

Theophylact, *On Predestination*: a First Translation

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Introduction

AMONG the several bearers of the name Theophylact, the best known, or at any rate second best known, is Theophylactus Simocates, who flourished in Constantinople in the late sixth and early seventh centuries of the Christian era. He was a writer of Greek descent, born in Egypt. He held certain public appointments under the emperor Heraclius (reigned 610–641), and wrote a history of the reign of Maurice (582–602) which is one of the chief sources of the forty-sixth chapter of Gibbon. Within the general tradition of Byzantine sophistic and rhetoric he developed, or at any rate wrote in, a somewhat tiresome and self-conscious style which has been criticized since the time of Photius and of which the chief merit is that it is his own.

Three works of Theophylact have long been current—the *Problems of Natural History*, the *Letters*, and the *History*. Twentieth-century research has added a fourth—an energetic little treatise *On Predestination*. This was first published in St Petersburg in 1910, but the text used for the present translation is that of Leendert G. Westerink,* who has recently retranscribed and edited the work from the XIII-century codex, Jerusalem ms Taphos 108, ff. 7^r–10^v, which he abbreviates as **H** (*Hierosolymitanus*). The Greek title, which is lost, may have been *Περὶ ὀρων ζωῆς*, but was more probably in the form of the proposition that, or the question whether, our lives have a predestined end. This is the aspect of predestination to which the treatise is devoted. The beginning is lost, but Westerink has shown good reason to think that the loss does not extend to more than one leaf, that is, a maximum of 66 lines in the manuscript or about 105 lines of print; and it may be much smaller. The length of the extant portion

* In F. Cupaiolo et al., edd., *Studi in onore di Vittorio De Falco* (Naples 1971) 535–51. The *editio princeps* was by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Žurnal Ministerstva Narodnago Prosvěščenija* (St Petersburg, Nov. 1910) 509–22.

is about three-fifths that of Plato's *Euthyphro* or about three-quarters that of his *Crito*.

As the extant captions indicate, the subject is handled by the method of *prosopopoeia*, that is, through *personae* or in dramatized form. The treatise consists of three set speeches by different speakers, putting respectively a thesis (that our lives have predestined ends), the antithesis (that they do not), and an *apophasis* or verdict (which attempts a *via media*). The thesis is presented by an elderly monk Theognostus, the antithesis by a young man called Theophrastus, who from the way he is addressed seems to be a layman, and the verdict by two adjudicators called Evangelus and Theopemptus. The lost beginning may have included a *protheoria* (Westerink p.538); at any rate Theognostus, the first speaker in what is extant, explicitly indicates that he has already heard the gist of his opponent's case. Each of the two disputants devotes considerable energy to denouncing the other within the generous limits of vilification allowed by theological controversy and Septuagint Greek. And the adjudicators, besides rejecting both thesis and antithesis, advise the disputants in closing to mend their character and rhetoric as well as their dogmas.

The literary form has been described as "unparalleled both in Byzantine and in classical Greek literature" (Westerink p.535). Yet, if it is an experiment, it is one which has its roots in concepts which go back almost to the dawn of rhetoric. For, without going into a plethora of detail, it may be remarked that the history of speech and argument recognizes at least five foreshadowings or congeners of Theophylact's form of presentation. These are: (1) the two *logoi* of Aristophanes' *Clouds* and the *antilogiai* of the *Frogs* (see line 775), together with their seedbed, the whole first sophistic movement; (2) forensic oratory in general and especially the forms used in arbitration, including arbitration on the stage of New Comedy; (3) *controversiae*, especially exercises of the type preserved by the Elder Seneca; (4) the *progymnasmata* of Byzantine rhetoric, and especially (a) the *ethopoeia* or piece written in character, and (b) the *psogos* or speech of censure, which is the less popular inverse of the encomium; and (5) the formal mediaeval *disputatio*.

What Theophylact has done is to collect as many Biblical allusions as he could which appear to bear on the point at issue. Reserving for the adjudicants those which allow of a compromise view of the matter, he divided the rest between the two disputants, each of whom,

in the manner of the time, is a Biblical fundamentalist as fervid as the most extreme of Protestant sectaries were later to become. Round these texts Theophylact weaves his argument, if such it is to be called. His real aims are not dialectical at all, and Westerink has fully recognized this, though one might dispute his severe judgement (p.537) that “the problem itself is not even touched upon.” It is true that set speeches are a poor medium for dialectical exchange, and the speakers here do not get sufficiently into rational communication to clarify each other’s thinking. It is also true that Theophylact borrows significantly from St Basil. Yet, in the ‘antithesis’, the valid and basic point is made that a predestined end to a life excludes virtually by definition any contingent lengthening or shortening of that life, for whatever reason, while it is being lived. Further, Theophylact himself sees, and shows the reader, a great deal more than either of his disputants does; he highlights the difficulty of using the Bible for the purpose in view, and in particular he makes self-evident the futility of either brand of fundamentalism, both in its partial choice of texts and in its tendentious methods of interpretation. Finally, the conclusion of the adjudicants that our lifespan is *provisionally fixed* by, and *definitely foreknown* to, God, and that, during life, it may be lengthened or shortened by our own good or evil deeds, and by our wisdom or folly—or by different causes again, as with the Holy Innocents or the martyrs—this, if not very original, is surely as much in contact with the problem as the ordinary Christian can expect to be, in view of what Theophylact calls “the surpassing degree of [God’s] incomprehensibility.”

