ORATION 28
ON THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

28.1 Last time we used theology to cleanse the theologian. We glanced
at his character, his audience, the occasion and range of his theorizing.
We saw that his character should be undimmed, making for a perception
of light by light; that his audience should be serious-minded, to ensure
that the word shall be no sterile sowing in sterile ground;¹ that the right
occasion is when we own an inner stillness away from the outward whirl,
avoiding all fitful checks to the spirit; and that the range should be that
of our God-given capacity. These truths were established last time and so
we broke up our fallow-soil with God's furrows, not wanting to sow on
thorns;² we leveled off the face of the ground,³ impressed and impressing
it with Scripture's stamp. Well now let us go forward to discuss the doct-
trine of God, dedicating our sermon to our sermon's subjects, the Father,
the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that the Father may approve, the Son aid,
and the Holy Spirit inspire it—or rather that the single Godhead's single
radiance, by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its
connectedness may enlighten it.

28.2 I eagerly ascend the mount⁴—or, to speak truer, ascend in eager
hope matched with anxiety for my frailty—that I may enter the cloud⁵
and company with God (for such is God's bidding).⁶ Is any an Aaron?
He shall come up with me.⁷ He shall stand hard by, should he be willing
to wait, if need be, outside the cloud. Is any a Nadab, an Abihu, or an
elder? He too shall ascend, but stand further off,⁸ his place matching his
purity. Is any of the crowd, unfit, as they are, for so sublime contempla-
tion? Utterly unhallowed?—let him not come near, it is dangerous.⁹
Duly prepared?—let him abide below. He shall hear but the voice and the
trumpet, true religion's outer expressions; he shall see the mount in smoke
with its lightning-flashes,¹⁰ warning and wonder to those who cannot
ascend it. Is any an evil, untamed beast, quite impervious to thoughts of

¹ Mt. 13.5-6; Mark 4.4-6; Luke 8:6-7
² Jer. 4.3
³ Isa. 28.25
⁴ Ex. 19.3 and 20; 24.9 and 15
⁵ Ex. 24.18
⁶ cf. Ex. 24.12
⁷ Ex. 19.24
⁸ Ex. 24.1-2, 9-10 and 14; cf. Lev. 10.1-3
⁹ Ex. 19.12
¹⁰ Ex. 19.16-20
contemplation and divinity? He shall not lurk in the woods, baneful and harmful, to pounce out on some truth or utterance and rend "wholesome thoughts" with his abuse. No, he shall stand still further off. He shall quit the mount or "be stoned" and "crushed"—an evil death for an evil man, seeing that the brutish find real and solid arguments to be stones. Is he a leopard? He shall die spots and all. A predatory, roaring lion, seeking our souls or our phrases for meat? A swine, trampling truth's fair, clear pearls? A wolf, Arabian and foreign, or even sharper than these are at chop-logic? A fox, a shifty, treacherous soul, matching its form to the hour's need, fed off stinking corpses, or avoiding the big, off little vineyards? Some other carnivore, rejected by the Law, unclean, useless as food? Our sermon leaves these behind, meaning to be engraved on solid tables of stone and on both sides of these because the Law has an obvious and hidden aspect. The obvious belongs to the crowd waiting below, the hidden to the few who attain the height.

28.3 What experience of this have I had, you friends of truth, her initiates, her lovers as I am? I was running with a mind to see God and so it was that I ascended the mount. I penetrated the cloud, became enclosed in it, detached from matter and material things and concentrated, so far as might be, in myself. But when I directed my gaze I scarcely saw the averted figure of God, and this whilst sheltering in the rock, God the word incarnate for us. Peering in I saw not the nature prime, self-apprehended (by "self" I mean the Trinity), the nature as it abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, but as it reaches us at its furthest remove from God, being, so far as I can understand, the grandeur, or as divine David calls it the "majesty" inherent in the created things he has brought forth and governs. All these indications of himself which he has left behind him are God's "averted figure." They are, as

11 Titus 2.8
12 Ex. 19.13
13 Lev. 11.33
14 Mt. 21.41
15 Jer. 13.23
16 1 Pet. 5.8
17 Mt. 7.6
18 Hab. 1.8 [LXX]
19 Cant. 2.15
20 Gen. 7.2, 3 and 8; Lev. 11; Deut. 14.3-20
21 Ex. 31.18
22 Ex. 33.21-23
23 1 Cor. 10.4; John 1.14
24 Ex. 26.31-33; 36.35-36
25 Ps. 8.1(2); 111(110).3; 145(144).5 and 12
26 Ex. 33.22-23