

ART HUMANITIES: PRIMARY SOURCE READER

Section 2: Cathedral of Notre Dame, Amiens

Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 4

Renaud de Cormont

INSCRIPTION IN THE LABYRINTH OF AMIENS
CATHEDRAL, 1288

The date of the start of work on the Cathedral of Notre Dame at Amiens is established by the inscription in the octagonal labyrinth laid out in colored tiles on the nave pavement. The inscription commemorates the founding bishop, Evrard de Fouillois, and the sequence of master masons responsible for the work. The evocation of Daedalus, the legendary artist and craftsman of Greek antiquity, inventor of the first labyrinth, celebrates the ambition of the medieval masters and their achievement.

Note on when this church was begun. Just as it is written in the slab of the House of Daedalus. In the year of grace 1220 was this work first begun. At that time the bishop of this diocese was Evrard blessed bishop. And the king of France was Louis who was the son of Philip the wise. He who was master of the work was named Master Robert and surnamed de Luzarches. Master Thomas de Cormont was after him and afterwards his son Master Renaud who had this inscription placed at this place in the year of the incarnation 1288.

The translation of the labyrinth inscription is from *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens: The Power of Change in Gothic* by Stephen Murray. Copyright © 1996, Cambridge University Press.

Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 5

Abbot Suger

ON THE ABBEY CHURCH OF SAINT-DENIS, 1140-44

The man who commissioned and personally directed the building of the first completely gothic structure was Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis, churchman, diplomat and trusted adviser to two kings of France (1081-1151). His passionate interest in every phase of the reconstruction of the old abbey church, his rare intelligence and his intuitive ability to evaluate the artistic experiments of his time made him a great patron of the arts. Fortunately, he was moved by circumstances and temperament to commit to writing the account of the reconstruction and embellishment of his church. He wrote it in his own and his fellow brethren's name, as he said, "in honor of the Abbey and to the Glory of God and the Holy Martyrs." Suger's account is an undisguised encomium on the beauty of the new lofty structure and the infinite variety of precious objects contained in his church.¹

The abbey of Saint-Denis was situated in the town of Saint-Denis just to the north of Paris. Founded by King Dagobert (629-639) in memory of Saint-Denis, traditionally considered apostle of the Gauls, the monastery had enjoyed uninterrupted royal patronage. The abbey church housed the tombs of the French kings and guarded the royal coronation insignia and the abbey school was responsible for the education of many princes of the blood. At this school, as children, the later King Louis VI and Suger formed a lifelong friendship.

When Suger was ordained abbot of Saint-Denis in 1122, the abbey had been in poor condition for years. Its immense wealth in land, privileges, treasures and buildings had been dissipated. Within a few years of Suger's administration, the abbey was reorganized and reformed, its land-holdings and finances brought back under firm control and Suger was free to give the old Carolingian church a spacious new narthex, dedicated in 1140, and a new choir, greatly enlarged, dedicated in 1144.

*So strong was Suger's preoccupation with the reconstruction of his church that he discussed it in three separate treatises written between 1140 and 1148-49. The *Scriptum consecrationi*, written between 1144 and 1146-47, is entirely dedicated to the account of the construction and consecration of the new narthex and chevet. His account of his administration, entitled by its first editor *Liber de rebus in administratione sua gesti*, written between 1144 and 1148-49, contains an account of the improvement of the abbey's economic condition and the story of the remodeling and embellishment of the interior of the church. The *Ordinatione*, Suger's collection of his newly formulated regulations for the monastery, written between 1140 and 1141, also contains a statute which deals with the construction and consecration of the narthex and the laying of the foundation for the new choir.*