Advancement of the question at issue is, however, subordinated to what are, to the writer, more important aims. The first of these is that his ebullition shall give pleasure or amusement as a verbal and ethopoeic construct. His style achieves this in spite of itself. It is not the natural discourse of any actual age or society, not even that of Byzantine sophistic. The sentences, which are often long and rambling, are an odd mixture of periodic and *eiromenē lexis*, thickly studded with abstractions, with the vocabulary and mannerisms of the Septuagint, and to a lesser extent those of New Testament *koinē*. It is marked also by long series of participial phrases and rhetorical questions, and by occasional complex vocative phrases very difficult to render into a modern uninflected language.

One of the most striking affectations is Theophylact’s cult of dis-

tinctive *clausulae* which, when scanned by word-stress, form single or accumulated dactyls or dactyl-related sequences. Both choice and order of words are subordinated to this whim. On a rough count, some 86 out of 114 sentences have *clausulae* of this kind. The breakdown is:

CLAUSULA	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
1. 1-dactyl	26
2. 2-dactyl	35
3. 3-dactyl	10
4. 4-dactyl	1
5. —UU UU —UU	13
6. —UU UU UU —UU	1
Total dactyl and dactyl-related	86
Other <i>clausulae</i>	28
Grand total	114

These figures are only an approximate indication of the real state of affairs. A more thorough analysis would require enlargement of the category of 'dactyl-related' *clausulae*, when it would be found that many of those I have called 'other' are really of this kind; and many of what I called the 1-dactyl *clausulae* have a dactyl-related structure preceding them. Most important of all, analysis should be extended from sentence-endings to include *colon-clausulae*. The full scope of the craze would then become very striking. In the translation I have made no attempt to reproduce this feature of the author's style.

"If his dialogue has any purpose," Westerink remarks (p.537), "beyond that of a purely rhetorical performance, it is to censure the crude ruthlessness that was considered normal in theological argument. Still, in an author whose style comes so dangerously close to being a parody of itself, it is not easy to distinguish between irony and earnest." My own impression is that, within the total rhetorical ambience, irony is the dominant note and quite deliberately so. Whatever the author's actual age at the time of writing, the temper of the piece is that of a young man who has only recently gone through the schools and emerged into the world of Byzantine sacred oratory and theological controversy. He regards it, and especially its patristic form of Biblical fundamentalism, with mingled incredulity, awe, devotion, affection and amusement; and his first impulse, that for which his

training has qualified him above all else, is to prove himself as 'to the manner born'. Like many doctoral candidates of our own day, he has the manner long before he has much of an original thesis to maintain, and the result is an impressionistic echo of what he hears around him, but in this case strongly tinged with caricature. But I think that his indirect censure strikes also at something one step beyond "the crude ruthlessness that was considered normal in theological argument." If he himself has grown up with a style which is not the natural discourse of any actual age or society, this is partly because he has had to spend long years of study on book after book, written in another style of which the same holds true, namely, that of the Greek of the Septuagint itself, Greek cast in a matrix of classical Hebrew—phraseology, structure, idiom, rhetoric, denunciation and all: the style of *Deuteronomy* and the style of *Isaiah*. One of the primal axioms of his education has been that such discourse is what St Augustine two hundred years earlier had called the *dominicum eloquium*, 'our Lord's manner of speech' (*Confessions* 9.5). It is not too much to see in the present essay, at a level deeper than that of parody of current theological polemics, the tragicomic protest of Theophylact as a young graduate, or putting himself in the position of one, against the *lexis* of Authority itself, the *lexis* of the Bible as the undoubted oracle of truth.

A word more needs to be said about his Biblical quotations and allusions. His prose abounds in these, not only in the form of texts relating to predestination and phrases and epithets of strong and picturesque denunciation but in many less tangible ways. The total number of certain, probable or possible allusions established by Westerink is about 177, and perhaps one or two more could be added. The breakdown is:

Old Testament, including Apocrypha (2)	139
New Testament	38
	—
Total	177

The breakdown by individual books is:

<i>Psalms</i>	49
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	17
<i>Exodus</i>	14
<i>Genesis</i>	13
<i>I Kings (III Kings in LXX)</i>	8
<i>Matthew</i>	8

<i>Romans</i>	7
<i>I Corinthians</i>	7
<i>II Kings (IV Kings in LXX)</i>	6
Certain other books, each	1-5

This sheds some light on the suitability of different books for Theophylact's purpose. But it doubtless also reflects to some extent the pattern of his studies, which appear to have concentrated on the *Psalms* and the *Pentateuch*. In the notes to my translation I have selected for mention only the most salient of the Biblical allusions, a little over seventy in total. Westerink's references are all to the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament: mine are to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in English. I have throughout kept an eye on the wording of this version and used or adapted it where possible, though the amount of direct quotation from it is not large. In the XX century there is no very agreed way of citing the Bible in English; tradition has largely gone overboard, but the Revised Standard Version perhaps retains enough of it to suggest (dimly) what the Greek scriptures were to citizens of Constantinople.

