

Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God

WRITTEN FOR THALASSIOS

First Century

1. God is one, unoriginate, incomprehensible, possessing completely the total potentiality of being, altogether excluding notions of when and how, inaccessible to all, and not to be known through natural image by any creature.

2. So far as we are able to understand, for Himself God does not constitute either an origin, or an intermediary state, or a consummation, or anything else at all which can be seen to qualify naturally things that are sequent to Him. For He is undetermined, unchanging and infinite, since He is infinitely beyond all being, potentiality and actualization.

3. Every being whose self-limitation is intrinsic to it is by nature the origin of the activity perceived as potentially present within it. Every natural activity in the process of actualization - and such activity is, on the conceptual level, sequent to the being itself but prior to its own actualization - is an intermediary state, since by nature it lies between the being in which it is present potentially and its own actualization. Every actualization, limited as it naturally is by its own inner principle, is the consummation of that activity which has its origin in the being and which, conceptually speaking, precedes the actualization.

4. God is not a being either in the general or in any specific sense of the word, and so He cannot be an origin. Nor is He a potentiality either in the general or in any specific sense, and so He is not an intermediary state. Nor is He an actualization in the general or in any specific sense, and so He cannot be the consummation of that activity which proceeds from a being in which it is perceived to pre-exist as a potentiality . On the contrary, He is the author of being and simultaneously an entity transcending being; He is the author of potentiality and simultaneously the ground transcending potentiality ; and He is the active and inexhaustible state of all actualization. In short, He is the author of all being, potentiality and actualization, and of every origin, intermediary state and consummation.

5. Origin, the intermediary state and consummation characterize things divided by time, as indeed they characterize things existing in the aeon. For time, by which change is measured, is defined numerically; while the aeon, whose existence presupposes a 'when', possesses dimensionality , since its existence has an origin. And if time and the aeon have an origin, how much more so will those things that exist within them.

6. God by nature is always one and alone, substantively and absolutely, containing in Himself all-inclusively the totality of substantive being, since He transcends even substantiveness itself. If this is so, there is nothing whatsoever among all the things to which we ascribe being that possess substantive being. Thus nothing whatsoever

different in essence from God can be envisaged as coexisting with Him from eternity - neither the aeon, nor time, nor anything which exists within them. For substantive being and being which is not substantive never coincide.

7. No origin, intermediary state or consummation can ever be altogether free from the category of relationship. God, being infinitely beyond every kind of relationship, is by nature neither an origin, nor an intermediary state, nor a consummation, nor any of those things to which it is possible to apply the category of relationship.

8. Created beings are termed intelligible because each of them has an origin that can be known rationally. But God cannot be termed intelligible, while from our apprehension of intelligible beings we can do no more than believe that He exists. On this account no intelligible being is in any way to be compared with Him.

9. Created beings can be known rationally by means of the inner principles which are by nature intrinsic to such beings and by which they are naturally defined. But from our apprehension of these principles inherent in created beings we can do no more than believe that God exists. To the devout believer God gives something more sure than any proof: the recognition and the faith that He substantively is. Faith is true knowledge, the principles of which are beyond rational demonstration; for faith makes real for us things beyond intellect and reason (cf. Heb. I I: I).

10. God is the origin, intermediary state and consummation of all created things, but as acting upon things not as acted upon, which is also the case where everything else we call Him is concerned. He is origin as Creator, intermediary state as provident ruler, and consummation as final end. For, as Scripture says, 'All things are from Him and through Him, and have Him as their goal' (Rom. I I: 36).

11. No deiform soul is in its essence of greater value than any other deiform soul. For when God in His supernal goodness creates each soul in His own image, He brings it into being endowed with self-determination. By exercising this freedom of choice each soul either reaffirms its true nobility or through its actions deliberately embraces what is ignoble.

12. God, it is said, is the Sun of righteousness (cf. Mal. 4: 2), and the rays of His supernal goodness shine down on all men alike. The soul is wax if it cleaves to God, but clay if it cleaves to matter. Which it does depends upon its own will and purpose. Clay hardens in the sun, while wax grows soft. Similarly, every soul that, despite God's admonitions, deliberately cleaves to the material world, hardens like clay and drives itself to destruction, just as Pharaoh did (cf. Exod. 7 : 13). But every soul that cleaves to God is softened like wax and, receiving the impress and stamp of divine realities, it becomes 'in spirit the dwelling-place of God' (Eph. 2 : 22).

13. If a person's intellect is illumined with intellections of the divine, if his speech is unceasingly devoted to singing the praises of the Creator, and if his senses are hallowed by unsullied images - he has enhanced that sanctity which is his by nature, as created in the image of God, by adding to it the sanctity of the divine likeness that is attained through the exercise of his own free will.

14. A man keeps his soul undefiled before God if he compels his mind to meditate only on God and His supreme goodness, makes his thought a true interpreter and exponent of this goodness, and teaches his senses to form holy images of the visible world and all the things in it, and to convey to the soul the magnificence of the inner principles lying within all things.

15. God has freed us from bitter slavery to tyrannical demons and has given us humility as a compassionate yoke of devoutness. It is humility which tames every demonic power, produces in those who accept it every kind of sanctity, and keeps that sanctity inviolate.

16. He who believes fears; he who fears is humble; he who is humble becomes gentle and renders inactive those impulses of incensiveness and desire which are contrary to nature. A person who is gentle keeps the commandments; he who keeps the commandments is purified; he who is purified is illumined; he who is illumined is made a consort of the divine Bridegroom and Logos in the shrine of the mysteries.

The Philokalia, vol.2, 1981, Faber & Faber, pg.114-117.