

The Jerusalem Life of St. John Damascene

BHG 884

Translated
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Introduction

St. John of Damascus, better known as John Damascene, is an Eastern Orthodox Saint also accepted by Roman Catholics, and venerated on 4 December. He is famous for his literary output, his musical output, and as an enemy of the iconoclast emperors.

A number of fictional biographies, or rather hagiographies, exist.² This document contains an English translation of one of them, the “Jerusalem Life”, BHG 884. This is so-called because it is attributed to a certain “John Patriarch of Jerusalem” in the manuscripts (most of) and the editions. This seems to be John VII of Jerusalem (964-966 or 969). The author states that he adapted an existing Arabic “Life”, but the relationship of BHG 884 to any extant Arabic “Life” of John Damascene seems debateable. The earliest manuscript witnesses are 11th century.

No modern language translation has ever been made of this text. The translation was made from the text in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database. This taken from the *Patrologia Graeca* 94, cols. 429-489. The PG text is a slightly amended reprint of the Michel Lequien text from 1712, vol. 1, p.i.-xxiv.³ Lequien’s Latin translation was consulted throughout. A modern critical edition of the Greek text, made by Robert Volk, appeared in late 2024.⁴ This did not reach me until late in the project, so it could only be used to a limited extent. Likewise another Latin translation was printed in the *Acta Sanctorum* Mai II, pp.723-730 (1680), by Fr. Antoine François Destieu, but this also only came into my hands at the end of the project.

The chapter numbering in the older editions is disordered. In Lequien, two chapters were both numbered “21”; chapter 33 was numbered “30”; and two chapters were numbered “31”, making the last chapter 39. The PG corrected the first two problems. Chapter 21a was merged with chapter 20. But the two chapter 31’s remained, which have been sometimes referred to as 31, and 31bis. This translation follows Volk’s numbering, which is the chapter numbering in the *Patrologia Graeca* as far as chapter 31, and Destieu thereafter. The chapter titles are not part of the text, and are mostly taken from the marginal notes in Lequien. Matter in square brackets [] is explanatory.

The biblical references are from the PG, which corrects many errors in Lequien’s references. The references to the psalms are given to the Greek Old Testament first (gk.), which is the same as the Latin vulgate, and the modern English reference afterwards (heb.).

I should like to thank Diego Segui, who prompted me to translate this text, and without whose encouragement and support it would never have come to be. All of the errors, omissions and misjudgements are purely my own.

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² See Robert Volk, “The Greek Lives of St John Damascene: Common Information, Differences, and Historical Value”, in: Scott Ables, *John of Damascus: More than a Compiler*, Brill (2022), pp. 17-39 with bibliography. Series: Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, vol. 26.

³ Michel Lequien, *Sancti Patris Nostris Joannis Damasceni... Opera Omnia quae exstant...*, Paris (1712), 2 vols.

⁴ Robert Volk, “Iohannis Damasceni Vitae”, Series: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* 10 (*Patristische Texte und Studien* 81), De Gruyter (2024), BHG 884 - introduction: pp.131-294; text: pp.295-366.

The Life of St Damascene, by John, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

1. The deeds of the saints should be passed down to future generations, especially those of the doctors of the church.

It has become customary among men, as a mark of honour, to make godly likenesses of those who have kept the image of God⁵ [in their souls]⁶ pure and uncorrupted, whole and in its original integrity, or even of those who restored it, after it had been often tarnished and defiled. Indeed, those who are eager to show their reverence more ambitiously, and whose generosity, along with their wealth, is magnificent, employ superior and splendid materials, and engrave upon them their likenesses, thinking that thereby they show greater honour to the saints.

If then, they hasten to make glorious the outward likeness of the saints, then isn't it wrong to leave the story of their deeds in a neglected and unfitting state? Certainly it is. We must excuse those who are unlearned⁷, being what they are, for improvising the story recounting the deeds of those who were pleasing to Christ; but it is inexcusable for those who have dedicated themselves to the study of eloquence if they neglect the lives of the saints, [and leave them] written in a haphazard way; especially for the kind of men [the saints] for whom vigilance in words was breath and life itself, and who, through discourse, purified both their minds from ignorance and forgetfulness, and their souls from passionate impulses. Through such men the world around us has been adorned, and every mind has been illuminated; and not only do [their works] possess the elegance of external wisdom, but also they send forth the abundant light of the Holy Spirit.

2. John Damascene must be considered among the foremost doctors of the church. He flourished when the heresy of the iconoclasts emerged. Leo the Isaurian was the author of the heresy.

One of these men, and among the most important, is the celebrated John, whose surname⁸ is clearly derived from his homeland, the city of Damascus. For he was not a minor star in the firmament of the church, but rather a very great and most brilliant one; not only shining in [one] night when heresy was spread everywhere, but also dispelling false doctrine every night through the illumination of his writings.⁹ For darkness¹⁰ was indeed spread everywhere over the whole world, obscuring the bright images of the venerable icons, and it was a profound gloom; but the one who was spreading it and making it happen was not just some common man, able to spread evil over only a part of the world, but rather that man holding in his hand, so to speak, the ends of the earth, he who wielded authority¹¹ over the Roman empire. From then on he acted aggressively, raging¹² in

⁵ "Of God" is in the Volk edition, but not in the *PG*. An allusion to Gen. 1:26, Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν, "Let us make man in our image."

⁶ Addition in the Bollandist translation.

⁷ ἄγροῖκος, "rustic" or "unpolished."

⁸ Damaskenos.

⁹ τῶν λόγων: The Bollandists give "eloquence", which is possible; but the sentence is a "then and now" contrast. This makes best sense as a contrast between the "one night" when John refuted the heresy of his own day, and the "every day" in which he still does so, because we have his books.

¹⁰ Lit. "night."

¹¹ σκηπτρουχία, rendered as "the sceptre" in the Latin translations of Lequien and the Bollandists.

every direction, and destroying the venerable images with great violence, and those who venerated them. This man, a lion [Leo] by name, and by nature, devoured some of them, while others of the orthodox he scattered with his roaring into various places, and drove them to hide in underground refuges. Indeed many chose to dwell among lions and dragons rather than associate with him and his servants: but others, out of fear, fled to the farthest ends of the earth, for when “the lion roars, who will not be afraid?”;¹³ and they fled from him as from the presence of a snake.

3. The name "John" in Hebrew signifies the grace of God. The Life of St. John of Damascus originally written in Arabic.

This man, named after grace,¹⁴ and filled with spiritual grace, was boiling with anger, but only against the snake, so that his [feelings of] anger turned into the pursuit of goodness and courage. He did not flee from Thrace, where he then resided, to the Sarmatians. He did not hurry away from Byzantium to the Pillars of Hercules. He did not withdraw from the palaces into the wilderness because of the roaring of the lion. Rather, when he was living first in Damascus, then later in Palestine, and leading the ascetic life in a deserted place, he fought against Leo most courageously. And from such a great distance this three-time champion of mine pierced his heart, as if with a three-pronged spear, with words forged in the fire of the Holy Spirit, and tempered in the living water. However our discourse will expand on these matters in their proper place with more elegance.

So then, should we neglect the life of this man, just because it is hastily written in an unpolished¹⁵ manner, or worse, in Arabic language and script? Certainly not. Therefore we must now explain from what kind of noble root this most flourishing shoot has grown, and what kind of homeland is proud to have produced him.