As for the rest of my rendering, it would no doubt be possible to do for Theophylact what J. B. Phillips has done for the New Testament and especially its Epistles, that is, to produce something homogeneous and semi-naturalized in the colloquial idiom of our day. But I thought this not fully appropriate to a *first* translation, and have been content rather to reflect something of the sentence structure, non-homogeneous phraseology and accumulated abstractions of the original. I have also been fairly faithful to Theophylact's somewhat cavalier tense usages. The inserted figures are line numberings taken from the edition used. I have throughout been indebted to the counsel and help of Professor Westerink, but am in all cases responsible myself for the final choice of wording.

As a footnote to this introduction it may be added that Theophylact presents us with three *addenda lexicis*—words to be found neither in LSJ or its Supplement nor in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (line numbers are as in Westerink):

- (1) *διαφλεγμαίνω* (II line 4), 'cause to swell up thoroughly', 'inflamm thoroughly'.
- (2) *φιλόκομπος* (II line 22), 'loving refinement', 'quibbling'.
- (3) *ἐξόρχησις* (II line 126), 'a dancing forth, away, or along'.

Two adverbs not given in either dictionary are *βρασματωδῶς* (I line 41), ‘in the manner of a liquid boiling up, seethingly, splutteringly’; and *Μωσαϊκώτερον* (II line 124), ‘more Mosaically’. In both these cases, however, Lampe and the *Sophocles Greek Lexicon* have the corresponding adjective. A new syntactical usage is *ἰλιγγιάω* with the accusative (III line 125), ‘turn giddy at’. *χοροστασία* (III line 101) in the sense ‘choir’, ‘holy band (of martyrs)’, is a later development of a usage already recognized by LSJ.

Theophylact, *On Predestination*

I

[*Essay of Theophylactus Simocates, graduate of the schools,¹
in dramatized form, putting case that there are
predestined ends set for human lives*]²

[THEOGNOSTUS AGAINST THEOPHRASTUS]²

[. . . With regard to the present disputation between myself and my opponent, had it not been for the fact that]³ [LINE 1] I undertook it with an eye to the boon it would confer, scurvy to satisfy as is the summons which occasions it, I should not have entered this contest or got myself involved in the dust of the ring. The cause for apprehension was in fact no ordinary one. It was the possibility that theological propriety might somehow, if I may put it so, be obelized as false, and phantoms of strange new gospels supervene upon our sight, things bringing in their train a spectacle of I know not what grotesque ventures in argumentation.

[7] Whose schooling was it that possessed him of the idea that there are no predestined ends for human lives? Where in holy scripture has he ever heard that men were assigned the stragglng indeterminacy he speaks of? If the vault of heaven has, as the prophet says, been

¹ *εχολαστικοῦ*: I venture this translation, instead of the more usual ‘public advocate’ or ‘sacred orator’, in view of the scholastic tone and setting of the work, and especially its emphasis on *παίδευσις*. Cf. the *Quaestiones physicae* which, as Westerink (p.535) points out, was designed “for public presentation before a jury or board of teachers,” the occasion being “either a school contest or an examination.”

² Greek title supplied by Westerink on the basis of titles to section II and *Quaestiones physicae*.

³ Approximate sense of the missing part of the sentence.

measured by the divine hand, and the number of angels has been decided by God's creative wisdom (to purfle my utterance for you with the words of Moses⁴ also), if bounds of nations and divisions of peoples have been allotted among the various angels, and God has numbered the hairs of our head, surely predestined ends are set for men's lives too, coming into existence by what I may call a Creator's providence. Did not our Maker according to scripture portion everything out by measure and weight? Bah, the absurdity of the man! The sun, says scripture, stood in his appointed course and the moon knows her own nature;⁵ "from the end of the heavens is their rising, and their circuit is to the end of the heavens";⁶ "for signs and for seasons and for years"⁷ were they appointed by their Producer. This being so, it was by a kind of active disposing on the part of a supreme artistry that the whole universe was ordered by the majesty, mighty in performance, of the God who produced everything.⁸ Did He who gives names to the stars, who decided everything before Creation and sets both seasons and times under his own control, bring our lives into being without predestined limits? Far from it, indeed.

[27] What place will you assign to "the season of every man has come before me,"⁹ or "the days of your death have drawn near,"¹⁰ or "my Spirit shall not continue indefinitely in the sons of men, but their days shall be a hundred and twenty years"¹¹? This I ask you, champion as you are of that outlandish indeterminacy and introducer of those strange doctrinal novelties, portentous and like a kind of Platonic Ideas, phantasms of the mind and toys of a frivolous brain—improviser in fact of an evil Academy for the churches in all too Greek a fashion. Again, had not the sojourn of Israel in Egypt been determined at four hundred years, you lover of indeterminacy and recoiner of the unrepheasable doctrines of the Faith? What will have become of that pronouncement so particularly espoused by the psalmist, "the days of our years are seventy years or eighty"¹²—that is, of discrimination

⁴ *Deut.* 32.8, LXX.