I. DE ADMINISTRACIONE.

In the twenty-third year of our administration, when we sat on a certain day in the general chapter, conferring with our brethren about matters both common and private, these very beloved brethren and sons began strenuously to beseech me *in charity* that I might not allow the fruits of our so great labors to be passed over in silence; and rather to save for the memory of posterity, in pen and ink, those increments which the generous munificence of Almighty God had bestowed upon this church, in the time of our prelacy, in the acquisition of new assets as well as in the recovery of lost ones, in the multiplication of improved possessions, in the construction of buildings, and in the accumulation of gold, silver, most precious gems and very good textiles. For this one thing they promised us two in return: by such a record we would deserve the continual fervor of all succeeding brethren in their prayers for the salvation of our soul; and we would rouse, through this example, their zealous solicitude for the good care of the

church of God. We thus devoutly complied with their devoted and reasonable requests, not with any desire for empty glory nor with any claim to the reward of human praise and transitory compensation

XXIV. OF THE CHURCH'S DECORATION.

. . . The first work on this church which we began under the inspiration of God [was this]: because of the age of the old walls and their impending ruin in some places, we summoned the best painters I could find from different regions, and reverently caused these [walls] to be repaired and becomingly painted with gold and precious colors. I completed this all the more gladly because I had wished to do it, if ever I should have an opportunity, even while I was a pupil in school.

XXV. OF THE FIRST ADDITION TO THE CHURCH.

However, even while this was being completed at great expense, I found myself, under the inspiration of the Divine Will and because of that inadequacy which we often saw and felt on feast days, namely the Feast of the blessed Denis, the Fair, and very many others (for the narrowness of the place forced the women to run toward the altar upon the heads of the men as upon a pavement with much anguish and noisy confusion), encouraged by the counsel of wise men and by the prayers of many monks (lest it displease God and the Holy Martyrs) to enlarge and amplify the noble church consecrated by the Hand Divine; and I set out at once to begin this very thing. In our chapter as well as in church I implored Divine mercy that He Who is the One, *the beginning and the ending, Alpha and Omega*, might join a good end to a good beginning by a safe middle; that He might not repel from the building of the temple a *bloody man* who desired this very thing, with his whole heart, more than to obtain the treasures of Constantinople. Thus we began work at the former entrance with the doors. We tore down a certain addition asserted to have been made by Charlemagne on a very honorable occasion . . . and we set our hand to this part. As is evident we exerted ourselves incessantly with the enlargement of the body of the church as well as with the trebling of the entrance and the doors, and with the erection of high and noble towers

XXVII. OF THE CAST AND GILDED DOORS.

Bronze casters having been summoned and sculptors chosen,² we set up the main doors on which are represented the Passion of the Saviour and His Resurrection, or rather Ascension, with great cost and much expenditure for their gilding as was fitting for the noble porch. Also [we set up] others, new ones on the right side and the old ones on the left beneath the mosaic which, though contrary to modern custom,³ we ordered to be executed there and to be affixed to the tympanum of the portal. We also committed ourselves richly to elaborate the tower[s] and the upper crenelations of the front, both for the beauty of the church and, should circumstances require it, for practical purposes. Further we ordered the year of the consecration, lest it be forgotten, to be inscribed in copper-gilt letters in the following manner:

For the splendor of the church that has fostered and exalted him,
Suger has labored for the splendor of the church.
Giving thee a share of what is thine, O Martyr Denis,
He prays to thee to pray that he may obtain a share of Paradise.
The year was the One Thousand, One Hundred, and Fortieth
Year of the Word when [this structure] was consecrated.

The verses on the door, further, are these:

Whoever thou art, if thou seekest to extol the glory of these doors,
Marvel not at the gold and the expense but at the craftsmanship of the work.
Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work
Should brighten the minds, so that they may travel, through the true lights,

To the True Light where Christ is the true door.
In what manner it be inherent in this world the golden door defines:
The dull mind rises in truth through that which is material
And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion.

And on the lintel:

Receive, O stern judge, the prayers of Thy Suger;
Grant that I be mercifully numbered among Thy own sheep.