4. Damascus.

This city is none other than Damascus. For just as, in regard to Paul, it takes great pride in the heaven-traversing one,¹⁶ whom it was the first to see after he renounced impiety, and saw him transformed from a Christ-hater to a Christ-lover, in the same way, in regard to this man [John] also, it is rightly and deservedly proud. For he did not come from somewhere else, nor was he converted from another religion to the true faith, but because it [Damascus] brought him forth from its own roots and gave birth to him, more in regard to piety than bodily existence, and nurtured him with words[teaching], it boasts greatly in its own offspring. For this reason it takes pride in him, and rejoices in him, more than over the other splendid things which distinguish it, even if you mention the mildness of the climate, and the many streams of fresh, clear water by which it is irrigated. It is not the abundance of noble fruits that gives so much glory and renown¹⁷ to this city, but rather that this beautiful and noble tree grew up here, reared beside the channels of the water, and giving back

¹² ὁ πνέων, literally “breathing”: Lampe 4., “rage”; the Bollandists render this as “breathing fury.”

¹³ Amos 3:8.

¹⁴ χαριτώνυμος, v. Lampe, referenced to this passage. The idea is that “John” (Ioannes, Ἰωάννης) is based on Hebrew “Yohanan”, “God is gracious.”

¹⁵ ἀγροῖκος, “rustic” or “unlearned.”

¹⁶ οὐρανοδρόμος; “traversing the heavens”, quoted in Lampe p.978 from this passage. The reference is no doubt to Paul being caught up to the third heaven in 2 Cor. 12:2.

¹⁷ Lit. “exalts and elevates.”

the fruits of the Spirit¹⁸ in due time, the fruits of which are always fresh among us, lovely to look at, sweet to taste, and those who touch and taste them are delighted, and indeed are also nourished and strengthened, and brought to a higher level, leading them to perfection in the Spirit. In this way has the city of Damascus been made more glorious by this, its offspring, than by all the other good and delightful things with which it has been enriched. It was this [city] indeed that produced this man.

5. John's ancestors were religious.

His ancestors were pious, and they alone preserved the flower of piety and the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ in the middle of thorns. For they alone preserved the name of Christian, as a bright and inalienable inheritance that could not be taken away, not faltering in the orthodox faith after the descendants of Hagar took control of the city.¹⁹ As a result their principles made them notable among the impious, so much so that even their enemies respected this. Or rather, just as God glorified Daniel among the Assyrians, because of the piety that he showed,²⁰ and Joseph in Egypt,²¹ appointing as stewards and rulers over foreign and hostile lands those who had been taken captive, so here too he appointed the ancestors of John as stewards over public affairs even among the Saracens.²² So here again the pious captives ruled over those impious ones who had taken them captive.

O, the great and wondrous works of God, and His marvellous and extraordinary deeds! Nothing is higher than virtue, nothing is more honourable or more sublime than piety. For like a banner raised on a hill,²³ or rather like a lamp in the night,²⁴ or a seed in Israel, or a spark in the ashes,²⁵ so too the family of John was left in Damascus, to bring forth this bright torch, which would shine out to every corner [of the world]. Such were the ancestors of the man whom we are praising.

6. His father was devoted to virtue.

His father, coming from such a good background, was eager to surpass his parents in piety and other virtues, and to demonstrate an even greater love for God. For it was necessary that such an illustrious man, destined to reach the highest point of virtue, should have a parent more distinguished than those before him, so that, as from a sequential progression, the rise to greatness would occur in an orderly fashion, as if the affairs concerning this great and illustrious one were arranged from above by divine providence, just as happened in the case of John the Baptist. For since he [John the Baptist] was destined to shine forth as greater than the prophets before him and to perform a sacrament more exalted than any priestly office—the baptism of my Lord—divine providence ordained that he would not come from an ordinary lineage but from a priestly family, and that his father would be a prophet. Thus, in this case, too, John's father was appointed by

¹⁸ Ps. 1:3.

¹⁹ The Hagarenes, i.e. the Arabs or Saracens.

²⁰ Dan. 2:48.

²¹ Gen. 41:41.

²² At this point the Volk edition incorporates an extra portion of text, not present in all manuscripts, and so a significant textual variant. In translation it reads: "...so, in this way also, the Lord, who is glorified, in turn glorified the pious grandparents of John, who had remained faithful to God and had not been corrupted along with the others into a crooked bow, and He appointed them as stewards of public affairs among the Saracens."

²³ Isaiah 30:17.

²⁴ Prov. 31:18.

²⁵ Isaiah 1:31.

providence to be especially pious and philanthropic. For he was an administrator of public affairs throughout the entire country, having been appointed because of his outstanding virtue and his distinguished way of life, and in this he used to spend his wealth abundantly; not on revelry, drunkenness, or frittering it away, but rather he used all of whatever he had in gold and other movable wealth to ransom Christians who were being taken into captivity. As for his immovable possessions—of which he had a great deal in Judea and Palestine—he gave them for the relief and livelihood of those Christians whom he had freed who chose to live on those lands. The others he allowed to go as free men wherever they wished. Such was the philanthropic virtue of the man. For he lived with wealth as though he had nothing, and so he was making offerings to God both by night and by day.

7. John is born and baptized.

Acting like this, he received a reward, not for hospitality like Abraham, but a wondrous offspring²⁶ for his love of humanity; if not from a promise, certainly from divine foreknowledge and predestination. For God foresaw what sort of man John would become, and predestined him to be born of this man as a reward to him for the love of humanity that he showed habitually towards those who had exchanged their freedom for dreadful captivity. Thus this glorious child was born to him, and while his [the child's] body was still delicate, his father made him into a son of light, by rebirth through his spiritual mother²⁷, accomplishing a deed which was not easy at that time, and which most people would not easily dare to do in the midst of those pagans. Then the father's concern for the child was not for him to learn to ride, nor to wield a spear skilfully, nor to shoot an arrow from a bow with precision, or to fight with wild animals and change natural gentleness into savage cruelty, as often happens with many who are troubled in spirit, and rush about wildly and recklessly. For this reason, John's father did not seek out some mountain-dwelling Chiron²⁸ to nourish his pupil on deer marrow, but rather a man trained in every field of learning was sought out, having knowledge of every kind of discourse, and pouring out good teaching from the soul's heart, so that he might also raise his own son with such nourishing food and seasonings; and God fulfilled the man's holy desire, and the one who was seeking found the one sought. And the manner of the finding of the one who was sought is as follows.

8. Cosmas the Elder was taken captive and brought to Damascus. He was a priest and a monk.

The barbarians from Damascus made a raid by sea, as they often did, and they plundered many Christians, and going down to the sea in their ships, they took a large number of captives, and brought them into the city. They offered some to those buying, and drew their swords to kill the others.²⁹ Also captured with them was a man dressed as a monk, originating from Italy³⁰,

²⁶ ὁ τόκος also means a return on investment, interest.

²⁷ i.e. baptism in the church.

²⁸ The mythical teacher of Achilles.

²⁹ Lampe gives this meaning from this passage for οὐς δὲ μαχαίρας εἴλκον ποιήσασθαι ἀνάλωμα. Killing those captives who cannot be sold was still practiced in 1809 by raiders from the Pirate Emirates in the Persian Gulf. "On the 23 May 1809, the Merchant ship Minerva which had been making the run from Bushire in Persia was accosted by a Qasimi pirate fleet. The fleet which consisted of 55 vessels, had been chasing them for two days until they caught them. Just off the Musandam peninsula. The ship was overwhelmed in the typical Qasimi fashion and the crew subdued. Their captors were puritanical Wahabis, followers of a movement that sprang up a few decades before. They purified the ship with water and perfumes. They separated their captives into

distinguished³¹ in appearance, more distinguished in soul, and named Cosmas. A certain solemnity on his face shone forth, revealing his settled disposition. Those being led to slaughter were falling at his feet: they entreated him to make God merciful to them, and to pray that they might find forgiveness for their sins from the merciful One. Therefore the barbarians, seeing the supplication of those about to die, which they addressed to that distinguished one, approached, and inquired of the man what his standing in the world might be, and what sort of prominence he held among the Christians. But he answered, saying, “I possess no other rank in the world but that of priestly ordination.” Indeed I am an unworthy, solitary nobody, and practising philosophy; not only the God-loving philosophy we practice, but also that [philosophy] which the sages outside [the faith] established. But after he said these things, his eyes were filled with tears.