⁵ *φύειν*: so H, Westerink. I think this may be a corruption for *δύειν*, "the moon knows her going down," with allusion to *Ps.* 103.11.

⁶ *Ps.* 19.6.

⁷ *Gen.* 1.14.

⁸ Cf. *Pind.* fr.57; *Basil. Hom.* 3.8 (PG 31.216c).

⁹ *Gen.* 6.13.

¹⁰ *Deut.* 31.14.

¹¹ *Gen.* 6.3.

¹² *Ps.* 90.10.

and capacity.¹³ Indeed, if a sacred law had not bridled our mouths against indulgence in uncontrolled laughter,¹⁴ the thing is so laughable that I could have given way to a seething surge of cachinnation, constrained as I feel to laugh over your enterprises in argumentation. Have you never heard that David led the choir and sang “Lord, let me know my end and what is the number of my days, so that I may know how fleeting my life is”?¹⁵

[46] No, sir, in the church’s name, “but come, now, change about,” as Homer puts it.¹⁶ Change over to our side, ridding yourself of that helpless kind of pilotless drifting. You fought against the yoke and were punished with loss of truth, but if you admit defeat you will have in full what you have been deprived of. Old and full of days the patriarchs have been, have they not, when they were laid to rest. What do you think scripture implies by this? To my mind it implies, to quote the great Basil, “when the terms of their lives were fulfilled.”¹⁷ Actually not a sparrow shall fall without our Father in heaven, you thoroughbred investigator and instantaneous word-weaver! The saying “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come,”¹⁸ and Christ’s flight from the Jews because the hour of the cross had not yet come, surely these instances will contradict your doctrines, they will like catapults bombard your arguments, and winnow them like chaff which the wind sweeps off the face of the earth.

[62] Who was it who passed on to you in his cups all this mythological balderdash? Why did you let yourself be sold a load of vacuous pettifogging and now look supercilious about it? What kind of gain accrues to your account in, as the prophet says, weaving a spider’s web and fabricating on the loom puny unsubstantial notions in opposition

¹³ τῆς διαστολῆς καὶ δυνάμεως: I take these genitives as a descriptive appendage added to the “seventy years or eighty” of the preceding question, the purpose being to reconcile this scriptural text with *Gen.* 6.3 cited above, which gives man’s lifespan as a hundred and twenty years. The latter, Theophylact means, may be the theoretical limit, but the span during which we have real use of our faculties is shorter. Westerink is inclined to take the genitives as an independent exclamation meaning “What discrimination and arbitrariness (in my opponent)!”—but this involves the difficulty of supposing the first noun sarcastic and the second not.

¹⁴ Basil. *Regulae fusius tract.* 17.1 (PG 31.961A–B).

¹⁵ *Ps.* 39.4.

¹⁶ τὴν ποίησιν: to Theophylact Homeric epic is ἡ ποίησις *par excellence*; cf. *infra* n.21. The reference here is to *Od.* 8.492.

¹⁷ Basil. *Hom.* 9.3 (PG 31.333B).

¹⁸ *John* 2.4.

to mighty dogmas? Why have you thrust aside the garment of contemplation that is woven on high and clad yourself in garments of the human intellect, which are garments of skins and coarser? The people who should put these on are people who have drifted out of safety, who are being banished from heaven's Eden of the mind,¹⁹ thanks to the inanity of their venturing, which anyway was forbidden them. Grey-haired orthodoxy should put you out of countenance; it is old like the church, and the church's seniority you must respect. It is practically always true that what is younger and newer is less to be esteemed. When we rule that new is bad, it is a sentiment with which even tragic actors on the stage align themselves.²⁰ So do not say, "I am younger and newer." You are aware that Homer,²¹ too, disesteems what is newer. This also explains why time is given a bad name by the representatives of pagan wisdom and culture.²² They say it is always oedematous with strange things and diseased with innovations. Ask furthermore your fathers and they will report to you, ask your elders and they will tell you, that it is when the predestined terms of life are completed that deaths are brought on.

[81] Judges, councillors and guardians of the law: I have presented an adequate defence of the case presently before us. Now is the moment when I should be on the way to carrying off the victor's prize, when I should be assigned the award that indicates superiority. It is time to put on the crown of success in the debate and enter the chancel of the church dancing and singing along with you a song of victory to the Lord. For a mouth speaking wicked words was stopped, a sea of error has divided, we diverted as it were the billow of it, the force of the enemy is overwhelmed by sea and drowned, rider and horse in their boldness have vanished from sight, and every argument that sat in command against us has been destroyed. But on our side we raise a spiritual paean; we do not veil our exultation nor hide our trophy, but cry with the angels, "Let us sing to the Lord, for He has gloriously triumphed."²³

¹⁹ τῆς θείας τῶν νοημάτων τρυφῆς: *Τρυφή* was believed to be the Greek equivalent, etymologically, of 'Εδέμ, Eden or Paradise. The 'Eden of the mind' is true doctrine.

²⁰ Eur. *Andr.* 184.