XXXVIII. OF THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE UPPER CHOIR.

In the same year, cheered by so holy and so auspicious a work, we hurried to begin the chamber of the divine atonement in the upper choir where the continual and frequent Victim of our redemption should be sacrificed in secret without disturbance by the crowds. And, as is found in [our] treatise about the consecration of this upper structure, we were mercifully deemed worthy-God helping and prospering us and our concerns-to bring so holy, so glorious, and so famous a structure to a good end, together with our brethren and fellow servants How much the Hand Divine Which operates in such matters has protected this glorious work is also surely proven by the fact that It allowed that whole magnificent building [to be completed] in three years and three months, from the crypt below to the summits of the vaults above, elaborated with the variety of so many arches and columns, including even the consummation of the roof. Therefore the inscription of the earlier consecration also defines, with only one word eliminated, the year of completion of this one, thus:

The year was One Thousand, One Hundred, Forty and Fourth of the Word
when [this structure] was consecrated.

To these verses of the inscription we choose the following ones to be added:

Once the new rear part is jointed to the part in front,
The church shines with its middle part brightened.
For bright is that which is brightly coupled with the bright,
And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by the new light;
Which stands enlarged in our time,
I, who was Suger, being the leader while it was being accomplished.

Eager to press on my success, since I wished nothing more under heaven than to seek the honor of my mother church which with maternal affection had suckled me as a child . . . we devoted ourselves to the completion of the work and strove to raise and to enlarge the transept wings of the church [so as to correspond] to the form of the earlier and later work that had to be joined [by them]

XXXI. OF THE GOLDEN ALTAR FRONTAL IN THE UPPER CHOIR.

Into this panel, which stands in front of his most sacred body, we have put, according to our estimate, about forty-two marks of gold; [further] a multifarious wealth of precious gems, hyacinths, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and topazes, and also an array of different large pearls-[a wealth] as great as we had never anticipated to find. You could see how kings, princes, and many outstanding men, following our example, took the rings off the fingers of their hands and ordered, out of love for the Holy Martyrs, that the gold, stones, and precious pearls of the rings be put into that panel. Similarly archbishops and bishops deposited there the very rings of their investiture as though in a place of safety, and offered them devoutly to God and His Saints. And such a crowd of dealers in precious gems flocked in on us from diverse dominions and regions that we did not wish to buy any more than they hastened to sell, with everyone contributing donations

Since it seemed proper to place the most sacred bodies of our Patron Saints in

the upper vaults as nobly as we could, and since one of the side-tablets of their most sacred sarcophagus had been torn off on some unknown occasion, we put back fifteen marks of gold and took pains to have gilded its rear side and its superstructure throughout, both below and above, with about forty ounces. Further we caused the actual receptacles of the holy bodies to be enclosed with gilded panels of cast copper and with polished stones, fixed close to the inner stone vaults, and also with continuous gates to hold off disturbances by crowds; in such a manner, however, that reverend persons, as was fitting, might be able to see them with great devotion and a flood of tears

XXXIII .

. . . We hastened to adorn the Main Altar of the blessed Denis where there was only one beautiful and precious frontal panel from Charles the Bald, the third Emperor; for at this [altar] we had been offered to the monastic life. We had it all encased, putting up golden panels on either side and adding a fourth, even more precious one; so that the whole altar would appear golden all the way round. On either side, we installed there the two candlesticks of King Louis, son of Philip, of twenty marks of gold, lest they might be stolen on some occasion; we added hyacinths, emeralds, and sundry precious gems; and we gave orders carefully to look out for others to be added further

But the rear panel, of marvelous workmanship and lavish sumptuousness (for the barbarian artists were even more lavish than ours), we ennobled with chased relief work equally admirable for its form as for its material, so that certain people might be able to say: *The workmanship surpassed the material*

Often we contemplate, out of sheer affection for the church our mother, these different ornaments both new and old Thus, when-out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God-the loveliness of the many colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner. I used to converse with travelers from Jerusalem and, to my great delight, to learn from those to whom the treasures of Constantinople and the ornaments of Hagia Sophia had been accessible, whether the things here could claim some value in comparison with those there. When they acknowledged that these here were the more important ones, it occurred to us that those marvels of which we had heard before might have been put away, as a matter of precaution, for fear of the Franks, lest through the rash rapacity of a stupid few the partisans of the Greeks and Latins, called upon the scene, might suddenly be moved to sedition and warlike hostilities⁴ for wariness is preeminently characteristic of the Greeks. Thus it could happen that the treasures which are visible here, deposited in safety, amount to more than those which had been visible there, left [on view] under conditions unsafe on account of disorders. From very many truthful men, even from the bishop Hugues of Laon, we had heard wonderful and almost incredible reports about the superiority of Hagia Sophia's and other churches' ornaments for the celebration of Mass. If this is so-or rather because we believe it to be so, by their testimony-then such inestimable and incomparable treasures should be exposed to the judgment of the many...

