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upon the particular version available to him. Hence the translation follows the version which appears in the patristic text and does not conform exactly to any of the modern translations of the Bible.

II.

Irenaeus of Lyon

AGAINST HERESIES

Book IV  Chapter 38

(1) Someone might say, "Why is this? Was God unable to make humanity perfect from the start?" He should realize that because God was not born and always remains the same, he can do anything, as far as depends on himself. The things he made had to be lesser than himself, however, precisely because they were to be made and have a beginning. What was only recently created could not be uncreated; such things fall short of perfection by the very fact of not being uncreated. Because they come later, they are immature; as such they are inexperienced and not trained to perfect understanding. A mother, for example, can provide perfect food for a child, but at that point he cannot digest food which is suitable for someone older. Similarly, God himself certainly could have provided humanity with perfection from the beginning. Humanity, however, was immature and unable to lay hold of it. When our Lord came in the last age to gather all things in himself, therefore, he did not come in the way he was able, but in the way we were able to see him. He could have come to us in his indescribable glory; we, however, could not have borne the greatness of his glory. For this reason, the one who was the perfect bread of the Father offered himself to us as milk for children: he came in human form. His purpose was to feed us at the breast of his flesh, by nursing us to make us accustomed to eat and drink the Word of
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God, so that we would be able to hold in ourselves the one who is the bread of immortality, the Spirit of the Father.

(2) Thus Paul says to the Corinthians, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, because you could not yet receive solid food” [1 Cor. 3:2]. He means: I taught you about the coming of the Lord in a human way; because of your weakness, the Spirit of the Father has not yet rested upon you. “For when envy, strife and factions exist among you,” he says, “are you not being carnal and walking in human ways?” [1 Cor. 3:3]. This means that they did not yet have the Spirit of the Father because of their imperfection and the inconstancy of their conduct. Still, the Apostle could have given them solid food. Anyone upon whom the apostles imposed hands received the Holy Spirit, who is the food of life. They could not hold him, however, because their capacity for dealing with God was still weak and undeveloped. Similarly, God could have given humanity perfection in the beginning. Humanity, however, had just been made; it could not receive it, or hold it once received, or preserve it once held. The Word of God, then, did not take on humanity’s immaturity for his own sake, since he was perfect; rather, because of humanity’s immaturity was he made susceptible of being grasped by humans. The inadequacy and impossibility were not on God’s part but on the part of humanity, since it was not uncreated but had just been made.

(3) God’s power, wisdom, and goodness are all demonstrated at once: power and goodness in his freely creating and establishing things which do not yet exist; wisdom in his making things which follow in order, which go together, which are well arranged. Through his immense goodness, some of them develop, continue for a long time, and reach the glory of the uncreated. God generously bestows on them what is good. Though as created, they are not uncreated; still since they continue for long ages, they will take on the strength of the uncreated. God will give them everlasting endurance.

God therefore has dominion over all things since he alone is uncreated, is before all things, and is the cause of the existence of all things. All else remains subjected to God. Submission to God is incorruption, and continuance in incorruption is the glory of the uncreated. Through this system, such arrangement, and this kind of governance, humanity was created according to the image and established in the likeness of the uncreated God. The Father decided and commanded; the Son molded and shaped; the Spirit nourished and developed. Humanity slowly progresses, approaches perfection, and draws near to the uncreated God. The perfect is the uncreated, God. It was therefore appropriate for humanity first to be made, being made to grow, having grown to be strengthened, being stronger to multiply, having multiplied to recover from illness, having recovered to be glorified, and once glorified to see its Lord. God is the one who is going to be seen; the vision of God produces incorruptibility; incorruptibility makes a person approach God.

(4) People who do not wait for the period of growth, who attribute the weakness of their nature to God, are completely unreasonable. They understand neither God nor themselves; they are ungrateful and never satisfied. At the outset they refuse to be what they were made: human beings who are subject to passions. They override the law of human nature; they already want to be like God the Creator before they even become human beings. They want to do away with all the differences between the uncreated God and created humans. Thus they are more unreasonable than the dumb animals. The beasts do not blame God for not making them human; rather, by the fact of its creation each gives thanks for being made. We, however, complain that instead of being made gods from the beginning, we are first human and then divine. Yet God followed the simplicity of his goodness in doing this. To prevent anyone from considering him jealous or lacking in generosity, he says, “I said that you are gods, all children of the Most High.” To us, however, who could not stand to bear the might of divinity, he said, “You, however, will die like human beings” [Ps. 82:6, 7]. He speaks here of
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two things: of the generosity of his gift, then of our weakness and our having dominion over ourselves. In his generosity he freely gave what was good and made human beings like himself in their having control over themselves. In his foresight he knew human weakness and what would result from it. In his love and power, he will surpass the substance of our created nature. It was appropriate that the nature first appear and only later that the mortal be surpassed and absorbed by immortality, the corruptible by incorruptibility; that by acquiring the knowledge of good and evil, human beings should be made according to the image and likeness of God.