²¹ τῆν ποίησιν: Hom. *Il.* 3.108; *Od.* 7.294. Cf. *supra* n.16.

²² Perhaps partly an allusion to Soph. *Aj.* 646ff. (Theophylact quotes this play at III, 120–21 below); but there is clearly more pointed allusion to some other classical passage, as yet untraced.

²³ *Exod.* 15.1.

II

*Essay of the same Theophylactus in dramatized form, putting
case that there are no predestined ends set for human lives*

THEOPHRASTUS AGAINST THEOGNOSTUS

[LINE 1] As Theognostus has gotten a throat that is an open grave and armed his tongue like a sharpened razor, with anger swelling up his words after the manner of a snake; as he is bloated with his insolences, prides himself on vices, sticks out his neck in reviling and says, “Our lips are with us: who is our master?”;²⁴ as he did not, to quote the prophet, set at naught a bragging tongue but thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think, showing disobedience in this to the inspired Paul,²⁵ I will punish his words with a rod and his speechifying with scourges. His heart indeed towered above the cedars of Lebanon, he forgot David and all his meekness,²⁶ and raised too high the eyes of his mind, occupying himself in great matters and not calming and quieting his spirit, as it says in holy writ, but elevating his soul after stripping off the dignity of angelic discretion. We know that the law of God instructs us to deal with the fool according to the self-will of his folly, in case, luxuriating in the breadth of our indulgence, such men go off and fall into a deeper pit of wrongdoings for want of the reproof of our admonitions. Well, then, here I come against you the proud one (amalgam of presumptuous education and own thinking as you are),²⁷ to begin from scripture and beautify the prelude of my discourse with a smatch of divinity.

[22] If there are predestined ends for human lives, you quibbling censorious mouth (I will ask you questions and you answer me, as is said, I think, by the Declarer of ineffable mysteries to the man of many sufferings),²⁸ how does it happen that populous cities suffer

²⁴ Ps. 12.4.

²⁵ Rom. 12.3.

²⁶ Ps. 132.1; *πρᾶότητος* (H) is the reading of LXX.

²⁷ *ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐπὶ σὲ τὴν ὑβρίστριαν καὶ παιδεύειν καὶ διάνοιαν*: The first six of these words are a quotation from Jer. 50.31 (27.31 in LXX), in which *ὑβρίστριαν* is feminine because ‘you’ is the city of Jerusalem. Theophylact keeps the feminine and justifies it by making the word qualify the two feminine nouns following, i.e. “you who are, who personify, presumptuous education and thinking.” The end of the sentence, however, requires that in a translation the Biblical quotation be kept (a) intact, (b) recognizable to the reader, and (c) distinct from the added words. The only way to achieve this is to parenthesize the latter.

²⁸ Job: see Job 38.3.

calamities when the air overhead is infected and imparts a kind of pestilential decay to those who have been exposed to it? Is there, I wonder, is there a predestined limit of a year set for their lives, at which precise point the countless races of men are swept up in a dragnet to their deaths? Again, how is it that often when two-hundred-ton merchant ships have unfurled, so to say, their fine drapery and stemmed the greatest seas, they have come to grief under the wild onset of winds, sinking with all on board, so that young men and girls, old men and children are drowned as it were in unison? Is it, I wonder, is it that one single and unalterable end was predestined for the voyagers? But again, when the foundations of the earth are quaking there at hand, one may perhaps witness the simultaneous destruction, in what the holy apostle calls the twinkling of an eye, of limitless masses and every age-group of people who through a single accident are accorded a single grave, . . . the nation-wide character of the destruction.²⁹ What need is there to present you with the parallel arguments about gaping fissures in the ground? Or the defeats affecting the marshalled regiments in military engagements—what place will you mentally assign to these, dear sir and artful dodger?³⁰ Occasions, I mean, where often we find not a member surviving of the sex that urinates against a wall³¹—to produce against you in turn some little turn of phrase from sacred history.

[44] Again, “men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days”³²—how are you to take that? Answer! “Because,” you say, “their predestined terms are cut short through proclivity towards evil deeds and failure to heed the better course.” In that case it is untrue that men’s deaths are brought on when the predestined terms of their lives are fulfilled, you paragon of monks and best logician among them, because any lopping off from a predestined term that manages to slip into the picture absolutely destroys the term in question. Does not Paul, too, proclaim something like this with piercing effect when he declares to the Corinthians, “That is why

²⁹ τῆς διαφθορᾶς τὸ ἐπίδημον: The phrase cannot be construed without torturing the Greek. This applies whether we take it as a kind of accusative in apposition to the sentence or as an exclamatory comment. Westerink is now inclined to think that it was originally governed by a participle missing from H: hence my indication of a lacuna.

³⁰ διαβατικώτατε: for this word in the sense indicated, i.e. ‘slippery customer’, cf. schol. *ad Ar. Nub.* 448, LSJ s.v.

³¹ *I Sam.* 25.22 and 34, and several times in *I* and *II Kings*: a Hebraism for the male sex.

³² *Ps.* 55.23.

many of you are weak and ill, and some have died”³³ The implication is that sin is cutting off before their time the lovers of itself and sending them to perdition. For we have it on the authority of our Lord’s own voice that “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”³⁴ and burned.