XXXIV

We also changed to its present form, sympathizing with their discomfort, the choir of the brethren, which had been detrimental to health for a long time on account of the coldness of the marble and the copper and had caused great hardship to those who constantly attended service in church; and because of the increase in our community (with the help of God), we endeavored to enlarge it.

We also caused the ancient pulpit, which-admirable for the most delicate and nowadays irreplaceable sculpture of its ivory tablets-surpassed human evaluation also by the depiction of antique subjects, to be repaired after we had reassembled those tablets

which were moldering all too long in, and even under, the repository of the money chests; on the right side we restored to their places the animals of copper lest so much and admirable material perish, and had [the whole] set up so that the reading of Holy Gospels might be performed in a more elevated place. In the beginning of our abbacy we had already put out of the way a certain obstruction which cut as a dark wall through the central nave of the church, lest the beauty of the church's magnitude be obscured by such barriers

Moreover, we caused to be painted, by the exquisite hands of many masters from different regions, a splendid variety of new windows, both below and above; from that first one which begins [the series] with the *Tree of Jesse* in the chevet of the church to that which is installed above the principal door in the church's entrance

Now, because [these windows] are very valuable on account of their wonderful execution and the profuse expenditure of painted glass and sapphire glass, we appointed an official master craftsman for their protection and repair, and also a goldsmith skilled in gold and silver ornament, who would receive their allowances and what was adjudged to them in addition, viz., coins from the altar and flour from the common storehouse of the brethren, and who could never neglect their duty to look after these [works of art].

We further caused to be composed seven candlesticks of enamelled and excellently gilded [metal] work, because those which Emperor Charles had offered to the blessed Denis appeared to be ruined by age.

XXXIV A.

. . . We also offered to the blessed Denis, together with some flowers from the crown of the Empress, another most precious vessel of prase, carved into the form of a boat, which King Louis, son of Philip, had left in pawn for nearly ten years; we had purchased it with the King's permission for sixty marks of silver when it had been offered to us for inspection. It is an established fact that this vessel, admirable for the quality of the precious stone as well as for the latter's unimpaired quantity, is adorned with "verroterie cloisonnée" work by St. Eloy which is held to be most precious in the judgment of all goldsmiths

We also procured for the services at the aforesaid altar a precious chalice out of one solid sardonyx⁵ which [word] derives from "sardius" and "onyx"; in which one [stone] the sard's red hue, by varying its property, so strongly contrasts with the blackness of the onyx that one property seems to be bent on trespassing upon the other

SCRIPTUM CONSECRATIONIS II.

. . . Through a fortunate circumstance attending this singular smallness [of the existing church]-the number of the faithful growing and frequently gathering to seek the intercession of the Saints-the aforesaid basilica had come to suffer grave inconveniences. Often on feast days, completely filled, it disgorged through all its doors the excess of the crowds as they moved in opposite directions, and the outward pressure of the foremost ones not only prevented those attempting to enter from entering but also expelled those who had already entered. At times you could see, a marvel to behold, that the crowded multitude offered so much resistance to those who strove to flock in to worship and kiss the holy relics, the Nail and Crown of the Lord, that no one among the countless thousands of people because of their very density could move a foot; that no one, because of their very congestion, could [do] anything but stand like a marble statue, stay benumbed or, as a last resort, scream