Chapter 39

(1) Human beings acquired the knowledge of good and evil. Good is to obey God, to believe in him, to keep his command; this means life for human beings. On the other hand, not to obey God is evil; this is death for human beings. God has exercised patience, and human beings have come to know both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience. Thus by experiencing them both the mind’s eye would choose the better things with discernment and never become sluggish or negligent of God’s command. By learning through experience the evil of not obeying God, which would deprive them of life, human beings would never try it. Rather, knowing the good of obeying God, which preserves their life, they would diligently maintain it. Human beings have this twofold power of perception which gives the knowledge of good and evil so that they might choose the better things intelligently. How can someone be intelligent about good when he does not know what is contrary to it? Certain understanding of the issue to be decided is more solid than a conjecture based on guessing. The tongue experiences sweet and sour by tasting; the eye distinguishes black from white by seeing; the ear perceives the difference between sounds by hearing. In this same way, by experiencing good and evil, the mind comes to understand good and is strengthened to preserve it by obeying God. First by repentance it rejects disobedience because it is bitter and evil. By grasping the nature of what is opposed to the sweet and good, it will never again try to taste disobedience to God. If a person avoids the twofold power of perception and the knowledge of both of these, therefore, he implicitly destroys his humanity.

(2) How will one who has not yet become human be God? How can one just created be perfect? How can one who has not obeyed his Maker in a mortal nature be immortal? You should first follow the order of human existence and only then share in God’s glory. You do not make God; God makes you. If you are God’s artifact, then wait for the hand of the Master which makes everything at the proper time, at the time proper for you who are being created. Offer him a soft and malleable heart; then keep the shape in which the Master molds you. Retain your moisture, so that you do not harden and lose the imprint of his fingers. By preserving your structure you will rise to perfection. God’s artistry will conceal what is clay in you. His hand fashioned a foundation in you; he will cover you inside and out with pure gold and silver. He will so adorn you that the King himself will desire your beauty [Ps. 45:11]. If, however, you immediately harden yourself and reject his artistry, if you rebel against God and are ungrateful because he made you human, then you have lost not only his artistry but life itself at the same time. To create belongs to God’s goodness; to be created belongs to human nature. If, therefore, you commit to him the submission and trust in him which are yours, then you hold on to his artistry and will be God’s perfect work.

(3) If, however, you do not believe in him and you run from his hand, then the cause of your imperfection will be in you who did not obey, not in him who called. He sent messengers to call to the wedding; those who did not obey him deprived themselves of the royal banquet [Matt. 22:1–14].

God’s skill is not deficient; he can raise up children to Abraham from the stones [Matt. 3:9]. The person who does not acquire that artistry is himself the cause of his imperfection. People who have blinded themselves do not thereby
make the light itself inadequate. The light remains just as it is while those blinded through their own fault are plunged into darkness. As the light does not subdue anyone by compulsion, neither does God force the person who refuses to retain his artistry. Those who stood outside the paternal light and transgressed the law of liberty had been given free choice and power over themselves; they separated themselves through their own fault.

(4) God, of course, foreknew all this and arranged appropriate dwelling places for both kinds of people. On those who seek and return to the light of incorruptibility, he graciously bestows the light they desire. For those who despise it and turn away, who run from it and blind themselves, he has prepared the darkness fitting for opponents of the light. Those who fled from submission to him he has subjected to an appropriate punishment. Submission to God is eternal rest. Thus those who flee the light have a setting befitting their flight; those who flee eternal rest have a dwelling appropriate to their flight.

Since, however, God is surrounded by everything that is good, those who decide to run from God deprive themselves of all good things. Then, deprived of all the good things associated with God, they will fall into his just judgment. Those who have fled the light justly dwell in darkness; those who flee rest will justly abide in punishment. In the case of this temporal light, those who abandon it subject themselves to darkness. They are themselves the cause of their desertion by the light and dwelling in darkness. The light itself does not cause their situation, as we have already said. In the same way, those who run from God’s eternal light, which contains all good things in itself, are themselves the cause of their dwelling in eternal darkness, of their being destitute of everything good. They made themselves the cause of their dwelling in such a place.

III.

Gregory of Nyssa

SERMON ON THE SIXTH BEATITUDE

Imagine how it must feel to peer out over the open sea from a high mountain ridge. That is what my mind feels when it peers down from the loftiness of the Lord’s saying, as from a mountain peak, upon the infinite depth of thought to which it gives vantage. One frequently comes across this scene in maritime districts: a mountain is, as it were, split in half. The sea has worn away the side that faces it in a straight line from the summit to the foot. But from the upper lip of this sheer cliff there juts forward a rocky projection, which tilts out over the sea. What must a person feel when he peers down at the sea beneath him from such a vantage point? As in his case, vertigo seizes me as I find myself suspended over the awesome implications of our Lord’s saying “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” [Matt. 5:8]. God offers himself as a spectacle for those whose hearts are purified.

But, says the great Apostle John, “No one has ever seen God” [John 1:18]. And the sublime Apostle Paul seconds him saying, “Whom no one has seen or can see” [1 Tim. 6:16]. This is the smooth, sheer rock whose surface discloses not a single foothold for our comprehension, the rock which Moses pronounced inaccessible in his laws. For he strips away the possibility that our understanding could approach it by asserting, “For no one can see God and live” [Exod. 33:20]. But, you object, “To see God is eternal life.” John, Paul,

This selection was translated by Joseph W. Trigg.