[56] I also know of a people being destroyed through recording of their numbers. When David made over the Jewish nation to be counted and committed his subjects so directed to official record, so that a people which was God’s peculiar possession was being subjected to a census, it was a needless provocation of the supreme God, and this was counted as a sin to David. It was for this reason that one of three blows had been ordained against the King and he was being forced to make a choice of misfortune. When the calamity proved ineluctable and the evil had been accepted as a matter for the exercise of choice, it was death that David as it were voted into power over the people, and mastery of the populace was entrusted to the misfortune chosen. David made death his choice, says scripture, rejecting both famine and war and declaring, “I will fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are very many: in enemy hands I refuse to be ensnared.”³⁵ In Aaron’s offering of incense and in the lifting up of the serpent, was not the power of death being broken through? Was not Moses’ holding up of his hands salvific of Israel when it was locked in battle? And when Job was being put to the ordeal did not his sons and daughters have their human lives brought to an end by a change that affected them collectively? It was not then because the predestined terms of their lives had been fulfilled that deprivation of children was brought to bear upon that champion in suffering, but by way of a test of his steadfastness of soul. Take the young daughter of Jephthah: was it not on account of the harsh requirement of his vow that she was being sacrificed? And how does the fratricidal killing of Abel happen, Sir Oracle, if the brother who was treacherously murdered was accorded a predestined term of life? If you mean that it is precisely because the term of his life had been fulfilled that he had then been handed over to death, why in that case is Cain sentenced to groaning and trembling, and why was he being given special protection against the like fate?

³³ *I Cor.* 11.30.

³⁴ *Matt.* 3.10; *Luke* 3.9.

³⁵ *I Chron.* 21.13; see the whole passage 1–14.

[80] Again, how is it that he who draws the sword shall perish by the sword, if men have predestined ends set for their lives? How have fasting and prayer been able to rescue the suppliant from the hand of death if the predestined bounds of his life have been reached and do not admit of removal by artifice? How will encounters with wild animals and the accidents that happen to men from the passing moment be able to keep to predestined ends of life? Have you not heard that David in a hymn to the supreme God cries out the words, “You have preserved my soul from death”?³⁶ Was there, I wonder, was there a single preset term of life for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or for the host of Pharaoh which was destroyed at the Red Sea as if by special arrangement?

[92] Again, if it is possible to find in scripture a person asking and receiving life and length of days, to find posterity of the wicked being completely destroyed, and the lawbreaker done away with as are grass and young green herbage when they wither, those predestined ends of life you speak of would have the ground taken from under them. Have you not heard that “an upright man shall flourish like a palm tree and be increased like a cedar in Lebanon,”³⁷ “in a little while the sinful man will not be there any more, you will seek the place where he is and not find him,”³⁸ “again I came by and was struck to find that he did not exist”?³⁹ How are we to take “were it not for anger of enemies, to prevent their long enduring”⁴⁰—you with your chatter about predestined ends of lives and execration of the teachings of Moses? Is not the Lord’s face set against doers of evil, so as to blot the memory of them from the face of the earth? Is it not the case that in schooling the upright man the Lord will school him without handing him over to death? Of whom is it true that their days came to nothing, amid emptiness, and their years amid anxiety? Is it not those who are casting piety away from them? And of whom does scripture say “let his days be made few,”⁴¹ if not of those who do not fear the Lord? On this account the prophet cries out with bared head for the wickedness of sinners to be brought to an end. Whose days did

³⁶ *Ps.* 56.13.

³⁷ *Ps.* 92.12.

³⁸ *Ps.* 37.10.

³⁹ *Ps.* 37.36.

⁴⁰ *Deut.* 32.27, text as in *LXX*.

⁴¹ *Ps.* 109.8.

He make a few handbreadths? As for “Rescue my soul from prison”⁴² and “Do not take me hence in the midst of my days,”⁴³ how is it possible to take holy writ as prescriptive if predestined ends of life that retain their validity in an unshakable way have been laid down symbiotically with human beings? How was a supplement of life bestowed upon Hezekiah because of his tears?⁴⁴ Or who will endure to accept a predestined term that admits of diminution or increase, you noble layer down of the law and exerciser of arbitrary power⁴⁵ to the point of real hubris!

[118] Mimickings of Greek mythology they are indeed, and wraiths of insubstantial, metaphysical Destiny, those empty monstrosities you utter out of such frivolous earnest! I would have you skip and dance and give a demonstration of the Pan performance chanting a paean. You gathered the winds into your bosom with your sophistries. You nurture mental arrogance with images of your vain dreams, and in your dreams the sea has parted for you. You are a greater thaumaturge than Moses; a king’s adjutants and chariots have met destruction at your hand; you beat the drum of your own blown-up character and give us a replica of David in your dancings forth, by which, however, you escort solemn verbiage instead of a holy tabernacle.⁴⁶ You all but resemble people in a state of Corybantic frenzy and assimilate yourself to the melancholy-mad, having neither acquired understanding of letters nor perused the confines of theoretical contemplation.