9. Cosmas explains his grief to John’s father.³²

But John’s father, standing not far away and so seeing the man in tears, came up, to console him in his distress, and said, “Why, O man of God, do you weep over the loss of this world, having long ago renounced and become dead to it as I see from your manner of dress?” Then the monk replied, “I do not lament the loss of this life; for I, as you have said, am dead to the world. But what does trouble me is that I have sought after all human wisdom, and laid down a general education³³ as a foundation. I have exercised my tongue in rhetoric; I have cultivated my reasoning through the methods and demonstrations of dialectic; I pursued [the study of] moral philosophy, as much of it as [Aristotle the] Stagirite, and as much as [Chrysippus] the disciple of Ariston, have handed down; I have examined carefully everything concerning natural philosophy, as far as humanly possible; I have learned the principles of arithmetic; I have mastered geometry to the highest degree; I have formally completed the disciplines of musical harmony and proportion³⁴; and I did not pass over anything concerning movement of the heavens and the turning of the stars, so that, from the greatness and beauty of these created things, in accordance with my knowledge of them, I might possess a proportionate understanding of the Creator.³⁵ For the one who has acquired a clearer knowledge of created things understands more clearly and regards with greater wonder the One who created them. From there, I advanced into the mysteries of theology, which the sons of the Greeks have handed down, and which our own theologians have most accurately elucidated. So I am filled with these sciences, but I have not yet been able to impart³⁶ to anyone else the benefit from them, nor to produce a disciple through philosophy in the manner of a father producing a

valuable and worthless. Then one by one, they led the worthless crew to the gunwale. Where, to cries of “Allahu Akbar,” they slit their throats. The people of quality were kept for ransom. Two of these were a Mrs Taylor and her infant son. At Ras Al Khaimah they were sold to a Bahraini Arab, who then sold them back to the British for twice the price.” See J.B. Kelly, “Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880” (1968), p.111 with sources. <https://archive.org/details/britain-the-persian-gulf-1795-1880>.

³⁰ Probably Calabria, which was full of Greek monks.

³¹ κόσμος, so a pun on “Cosmas.”

³² Heading by me.

³³ ἐγκύκλιος, with παιδεία implicit: see LSJ: <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ἐγκύκλιος>.

³⁴ I had difficulty here. “ἀρμολογίας δὲ μουσικῆς καὶ ἀναλογίας εὐτάκτους σεμνοπρεπῶς κατώρθωκα.” “εὐτάκτους” is the accusative plural, so must be the object of the verb. A verb εὐτάκτέω is in LSJ, “to be orderly, behave well; reduce to order;” εὐτάκτημα: “act of orderly behaviour”, “well-ordered”. Lequien’s Latin, “Musices concentus proportionesque probe satis sum assequutus” paraphrases.

³⁵ Wisdom 13:5.

³⁶ Or “ready to impart.”

son.³⁷ For just as most people want natural children to continue their family line, similarly those who have studied philosophy want, through teaching and initiation, to produce disciples³⁸ so that the golden line of philosophers may continue among the living for all time; and those who are the cause of this marvellous birth [of a disciple] inherit an immortal renown. Moreover it is a characteristic of goodness to share with others the good things that one has in abundance. Indeed anyone who is not like this, nor wishes to be, is not live in what is good, but in what is evil, as being full of pride and envy concerning those things which he does not want to share with others if he has received something good. Therefore, even what he seems to have is taken away from him, just as with that servant who did not deposit the talent with the bankers.³⁹ But I have chosen the good portion,⁴⁰ and I was very much inclined to become a sharer with others of the wisdom given to me. But since I did not attain what I desired, that I might be counted among those faithful servants who doubled their talents through their dealings with others,⁴¹ and I did not produce a disciple through philosophy, I am, as some might say, childless and miserable, as you see: my face is downcast and I am deeply distressed.”

10. John's father frees Cosmas and entrusts his sons to him.⁴²

On hearing these words, the man [John's father] who was seeking such a treasure replied, “Well then, O blessed man, console yourself, for perhaps the Lord may grant you the requests of your heart.” Having said this, John's father ran as fast as he could to the Saracen ruler and fell at his feet, requesting the distinguished Cosmas as a gift, nor did he fail in his request, but he received the one truly worthy of much as a gift, and brought him into his own house, comforted him, and refreshed him after his long ordeal, and said something like this, “Not only are you free from now on, but also I make you a partner in my household, and equal in authority with me, sharing all my joys and sorrows. But this only I request of your honour, that you instruct and educate most diligently my natural son John, and also this other who shares your name – whom I have made my spiritual son, who was born in Jerusalem but orphaned at a young age – all the secular learning and philosophy that you know, as well as that to which the grace of the Holy Spirit guides the worthy.”⁴³ The philosopher, upon hearing this, was at once like a horse galloping away from its restraints and prancing across the field, or a thirst deer sent out towards streams of water. You might say that he was like another Midas who had stumbled upon great treasures of gold. He was very eager for the matter at hand, and he took on the young men, and became their tutor.

11. John and Cosmas the Younger gain expertise in theology.

John was like an eagle, soaring through the air, as if using wings, and with natural ability and zeal of purpose. And his spiritual brother, and fellow initiate, Cosmas, was like a ship with sails spread wide, and borne like a cargo vessel upon the waters, [propelled] by a favourable breeze⁴⁴ and with a west wind blowing from the stern. Thus, by natural quickness and intensity of zeal, they gathered all the most important teaching in a short time, whether in grammar, dialectic or demonstration. And

³⁷ Lit. “nor to beget, through philosophy, a disciple in the manner of a father.”

³⁸ Lit. “father a child.”

³⁹ Matt. 25:27-8.

⁴⁰ Luke 10:42.

⁴¹ Matt. 25:14-30.

⁴² This heading is not from Lequien.

⁴³ I am not clear about **καὶ ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος χάρις τοὺς ἀξιούσας ἐμυσταγωγῆσεν** so I have followed the Latin.

⁴⁴ πνεῦμα = wind, breeze, breath, spirit.

with moral philosophy, they not only cultivated their minds by means of studying this, but also calmed the disturbances of their souls. And just like an eagle looking keenly, so did they gaze intently at the laws of nature. They also learned mathematical proportions as skilfully as Pythagoras or Diophantus. They were trained so well in the proof of geometry that they seemed like Euclid and those others similar to him. In harmony, they became like those⁴⁵ who appear to have created divine melodies for the wise. In astronomy, as much as [pertains] to intervals, figures,⁴⁶ and the proportions of distances, even if he [Cosmas the elder] taught only a introductory understanding for non-specialists, from what he wrote John appears to excel; and indeed so also did Cosmas. But discussion about him [Cosmas the younger] must be left to others, for John is the subject of our praise.⁴⁷

12. They study theology especially.

Who would not recognize and marvel at his theological insights, and the precision of his doctrines in his foundational book—or rather, in his comprehensive book on doctrine—which one could call a code of laws of every orthodox doctrine, and [liken to] the tablets of Moses without straying from the truth. However I know that I ought to have made praises of that book in the earlier chapters, and not here, but I have stated these things to demonstrate the education in which he was educated, and how he pursued all of it with knowledge and precision, and the marvellous thing is that he was not puffed up by knowledge, but rather, just as the noble branches of trees, weighed down by their abundance of fruit, inclined toward the ground, so also the great John, as the fruits of learning increased upon him, began to incline, not towards the ground, but towards the depths of the philosophical sea, sailing still upon it as if on some ship of worldly endeavour.⁴⁸ But he also longed to unload this world's ship, and to entirely strip off the garments of bodily endeavour, and with a naked mind to swim across the sea, and dive into the deep, so that he might find the precious pearl lying hidden there. Therefore, longing for this and aiming at it, he descended to the bottom of the depths. And he was not puffed up by his knowledge, but humbled by his desire for a more mystical wisdom. So the intellectual lamp of his soul was filled with the oil of worldly wisdom, in order that the incorporeal light falling down from above might set fire to this light, and John might appear like a burning torch.

