upon whom does his light not shine?\** God's light is of course his preceding grace. If this grace never arises in our hearts, our mind would unquestionably remain hidden in the darkness of sin. So he again adds,

\*Job 25:4

**XV. 21.** *Can a person be justified over against God, or can anyone born of a woman show up pure?\** These words were spoken by blessed Job before, and now they are repeated to reproach him. Every righteous person is righteous by God's showing, not by comparison with him. Human justice, compared to the Creator's justice, is surely injustice, because even if the human person should live on in its own created state, the creature could still not equal the Creator. Furthermore sin has added still heavier weakness to the creature's burden. Sin en-

tered the creature through the serpent's ambush, and the weakened woman prevailed. That is why the man is now born from the woman subdued by sin. The weakness of ancient guilt spreads in the descendants. The stem of the human race decayed at the root; the vigor of its creation did not stand fast. So Bildad is right to ask, *Can a person be justified over against God, or can anyone born of a woman show up pure?* It is as if he said more plainly, "Let not the human being raise itself above its maker, but let it take account of its origin and really know itself." But look now how some members of this race are helped by the gift of the Spirit against the weakness of the flesh: they are lifted up, their virtues shine out, and they are crowned with signs and miracles. Nevertheless there is not one who passes through life without sin, as long as corruptible flesh is carried. So he again adds,

**XVI. 22.** *Behold, even the moon does not shine, and even the stars are not pure in his sight.\** What is meant by the moon if not the entire church at once? What by the stars if not the souls of all those who live rightly? While interacting among depraved people they shine as in the darkness of night, because their remarkable virtues are conspicuous. That is why Paul speaks to his disciples in this way: *You shine out among them like the heavenly lights that shine on the world.\** The prophet also testifies that Holy Church is expressed by the word for moon, saying, *The sun has been lifted up, and the moon stood in its place.\** When the sun was lifted up, the moon stood in its place, because the Lord ascended into heaven, and forthwith Holy Church's authority to preach is confirmed.

Paul again points out that the word for stars indicates the elect, saying, *Star differs from star in glory.\** Accordingly the moon does not shine and the stars are impure in his sight, because not even Holy Church gleams with so

\*Job 25:5

\*Phil 2:15

\*Hab 3:11

\*1 Cor 15:41

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