[130] Now if, members of the panel, I crowned myself with victory in the contest, I do not expect to be garlanded by you with parsley and wild olive, but to be rewarded with the instrument⁴⁷ of approbation, illumined by the vote of ratification, and glorified by the applause of confirmation, so that today I too may cry with the prophet, “Truth has risen up from the earth, and justice stooped from heaven to look in upon our tribunal.”⁴⁸

⁴² *Ps.* 142.7.

⁴³ *Ps.* 102.24.

⁴⁴ *Isai.* 38; *II Kings* 20.1–11.

⁴⁵ *δύναμιν*: In Greek of this period *δύναμις* often has the sense of ‘arbitrary power’, ‘arbitrariness’, *cf. supra* n.13.

⁴⁶ *II Sam.* 6.12–23.

⁴⁷ *σπλῶ*: It is obscure what exactly the ‘instrument’ is. Perhaps the notion of accolade is implied.

⁴⁸ *Ps.* 85.11.

III

*By the same Theophylactus on the same problem
at issue, verdict in dramatized form*

THE ADJUDICATORS EVANGELUS AND THEOPEMPTUS

[LINE 1] To the God who loves judgement and justice, who gives utterance in the opening of the mouth, shedding grace upon the lips and preparing the tongue and lending beauty to it as to a writer's pen; who guides with reins the motions of the heart, and the mind as with a tiller towards right apprehensions; who gives a bodying of knowledge to every seeker of it, every knocker at the door of heavenly contemplation, and introduces him to the inmost sanctuaries of thought, filling his cup with wisdom and letting the thirsty drink as it were from a sovereign stream of instruction: to such a God shall each of us now pray that we may show forth a riddle and a dark saying like light, articulate it with all clarity in fair form, and deliver ourselves of a goodly theme which takes its course along a road that is royal, evangelical, smooth, and involves no crookedness causing devious aberration.

[14] Well, then, for our part, cogitating upon the doctrine which lies before you for examination, we neither affirm predestined terms of life which all, for everyone, and of necessity retain their immovability—for this is a Greek concept, a *proprium* of an autocratic Destiny, and alien to the law laid down by the church; but neither do we uphold that profuse indeterminacy stretching to an abyss of infinity, which we see as in every way clashing with nature, since to God alone is infinitude to be attributed, because of the surpassing degree of his incomprehensibility. The upshot is that it is of our own free choice that there ensue for us both length of life and the curtailment arising from death. There are appointed for us virtue, vice, the kingdom of heaven, darkness everlasting, the unsleeping worm, unquenchable fire, and everything that was prepared for punishment or paradise by the judgement of God, which is impartial and abhors evil. Correspondingly, both supplementation of life and bringing on of death are literally mortised to the human race through virtue or vice.

[29] Surely it is the case also that the divinely-molded living creature, the first human being fashioned of clay from the earth, had

his being in the region between mortality and immortality. It was part of his nature, if he had in no respect disobeyed the command, not to taste death, or conversely if he had gone astray through shrinking from virtue and heedlessness of the better course, to return to dissolution of decay and, having sinned, to make his homeward trek to the bosom of the earth. Well, then, life does have predestined terms inasmuch as, being children of earth, to earth we shall all go when we make our departure; but supplementation or abridgement is superimposed upon men's lives because of either virtue or vice in their souls.

[39] Whose bodies fell in the wilderness?⁴⁹ Surely the bodies of those who hankered after eating flesh. Was not the poison neutralized by prayer of him who fasted, when through the inclusion of the wild gourd those who partook of the meal were going to be in jeopardy?⁵⁰ Is it not the case that "Phinehas stood up and made propitiation, and the plague was stayed"?⁵¹ That Abraham, Moses and David "were gathered in a good old age to their fathers"?⁵² That "each one shall die for his own sin"?⁵³ and "evil is the death of sinners"?⁵⁴ Does not holy writ say that "the impious shall soon be utterly destroyed,"⁵⁵ and again, "day by day He will increase the years of the king"?⁵⁶ "If you turn again and listen to the Lord your God and do all his commands, the Lord your God will greatly prosper you in the fruit of your body and in the produce of your ground and in the fruit of your cattle"⁵⁷—did not the word of God so teach? Does not scripture say, "See, I have set before your face today life and death"?⁵⁸ "If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, you shall live and be multiplied and the Lord your God will bless you"⁵⁹—did not the Mosaic injunction so legislate? "If your heart turns away and will not listen, you shall die the death and shall not be long-lived in the land"⁶⁰—did not holy writ so proclaim? Does not the Lord say to

⁴⁹ *Num.* 14.29, 32; *Heb.* 3.17.

⁵⁰ *II Kings* 4.38–41.

⁵¹ *Ps.* 106.30.

⁵² *Gen.* 25.8; *Deut.* 32.50, 34.7; *I Kings* 2.10.

⁵³ *Jer.* 31.30.

⁵⁴ *Ps.* 34.21, text as in *LXX*.

⁵⁵ *Cf. Deut.* 28.20.

⁵⁶ *Ps.* 61.6.

⁵⁷ *Deut.* 30.8–9.