13. They are returned to their father by their teacher, who retires to a monastery. John becomes Protosymbolos.⁴⁹

In these circumstances, his teacher, guided towards this desire by his student, or so it seems, approached the boy's father and said, "Behold, your wishes are fulfilled, and the boys surpass me in wisdom. For it was not enough for them to become equal to their teacher, but by the greatness of their nature, and their unyielding efforts, perhaps also with God increasing their gift of wisdom, they have risen above me towards the pinnacle of philosophy. Accordingly, I am no longer needed by them from now on. As reward for my labours, allow me to depart to a monastery, where I may

⁴⁵ I was unable to follow the use of the particles here. Gk: Περὶ δὲ τὴν ἁρμονικὴν τοιοῦτοι γεγονάσιν, ὅποιοι ἄρα ἐξ ὧν ἔμουσουργήσασαν θείων μελισμάτων τοῖς συνετοῖς καταφαίνονται.

⁴⁶ ἐν διαστήμασι καὶ σχηματισμοῖς.

⁴⁷ ἐγκωμίων, encomium.

⁴⁸ The sense is that he was still using the works of mankind to investigate the truths of philosophy, but wanted to go beyond this.

⁴⁹ Protosimbulus = πρωτοσύμβουλος, First Adviser. Meaning is uncertain but may mean "First Tax Gatherer."

scientifically⁵⁰ seek the highest wisdom. For the philosophy, in which I was already trained, directs me towards that [higher wisdom], and to be enriched still more by both blessings [heavenly and earthly wisdom], and to add to the earlier wisdom also that which is most separated from matter, and surpasses understanding, and which only the mind alone, completely free from the body, can be initiated into.”

Comment [A1]: Weird... find a better way. Methodically?

John’s father was grieved at the words of the philosopher. But he could not detain him, as otherwise it would seem as if he had held onto the wages agreed for the teaching given [to his sons]. Having provided him with the most abundant supplies for his needs, he sent him away in peace. So he went to the monastery of Mar Saba in the desert, and remained there until his end, going to God who is Wisdom Himself. The father of John also departed through death. But the leader of the Saracens summoned John, and appointed him as First Advisor.⁵¹ But he declined because his inclination was directed elsewhere. However he was put under sufficient pressure that he was no longer able to refuse, and was appointed to a greater office than his father.

14. The madness of Leo the Isaurian against images.

At that time Leo the Isaurian was ruling the Roman Empire. He, opposing the sacred images and the orthodox mainstream of the church,⁵² was like a lion, ravening and roaring,⁵³ burning them [the icons] with a fire of bestial madness, seizing and destroying their worshippers, and cruelly tearing them apart with the teeth of tyrannical impiety. These things came to John’s ears, and he imitated the zeal of Elijah and the rebukes [of wrong-doing] of his namesake [John the Baptist] as if the spirit had anointed him invisibly, and, before his ordination,⁵⁴ as an opponent of this impiety; and he wielded words as though they were the sword of the Spirit, a sharp weapon to destroy the doctrine of the beast-minded one, as if he were cutting off its head. He sent out letters to defend the veneration of the sacred images to those of the true faith⁵⁵ who knew him, powerfully demonstrating in a philosophical way that the veneration of the divine images was necessary. He also instructed them to say the same things to others, and to show his letters to everyone. The new athlete of the truth laboured in every way for his letters to pass from hand to hand among the faithful, as if in a circle,⁵⁶ to strengthen the true faith,⁵⁷ and, following the example of Paul, he laboured to cover the whole world, although not on foot but through letters proclaiming the truth.

15. Leo’s stratagem against John.

These things were reported to the emperor Leo, and, summoning some of his like-minded associates, because he could not bear the exposure of his impiety, which John’s letters proclaimed clearly, he commanded them to put on a mask of piety and make haste and fabricate a story, and locate a letter written by John in his own hand. These accomplices of wickedness did not cease pulling on every rope, concealing their intentions and seeking out what they had been ordered to find, until they did find it, and delivered it to the emperor. He summoned some of his scribes and

⁵⁰ ἐπιστημονικός; Lequien “certis regulis”, “by fixed rules.”

⁵¹ πρωτοσύμβουλος, perhaps a financial post.

⁵² τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πληρώματος: this appears to be a standard phrase, lit. “fullness of the church,” the faithful, the assembly.

⁵³ Ps. 21:14 gk.; Ps. 22:13 heb.

⁵⁴ “anointing.”

⁵⁵ “orthodox.”

⁵⁶ ὡς διὰ κύκλου τινός. Present in Lequien’s text, but not in the translation.

⁵⁷ “the orthodox faith.”

set before them examples of John's letters, to imitate the style of the writing, both in thought and phrasing. Thus he found sufficient people to carry out this task, and he ordered them to write a letter as if from John to himself, the infamous emperor, with the following contents:

"Greetings, O emperor! I also rejoice in your mightiness, because we share the same faith. I render both gratitude and the appropriate respect to your imperial majesty, for which reason I send these things for your information. This city of ours happens to have been completely neglected in terms of its defence, and the military force of the Hagarenes here is weak and few in number. Wherefore in the name of God take pity on this city, and, contrary to all expectation, send a powerful and numerous force which pretends to march elsewhere, and you will take the city without a fight; for I myself will assist you considerably in this purpose, because both the entire region and the city itself are under my authority."

16. Leo's letter to the Caliph.

After this letter had been written, the impious man wrote another letter in malice to the ruler of the Saracens in Damascus, with this intent:

"As I know of nothing more blessed than peace, nor more fortunate than friendship, and since keeping treaties of peace is praiseworthy and pleasing to God, for these reasons I prefer above all else to preserve unbroken the peaceful friendships which I have established with your eminence, although I have often been urged to secretly break these and treacherously violate the treaties, by one of the Christians serving under you through his many letters, who confidently assures me that he would contribute greatly to subdue the city under your control if I should send a large army against it.

For this very reason I have also sent back to you one of the letters which he sent to me, showing that the things which I have written are true, so that you may know what kind of person I am in regard to friendships – truthful, and not inclined to break treaties – and so that you may recognise the ill-will and deceitfulness of the one who dared to write these things to me."

17. John's right hand is amputated.

He was lion-named, and serpent-like in deceit, so he sent both these letters through one of his men to the barbarian [ruler]. Upon receiving them, the latter summoned John and showed him that deceitful letter. John, reading through it, admitted that the shape⁵⁸ of the handwriting resembled his own, but he added that he did not recognise the things contained in them at all, nor had such thoughts ever even crossed his mind. Having read it, he did not fail to recognise the deception, and the plot of the Emperor [against him]. But that ruler, who hated Christ, was like a donkey listening to a lyre, as the proverb says,⁵⁹ in his response to what was said by John. He became deaf to good and truthful speech, and did not remain dumb, when it came to issuing an unjust decree. Instead he immediately ordered that John's right hand should be cut off.