⁵⁸ *Deut.* 30.15.

⁵⁹ *Deut.* 30.16.

⁶⁰ *Deut.* 30.17–18.

Moses, “You shall see the land in front of you and not enter it, because at the waters of strife you did not bless me”?⁶¹

[61] Why then should we expatiate upon similar matters in more methodical detail, and why do we thicken our speech with a burden of many words? We know that good men’s prayer often avails to bring on both life and death. Was not the child who had died handed over alive⁶² by the man who commanded the heavens, bridled the rain with his tongue, and guided the reins of a chariot of fire on which he rode? Did not the Shunammite woman receive the body of her son alive, the necrosis apparently dissolving away through the return of life to him?⁶³ Indeed, “women received their dead by resurrection.”⁶⁴ Is it not the case that when boys were jeering at him Elisha pronounced sentence of death on them because of their jibe?⁶⁵ Did not Ananias together with his wife fall dead at the feet of the apostles when Peter condemned the cheap unreliability of their words?⁶⁶ We also know of children perishing because of their parents’ wickedness, for otherwise the firstborn would not have been destroyed by the angel of destruction in Egypt. Also, a father’s piety can substitute for children who have sinned. It is on account of David that in the days of Solomon the kingdom is not torn from his hand, nor the scepters split, nor do the penalties for idolatry beset him round. We know that thanks to a king’s due advertence, catastrophe to both a city and a people is deferred: let Nineveh declare the great things that repentance can do, even after God’s proclamation through his prophet, “In another three days Nineveh shall be overthrown.”⁶⁷ The result was that they trusted in God, proclaimed a fast as scripture, I think, relates, and put on sackcloth. The king of Nineveh stood up from his throne, removed his robe, clad himself in sackcloth and sat among ashes. “And God,” it says, “repented of the evil which He had threatened to do to them, and did not do it.”⁶⁸

[88] Did not the voice of God make this pronouncement to the wisest among kings: “If you walk in my ways and keep my injunc-

⁶¹ *Deut.* 32.51–52, text as in LXX.

⁶² *I Kings* 17.17–24; ‘the man’ is Elijah.

⁶³ *II Kings* 4.8–37; the agent of the miracle is Elisha.

⁶⁴ *Heb.* 11.35.

⁶⁵ *II Kings* 1.23–24.

⁶⁶ *Acts* 5.1–11.

⁶⁷ *Jonah* 3.4–10.

⁶⁸ *Jonah* 3.10.

tions and my commandments, as your father David did, I will lengthen your days”?⁶⁹ Does not the saying “I will kill and I will make alive”⁷⁰ imply due recompense for the lives we have led? If we do not turn again, did He not threaten to draw his bow and burnish his sword, He who does not desire the death of sinners but their life and repentance from their sins? And this despite the fact that the human race has it at heart to despise the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience. Nor must we overlook, either, the words, “Fear of the Lord prolongs a man’s days, but the years of the wicked shall be made short.”⁷¹ Differently to be accounted for is the case of the children murdered at Bethlehem and of the choir of those who have suffered martyrdom, on which it is not germane to the present moment to expatiate in our review. But it does not, we think, lie outside the supremely discerning greatness of mind of our Creator, either when, or how, or to what point the full term of the life of each of us is delimited, though neither is our sinning or not sinning to be attributed to the all-pervading foreknowledge of the supreme God—a subject on which not a few treatises, and excellent ones, too, have been painstakingly composed in many places by many before us.

[108] These are, and will be, the fruits of our present and future cogitations. For your part, do not henceforward be children of wrath, but assume a spirit of gentleness and enter into awareness of yourselves. Cease from wrath, and with David leave your anger in ownerless neglect. Mortify the spirit of braggartry, amputate the limbs of self-exaltation, lull to rest the fiery heat of your nature. Humble the spirit and loftiness of your arrogance; make humility your peculiar possession, and do not adopt as your own any attitude that is rampant or brute and beastly. In the words of the holy apostle, outdo each other in showing respect. He who chases after the first place is assigned the last, according to the gospel. Let no one be puffed up by wealth of knowledge. Our knowledge is only partial, and we see in a glass and perplexingly, as the holy apostle puts it.⁷² “We know nothing distinct, but wander about”:⁷³ pagan literature has laid that down as a law for mankind, and we shall bear with it as behooved us. As for

⁶⁹ *I Kings* 3.14.

⁷⁰ *Deut.* 32.39.

⁷¹ *Prov.* 10.27.

⁷² *I Cor.* 13.12.

⁷³ *Soph. Aj.* 23.

doctrinal hairsplittings, tissues of questionings and recourses had by investigations, let us eschew them with a greater simplicity and piety, having turned giddy at the abysses of matters not entrusted to our keeping. Otherwise He who catches the wise in their knavery may lay a stumbling-stone before the precipitancy of our tongue, and we may crash into it and be shattered and then hear Paul saying, "Where is the wise man, where the scribe, where the debater of this age?"⁷⁴ *et cetera*. So then, changing your dogmas along with your characters and your rhetoric, let each of you go home disappointed of his wish.

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⁷⁴ *I Cor.* 1.20.