When he [John] requested a brief delay in order to defend himself, and to explain the rage of the impious one against him, the barbarian refused, and would not hear of it, being completely beside himself with anger. And so the right hand was cut off which had performed great deeds for the

⁵⁸ τύπους.

⁵⁹ This is one of Aesop's fables.

Orthodox in God through what it had written; the right hand was cut off which had rebuked those who hated the Lord and, instead of being dipped in ink, as it had once been when writing in defence of the veneration of images, it was now dipped in its own blood.

After cutting off that right hand of the Lord, so to speak, they suspended it in the marketplace.

18. John asks the Mother of God to restore his hand, in anacreontic verses.

As evening fell, and John supposed that the tyrant's anger had subsided, he sent a representative to him, pleading and speaking thus, "My pain is increasing and has become unbearable. The sharp sting of my suffering will not cease as long as my severed hand remains suspended in the air. Therefore, command that it to be given to me, so that I may bury it in the earth, and the agony may subside." The tyrant immediately allowed the request, and the hand was given to the righteous man. Having received it, he entered the oratory of his house and, falling prostrate before a certain sacred image bearing the divine likeness of the Mother of God⁶⁰, he placed his severed right hand upon its former joint, and, he prayed from the depths of his heart, crying out with sighs and tears,

O Lady, most holy Mother, You who gave birth to my God,
For the sake of the holy images, My right hand was cut off.
You are not unaware of the cause For which Leo went mad.
Hasten, then, with all speed And heal my hand.
The right hand of the Most High, Who took flesh from you,
Works many wonders Through your intercession.
Now, through your prayers, Let Him also heal this right hand of mine,
So that the hymns to you which you give me, And to the One incarnate from you,
May be written in harmonious melodies, O Mother of God,
And become an instrument For Orthodox worship.
For you can accomplish whatever you will, Since you are the Mother of God.

While John was saying these words with tears, he fell asleep. In his sleep, he saw the holy image of the Mother of God looking at him with merciful and joyful eyes, and saying, "Behold, your hand has been made whole. Delay no longer, but make it the pen of a swift-writing scribe,⁶¹ as you have promised me today."

19. John's severed hand is healed by the prayers of Mary.

He awoke, and was healed, and he examined carefully the severed hand, and on seeing it he rejoiced in the spirit in God his Saviour⁶² and in His Mother, because the Mighty One had done great things for him. Rising to his feet, he lifted his hands on high and sang a divine hymn most fitting for the occasion. Throughout the whole night, he with his whole household rejoiced and sang a new song of thanksgiving to God, "Your right hand, O Lord," he said, "has been glorified in strength; Your right hand has healed my broken right hand, and through it, you will crush the enemy, those who do not honour the venerable image of Yourself and those of Her who bore You. By the abundance of your glory, you will crush the enemy image-breakers through my hand." So that night was like day to him,

Comment [A2]: Not the right word?

⁶⁰ Θεομήτωρ.

⁶¹ Ps.44:1-2, gk.; Ps. 45:1-2, heb.

⁶² Luke 1:47.

a light and not darkness;⁶³ and, to express the prophetic word with a figure of speech,⁶⁴ there was there the pure sound of celebration and the voice of exultation in the tent of the righteous man.⁶⁵

These things⁶⁶ did not take place in secret, nor in silence; rather, that marvellous sound and harmonious jubilation was heard by those in the whole surrounding neighbourhood. Immediately some of the Christ-hating Saracens went to their own leader, saying that John's right hand had not been cut off at all, but that of someone else—perhaps a slave or some other attendant who had, out of loyalty, sacrificed himself in place of his master, and that those ordered to carry out the amputation had taken money instead of inflicting the penalty. "For John remains at home, singing and rejoicing in such a way that you might say that he was celebrating a wedding, and composing a bridal song for the marriage hymns. Indeed, his joy seems even greater than that."

20. The barbarian recognizes the miracle.

When these things had been reported in this way, John was summoned. On his arrival, he was ordered to show his severed right hand; and as it was displayed, by the arrangement of the Mother of God, a faint line of the cut also was visible, as a most undeniable sign that the amputation had indeed taken place. At this, the barbarian exclaimed: "Who is the physician that has healed you, John? And what medicines were applied to you?" Then he [John] in a loud and clear voice proclaimed the miracle.⁶⁷ "My Lord," he declared, "the Almighty Physician, whose power does not fall short of His will." The barbarian responded, "Then I infer, O man, that you have suffered for something of which you are innocent. Forgive us, then, for the rash and thoughtless judgment, because of which we inflicted this punishment upon you. Go, then, and take charge of your former office; and you will be foremost among our advisors. From now on, we will undertake nothing without your advice and guidance."

21. He obtains permission to withdraw into a monastery instead, although with difficulty.

Then he [John] fell to the ground and prostrated himself, and, lying face-down for a considerable time, he pleaded to be excused and allowed to take another road, more desirable to journey upon, and to follow Him who says, "I am the Way."⁶⁸ But the barbarian did not grant permission. And it was like seeing gladiators, as one might say, the barbarian and the righteous man. The former strove by many ways to hold John fast in the chains of the world, while the other was fiercely trying to break them apart with zeal, and to take flight on angelic wings. A great stadium then lay open, where Christ was seated as judge of the contest, the audience was the angels. Indeed one might rightly say that the wicked spirits on the left side emboldened and strengthened the persuasiveness of the barbarian. Yet with great acclaim my gladiator conquered, and all the adversary's persuasive efforts were reckoned as [nothing more than] the [feeble] arrows of infants.⁶⁹ The victor departed,

⁶³ Amos 5:18. The Latin translation of Lequien expresses this idea twice; presumably the translator's eye skipped back a phrase, and was not checked later.

⁶⁴ ὑπαλλαγή.

⁶⁵ Ps. 41:5, gk.; Ps. 42:4, heb.

⁶⁶ This paragraph is not numbered as a chapter in the PG, but is numbered 20 in Lequien, as is the one following.

⁶⁷ Lit. "became the herald of the miracle."

⁶⁸ John 14:6.

⁶⁹ Ps. 63:8, gk.; Ps. 64:7 heb. reads differently.

his head adorned with a radiant crown, and entered his home with a joyful countenance, though he had left it previously downcast.

22. He distributes his wealth and possessions.

Two of the Lord's commands were set before him; the one that ordained selling one's possessions and distributing them to the poor,⁷⁰ and the other that prescribed leaving behind houses, fields, and everything else for the sake of the Lord's name.⁷¹ He did not hesitate to do the first, in order to avoid procrastination. The second he carried out, but not in such a way that, by abandoning his possessions⁷², quarrels might arise and many disputes, among those related to him by blood, with different people asserting different rights to inherit. Instead, he took a middle course between the two, distributing his possessions to the poor, to captives, and to his own slaves, whom he also deemed worthy of freedom, while dedicating some to his relatives and to the holy temples. As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so he left this world naked, retaining only the necessary garments. Departing for Jerusalem, he performed the appropriate acts of worship in those sacred places, and, thirsting for God like a deer, he went into the desert. He arrived at the lavra of the God-bearing Saba, accompanied not only in his journey but also in his purpose by Cosmas, who had shared in his spiritual ascent and education. You might say that they were a sacred pair, running together under the yoke of Christ, to carry it upon their shoulders.

23. John is received by the shepherd of the monastery.⁷³

So John, the subject of this narrative, entered the divine sheepfold, and fell at the feet of the shepherd, earnestly begging to take the vow as one of the sheep there, calling himself lost, and just now returning from the desolate mountains to Christ the Shepherd. The leader of the flock rejoiced over him and declared his choice blessed. And since he was distinguished by the importance of his life and his exceptional knowledge, he decided that it was worthwhile to entrust the novice to one of the principal elders, so that, under such a guide, he might walk safely in the path of God [without danger of error]⁷⁴. Therefore he first summoned the one whom he considered the most distinguished among the monks of the monastery in all virtues, and attempted to entrust John to him. But he refused, claiming that he was not equal to the pastoral care of such a man, who had acquired a great reputation for his wisdom. The chief shepherd dismissed this elder, and summoned another. But the second one said the same things as the first. Then a third was brought in after them, and after him, not a few others. And with one voice, they all began to decline responsibility for [instructing] John.

Comment [A3]: These and the next
– move to footnote? Do I need these
words?

24. He is handed over to an elder to be instructed.

After many others, another elder was introduced, simple in manner but great in knowledge. Willingly he received the eager John, and went with him to his own cell. There, he first laid down an excellent foundation: that he should do nothing according to his own will, but to offer to God [as a sacrifice]⁷⁵ the sweat of the prayers produced through their intensity and effort, to weep, striving for purification from his former life: for they are considered by Christ as a pure sacrifice, more pleasing

Comment [A4]: Ditto – footnote?

⁷⁰ Luke 18:22.

⁷¹ Matt. 19:29.

⁷² Lit. "leaving these things to chance."

⁷³ ποιμήν = pastor, teacher, shepherd.

⁷⁴ These words appear only in the Latin translation.

⁷⁵ These words appear only in the Latin translation.

than any other incense. This was the first instruction regarding those things performed through the body. But regarding those things which concern the soul, [he instructed him] not to imagine⁷⁶ any worldly images, nor to form within his soul the images of things that are unsuitable; to keep his mind free from all empty pride; and not to be puffed up by the abundance of his learning, nor to think that he has fully comprehended everything that he has studied. He should not desire visions or secret revelations, nor should he allow his mind to become proud; nor should he ever place his trust in himself or believe that he possesses infallible knowledge until the separation of his soul from his body⁷⁷; but rather he should recognize that his own thoughts are weak and premature, and that his own insights are uncertain;⁷⁸ and he urged him to strive to avoid his thoughts being scattered, but to concentrate most carefully, so that in this way his mind would be enlightened by God, his soul cleansed, and his body purified; and finally the body together with the soul may be united to the mind and the threefold [being] may become a single [being], through union with the most single Trinity; and man may become no longer carnal nor animal⁷⁹ but wholly spiritual [in nature], when the two former states have been transformed by a conscious choice into the third and highest, namely the mind.

Thus, the father set down these instructions to the son, and the teacher to the disciple. But he also added this, saying, "Do not write a letter to anyone. Do not say anything at all of external matters. Practice silence with understanding. For you know that this is not only a commandment of our own philosophers, but also that this Pythagoras of Samos imposed many years of silence upon his disciples who were newly initiated into the mysteries of philosophy. And do not think that it is good to speak good things, at an inappropriate time, but in this matter let David be your guide, who says, 'I kept silent about good things.'⁸⁰ And what happened to him because of this? Listen to him speak. 'My heart grew hot within me'⁸¹—surely with the fire of divine love; indeed, it was through constant meditation that this fire was kindled within the prophet."

25.

The elder gave these instructions to John, and it was not like writing on water, or sowing on rocky ground, but upon good soil. Then some time passed, as John was being trained by the elder through every trial, and was demonstrating unwavering obedience in all things. And there was no argument from John regarding what was commanded of him. There was no murmuring on his tongue, nor any debate in his heart, any inquiring within himself into what his master prescribed for him. But this alone he had inscribed within his mind, as if deep-cut on tablets: to do, as Paul exhorts, whatever was commanded without murmuring or questioning.⁸² For what benefit is there in doing any kind of good, if murmuring sits on one's lips, or evil arguments in one's heart like a serpent? When will the soul be improved, for someone serving like this? When will he make progress? Indeed this is perhaps the reason that many toil in pursuit of virtue, but they toil in vain, not making progress towards what they aim at.

⁷⁶ Lit. "paint, depict."

⁷⁷ Lit. "until he is divided."

⁷⁸ Wisdom 9:14.

⁷⁹ **ψυχικός.**

⁸⁰ Ps. 39:2, gk.; Ps. 40:1, heb.

⁸¹ Ps. 39:3, gk.; Ps. 40:2, heb.

⁸² Phil. 2:14.

26. He is sent to Damascus to sell baskets.

After this, as the elder was training the athlete in the greater contests of obedience, what did he devise? He gathered together many baskets, which they had woven with their own hands, and presented them to John with the following pretext: "My son, I have heard that baskets are sold in Damascus for much more than in Palestine, and, as you know, we are in need of many things. So take them all, go there as quickly as you can, and do not sell them for less, even by a little, than the exact amount that I tell you." Then he set the price at more than double their worth. But he [John] did not object, nor did he question the command of the one who gave him orders, being obedient even to death. As if with wings of obedience, he took the load on his shoulders, and set off to Damascus, he who was once held in high regard there, now in rags, parched and filthy. And he wandered around the marketplace, trying to make a sale of the baskets. But since he was asking for too high a price, he provoked laughter, and became to all the object of reproach and insults. Then one of those who had served him when he was a well-known man in the city, standing close to him and studying his appearance, realised who this wretched and ragged man was, and what he had become. His heart was crushed, and though he knew him, he approached as if he did not, and bought the baskets, giving him the exact price that had been demanded. Having received this, he retraced his path to the one who had sent him, and returned like a victor who had boldly struck down his opponent to the ground, the father of empty glory and pride.

27. He is asked to compose a funeral hymn.

Now, among the neighbours of John's superior, there was a certain monk who left his dwelling on earth and departed to the heavenly abode, and journeyed to God. He [this monk] had a brother according to the flesh, who, overcome by the calamity, was utterly unable to bear the death of his brother. So John tried to comfort the grieving brother and, as best he could, tried to alleviate his grief with words. But the mourning man implored him and earnestly begged him to compose a hymn that would offer consolation to his grief and soothe his soul. Yet John feared the commandment of the elder, and did not consent to the request. On the other hand the man did not cease his entreaties. "For why," he said, "do you not have mercy on the soul of one who is suffering, and apply just a little painless medicine to it? If you were a physician of the body, and bodily pain was afflicting me, would you not provide me with the medicine to the best of your ability? And if I were suffering terribly, perhaps even to the point of death, would you not be accountable before God for this neglect? And now, ignoring me suffering in even greater affliction, will you not be liable for even greater judgement?"⁸³ But if you are afraid of the command of the elder, know that I will keep this matter absolutely secret, and no-one shall hear of it." With these words John was persuaded and composed for him a melodious funeral hymn⁸⁴, which even today is sung by everyone: 'All human things are pointless.'

28. John is cast out by his master.

One day, when John's superior⁸⁵ was away from the cell, John was inside the cell and singing the aforementioned hymn softly, when the elder returned and heard that musical sound; and in great anger he said to John, "Have you forgotten your initial vows? Instead of mourning and being downcast, you sit at ease, indulging yourself with melodies!" But he [John] explained the reason to

⁸³ This sentence does not seem to be translated by Lequien.

⁸⁴ τροπάριον, troparion.

⁸⁵ καθηγούμενος.

the elder, and spoke of the grief of the one who had made him do it, and fell prostrate and begged forgiveness. But the elder stood firm, like a stone or an anvil, not yielding at all to the one who was begging, and immediately cast him out of the cell.

29.

That remarkable man immediately called to mind the ancestral disobedience [of our first parents]⁸⁶ and the expulsion from Paradise because of it. He did not know what to do or where to turn, and he grieved even more than the one who had lost his brother, and he said as follows to himself, "That man indeed lost his brother, but I have destroyed my own soul through disobedience." Finally he approached other elders whom he knew to be of outstanding virtue, and put them forward as mediators, to speak to the elder and intercede, so that he might be persuaded and forgive John for his offence. So those men went and interceded, but he did not yield, unmoved like a statue, nor did he permit the disciple to enter the cell.

30.

Then one of the monks said, "It is possible to impose another commandment on the one who has sinned, and not cast him out from your fellowship."⁸⁷ Then the one being entreated said, "I impose this commandment on John, if indeed he wishes for his disobedience to be forgiven: to go through the entire area of the Lavra, and to clean by himself the filth from the small houses in the cells of the monks."⁸⁸ Those who heard this, embarrassed at these words, departed in sorrow, astonished at the elder's severity. John went to meet them and made his customary bow, and inquired about the decision of his [spiritual] father concerning him. But they answered that they were astonished at the elder's severity, and, out of embarrassment, were hesitant to disclose the decision. However he [John] persistently pleaded with them to reveal it. In the end they were overcome and told him of that disgraceful cleaning task. But when he heard this, he [John] rejoiced beyond all expectation and said, "This is easier for me and most welcome." So at once he departed, and sought out the cleaning materials, took them, and approached the cell of the monk who lived near the elder. Entering in, he began to soil those hands, which had previously been perfumed to many with fragrant oils, even the right hand that had served Christ. O, the great humility of the man! He made himself into one covered in dung and mud.

31. The elder admires John's obedience and humility.

But when the elder learned of John's great zeal for obedience and the depth of his sincere and profound humility, or rather how great it was, he ran toward him, embraced him, and wrapped his arms around his neck, clasped his hands, kissed his eyes, and affectionately kissed his shoulders. "Oh, what an athlete of blessed obedience I have begotten in Christ!" he exclaimed. But John was even more embarrassed at the words of the elder, and fell prostrate and bathed the ground with his tears, as if casting himself down before God himself. For he was not puffed up by his fatherly words, nor was he swollen with pride at the elder's praise, but he humbled himself even more, and his mind was utterly crushed. In this way, I know, the wise are humbled by praise, are pained by commendations, and are lifted up toward God.⁸⁹ At this, the father⁹⁰ raised up his son, took him by

⁸⁶ These words appear only in the Latin translation.

⁸⁷ Lequien reads, "but to cast him out from your fellowship altogether is not just."

⁸⁸ οἰκίδιον – this seems to mean that each cell had its own little toilet house.

⁸⁹ The Latin understands the last phrase to mean "are lifting themselves up."

⁹⁰ i.e. the elder monk.

the hand, and led him into his cell with joy. On seeing John, you might have said that he was now being restored to the paradise of Eden. For within himself, where he had previously represented the old Adam by disobedience, now within himself he represented the new Christ, by that extreme obedience.

32.⁹¹ **The Theotokos warns the elder in a dream to allow John to devote himself to writing.**

Not long afterwards, the most praised and more pure One appeared to the elder in a dream, saying, "Why did you block the fountain that poured forth such a sweet flow of water, clear, abundant and like nectar? Water of refreshment for souls? Water more excellent than that which miraculously gushed out of a rock in the wilderness? Water which David longed to drink? Water which Christ promised to the Samaritan woman? Let the fountain flow! It will flow abundantly and spread throughout the whole inhabited world, like a mighty water covering the seas of heresies. And it will transform them into a wondrous sweetness. Let those who are thirsty hasten eagerly to this water; and let those who do not have the silver of a pure life, let them sell their passions and purchase from John an unblemished purity of doctrine and works.⁹² He has taken up the prophetic lyre, the psalter of David, and he will sing new songs, songs to the Lord God. He will surpass the song of Moses with his musical compositions, and the choral dance of Miriam.⁹³ The valueless melodies of Orpheus will be exposed as fables. He will sing⁹⁴ a spiritual and heavenly melody. He will imitate the Cherubic hymns,⁹⁵ and he will make all the churches, the daughters of Jerusalem, like young maidens playing tambourines,⁹⁶ singing a new song to God, proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection. He will teach the doctrines of faith very correctly, and will expose the distortion and deviation of every heresy.⁹⁷ He will pour forth good discourses from his heart,⁹⁸ and he will proclaim the exceedingly marvellous works of the King."

33.⁹⁹

At dawn, having learned these secrets, he summoned John and said, "O child of the obedience of Christ! Open your mouth and draw in the Spirit; rather, bring forth through your mouth that which you have already received in your heart. For your mouth shall speak wisdom because in your heart you have gained great understanding through your meditation.¹⁰⁰ Open your mouth, not in parables but in truths;¹⁰¹ not in riddles but in doctrines. Speak within the Jerusalem which sees God, within His peaceful Church—not words idly spoken and flowing into the air, but those that the Spirit has written in your heart. You have ascended the Mount Sinai of the visions and revelations of God, even though you have humbled yourself to the depths of great humility. Now ascend the mountain

⁹¹ In Lequien and the PG reprint, these two chapters 31 and 32 are both numbered XXXI. In the Acta Sanctorum edition, and in the Volk edition, this chapter is numbered 32, and all subsequent chapters are numbered accordingly.

⁹² Isaiah 55:1.

⁹³ Moses' sister. Exodus 15:20-21.

⁹⁴ The sense is perhaps "compose."

⁹⁵ **Χερουβικός.** Liturgical hymns like the Cherubikon, perhaps, rather than "hymns of the Cherubim."

⁹⁶ **τυμπανιστρίας, tympanistriasis.** Ps. 67:26, gk.; Ps. 68:25 heb.

⁹⁷ This refers to John's dogmatic and anti-heretical works.

⁹⁸ Ps. 44:2, gk.; Ps. 45:1, heb.

⁹⁹ 32 in the PG.

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 48:4, gk.; Ps. 49:3, heb.

¹⁰¹ Ps. 77:2, gk.; Ps. 78:2, heb.

of the Church, and proclaim, preaching good news to Jerusalem;¹⁰² raise your voice with power! For glorious things have been spoken to me concerning you by the Mother of God. Forgive me also for whatever obstacle I have been to you, for I acted so because of my own rusticity."

34.¹⁰³ John's various hymns, and his books *On Dialectics, On Heresies, and On the Orthodox Faith*.

Therefore from this time onwards John began [composing] divine melodies, and sang mellifluous hymns, which indeed brightened the Church and made it a dwelling place of God,¹⁰⁴ where the pure sound of those celebrating is heard. Not only this, but he also composed sermons for major feast days¹⁰⁵ and that sacred book, or, so to speak, that divinely inscribed tablet, engraving no small encouragement to both the wise and the unlearned, and [acting as] a gateway to the mysteries of theology, the other doctrines of the true faith; and also to a concise contemplation and knowledge of those things that fall within the realm of the intellect and of sense perception,¹⁰⁶ which I have called "heaven," for it shines like stars with correct demonstrations, from nature and scripture, and exceedingly learned.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, whoever does not look up to this "heaven," whoever does not delight in its beauty, and is blind to its light, is either blind or in darkness. I would even call wretched the one who squints at its divine radiance. Furthermore John also composed lengthy discourses, and again, [wrote] concerning the glorious veneration of the divine images. And the more he had formed within himself the beauty of the divine image, the more sublimely and elegantly he set forth the matters concerning the veneration of the venerable images.

35.¹⁰⁸ In writing books he had Cosmas to encourage him, and as a partner in publishing songs. John becomes a presbyter of the Church of Jerusalem.

Supporting him in his labours was the distinguished¹⁰⁹ Cosmas [the Younger], who was his brother in the Holy Spirit, who was a sharer with him in teachings, in his spiritual ascent, and in ascetic practice. Likewise he [Cosmas] also wisely imitated John in his spiritual labours in hymns, and he sang forth melodious harmonies to the church, with the lyre and with his voice in psalmody, having presented his own body to God as a tambourine¹¹⁰ through the mortification of his passions, and made himself into a ten-stringed psaltery, by skillfully and wisely tuning the five-fold sense of the body and the corresponding faculties of the soul. Then Cosmas was ordained as bishop of Maiuma by the patriarch of Jerusalem; not willingly, but he yielded under compulsion, and, having shepherded his flock well, and as a friend of God, he reached a good old age, and departed to his fathers; rather, he

¹⁰² Isaiah 40:9.

¹⁰³ 33 in PG.

¹⁰⁴ Ps. 41:5, gk.; Ps. 42:4, heb.

¹⁰⁵ **φαιδρὰς πανηγύρεις**, literally "bright holidays", but I learn from Lampe that πανήγυρις 1.c.iii means major festal days like Easter.

¹⁰⁶ Lit. "of both the intelligible and the sensible realities." The Bollandists suggest the book in question is the *Sacra Parallela*.

¹⁰⁷ I struggled with the syntax here.

¹⁰⁸ 34 in the PG.

¹⁰⁹ κόσμος again.

¹¹⁰ τύμπανον, "tympanum."

journeyed to God. As for John, the patriarch of Jerusalem¹¹¹ summoned him by the inspiration of God, and ordained him to praise the Lord 'in the chair¹¹² of the elders.'¹¹³

36.¹¹⁴

But the high-soaring eagle, returning once more to the Lavra of the God-bearing Saba, and entering once more his own nest, did not take to heart that commandment of Solomon¹¹⁵, that elders are worthy of double honour,¹¹⁶ but instead, as if redirecting it, he turned it against himself, saying that elders should strive for double humility; that elders should practice asceticism twice as much as before; that elders should engage in double contests, not only against the passions of the body, but also against those [passions] of the soul, and the hidden [passions], which often escape the notice of those who practice asceticism unless they are exceedingly watchful, and then their inner man is defiled without their even realizing it. Now such hidden passions are: deceit, envy, arrogance, hidden arrogance, vanity disguised as humility, meddling in the affairs of others, which leads to many vices of speech, self-importance, anxious wavering, a deceitful disposition, pride in bodily humility, self-indulgence disguised as self-control, insistence on one's own will, the pursuit of money for insignificant matters, clothing beyond that allowed by rule, from which arises disagreement with the brothers, and the unnoticed snare of pride.

37.¹¹⁷ He reviews and revises his writings and books.

Striving to uproot these things from his mind, John added labour upon labour, and even more so spiritual labours. Focusing his mind, and pulling together what he had earlier laboured over, he reviewed these things [his books], refining, polishing and meticulously correctly the diction, meaning, rhythm and structure; and wherever the ornamentation was overly florid and somewhat excessive, he reduced it out of prudence, so that his writings might avoid anything like ostentation or frivolity. As a result, anyone who carefully examines his works of this kind will perceive the depth of thought and the elegance of expression, combined with grandeur.¹¹⁸ And who, upon reading his writings, would not praise his zeal for piety? How [marvellously] did he distribute his wealth of wisdom to all, seeing that, from the talent of knowledge that he had received, he did not merely double it but increased it tenfold. For I refrain from raising the number further, to avoid seeming to be exceeding the limits in the gospel. For it is plainly not right to speak beyond the proper limits.

38.¹¹⁹ Stephen the Younger praises John Damascene.¹²⁰

Divine zeal prevailed on him to such an extent that, fighting for the laws of God, he struck at those in Constantinople who were destroyers and desecrators of the holy images, first from Damascus and a

¹¹¹ Lit. "the one steering the helm of Jerusalem."

¹¹² καθέδρα, Latin "cathedra," seat; but in Latin it can also mean rank, office of a teacher, similar to a professor's chair today. Hebrew "council."

¹¹³ Ps.106:32, gk.; Ps. 107:32, heb.

¹¹⁴ 35 in the PG.

¹¹⁵ The PG text prints "Apostle", but neither Lequien nor any of the manuscripts give this. See Volk edition, p.292.

¹¹⁶ 1 Tim. 5:17.

¹¹⁷ 36 in the PG.

¹¹⁸ σεμνότης. Lequien translates as "majestate", "majesty."

¹¹⁹ 37 in the PG.

¹²⁰ Stephen the Younger was a Byzantine monk executed in 764 by Constantine V for his opposition to iconoclasm. An orthodox saint. His "Life" mentions John Damascene.

second time from Palestine. A native of that great city, who had the same name as the protomartyr struck down¹²¹ for the sake of Christ, he was likewise struck down for the sake of his image and ascended into heaven.¹²² For this reason he mentioned the books of John, and his anathemas from afar against the impious, and he called him a man of God. But although he [John] was never anointed with the unction of the episcopate (for the truth must not be concealed), he must still be regarded as crowned with the band of martyrdom; for it was because of his extraordinary zeal for piety that the calumny was brought against the pious man, because of which his hand was cut off.

39.¹²³ Death of John.

He spent his life living in this way, and when he had completed his ascetic journey, and kept the faith – indeed he propagated it with his books and strengthened it through his teaching, and through his labours he is still confirming, upholding and strengthening it to this day – he ascended to Christ whom he loved. And now he does not see Him in an image, nor adore Him in likeness, but beholds Him face to face,¹²⁴ gazing with unveiled face¹²⁵ upon the glory of the blessed Trinity. For these reasons, it was right for us to praise in words to the best of our ability this athlete, this ascetic, this ornament of the church, this herald of truth, the athletic one, and the teacher of doctrine, and instructor of the unlearned. This is not in order that we might acquire even the least bit of glory for ourselves, but so that so that he in turn will remember us in heaven, and that we may be filled with His heavenly glory even while [we are] still dwelling on earth: that glory which David testifies dwells within the princess, namely within the royal soul, saying, “All the glory of the princess is within.”¹²⁶

40.¹²⁷

Forgive me, O thrice-blessed man, and be my fervent and steadfast intercessor before God, because I, who share your name, found this excellent collection, made by someone else, as the man was able, in a simple style, and written in the Arabic language and script; and, out of longing for this work, and with as much diligence as I could muster, I have translated and revised¹²⁸ it, [guided] by your corrections, or, where need be, your instructions.¹²⁹ Grant me also to be a spiritual worshipper of the Trinity entirely beyond the body, living wholly in contemplation, wholly sanctified in the fire¹³⁰ of divine love, but still dwelling in the body, so that, when I depart from the flesh with detachment, I may present myself with boldness with you before God; to Whom be glory, forever and ever. Amen.¹³¹

¹²¹ The idea is of blows with a blunt object. Stephen the Younger was clubbed to death.

¹²² This sentence and those that follow make up a single sentence in Greek.

¹²³ 38 in the PG.

¹²⁴ 1 Cor. 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”

¹²⁵ Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...”

¹²⁶ Ps. 44:14 vulg; Ps. 45:13, heb. Commentators differ as to the meaning of this bible verse. Possible the “princess” here means the church.

¹²⁷ 39 in the PG.

¹²⁸ The word is “transform”.

¹²⁹ I.e. in a vision.

¹³⁰ ὀλοκαύτωσις, sacrifice of a burnt-offering.

¹³¹ End of the text. The following lines are in the PG. Volk indicates they come from MS. 43, München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. gr. 83.

The End of the Life of the holy and great John of Damascus. This has been collated with its own antigraph.¹³²

¹³² Antigraph: a manuscript from which a copy (the apograph) is made.