Since in the front part, toward the north, at the main entrance with the main doors, the narrow hall was squeezed in on either side by twin towers neither high nor very sturdy but threatening ruin, we began, with the help of God, strenuously to work on this part, having laid very strong material foundations for a straight nave and twin towers, and most strong spiritual ones of which it is said: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* Leaning upon God's inestimable counsel and irrefragable aid, we proceeded with this so great and so sumptuous work to such an extent that, while at first, expending little, we lacked much, afterwards, expending much,

we lacked nothing at all and even confessed in our abundance: *Our sufficiency is of God*. Through a gift of God a new quarry, yielding very strong stone, was discovered such as in quality and quantity had never been found in these regions. There arrived a skillful crowd of masons, stonecutters, sculptors and other workmen, so that thus and otherwise Divinity relieved us of our fears and favored us with its goodwill by comforting us and by providing us with unexpected [resources]

In carrying out such plans my first thought was for the concordance and harmony of the ancient and the new work. By reflection, by inquiry, and by investigation through different regions of remote districts, we endeavored to learn where we might obtain marble columns or columns the equivalent thereof. Since we found none, only one thing was left to us, distressed in mind and spirit: we might obtain them from Rome (for in Rome we had often seen wonderful ones in the Palace of Diocletian and other Baths) by safe ships through the Mediterranean, thence through the English Sea and the tortuous windings of the River Seine, at great expense to our friends and even requiring payment of passage money to our enemies, the near-by Saracens. For many years, for a long time, we were perplexed, thinking and making inquiries-when suddenly the generous munificence of the Almighty, condescending to our labors, revealed to the astonishment of all and through the merit of the Holy Martyrs, what one would never have thought or imagined: very fine and excellent [columns]. Therefore, the greater acts of grace, contrary to hope and human expectation, Divine mercy had deigned to bestow by [providing] a suitable place where it could not be more agreeable to us, the greater [acts of gratitude] we thought it worth our effort to offer in return for the remedy of so great an anguish. For near Pontoise, a town adjacent to the confines of our territory, there [was found] a wonderful quarry [which] from ancient times had offered a deep chasm (hollowed out, not by nature but by industry) to cutters of millstones for their livelihood. Having produced nothing remarkable thus far, it reserved, we thought, the beginning of so great a usefulness for so great and divine a building-as a first offering, as it were, to God and the Holy Martyrs. Whenever the columns were hauled from the bottom of the slope with knotted ropes, both our own people and the pious neighbors, nobles and common folk alike, would tie their arms, chests, and shoulders to the ropes and, acting as draft animals, drew the columns up; and on the declivity in the middle of the town the diverse craftsmen laid aside the tools of their trade and came out to meet them, offering their own strength against the difficulty of the road, doing homage as much as they could to God and the Holy Martyrs. There occurred a wonderful miracle worthy of telling which we, having heard it ourselves from those present, have decided to set down with pen and ink for the praise of the Almighty and His Saints.

III.

On a certain day when, with a downpour of rain, a dark opacity had covered the turbid air, those accustomed to assist in the work while the carts were coming down to the quarry went off because of the violence of the rain. The ox-drivers complained and protested that they had nothing to do and that the laborers were standing around and losing time. Clamoring, they grew so insistent that some weak and disabled persons together with a few boys-seventeen in number and, if I am not mistaken, with a priest present-hastened to the quarry, picked up one of the ropes, fastened it to a column and abandoned another shaft which was lying on the ground; for there was nobody who would undertake to haul this one. Thus, animated by pious zeal, the little flock prayed: "O Saint Denis, if it pleaseth thee, help us by dealing for thyself with this abandoned shaft, for thou canst not blame us if we are unable to do it." Then, bearing on it heavily, they dragged out what a hundred and forty or at least one hundred men had been accustomed to haul from the bottom of the chasm with difficulty-not alone by themselves, for that would have been impossible, but through the will of God and the assistance of the Saints whom they invoked; and they conveyed it to the site of the church on a cart. Thus it was made known throughout the neighborhood that this work pleased Almighty God exceedingly, since for the praise and glory of His name He had chosen to give His help to those who performed it by this and similar signs

NOTES

1. *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, trans. and ed. Erwin Panofsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, copyright 1946). Passages reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. The reader is advised to turn to this monograph for the full Latin text, the English translation and commentaries and identification of objects mentioned in the text. Minor corrections of the Latin text, which were later published by Professor Panofsky, are incorporated here; see Erwin Panofsky, "Postlogium Sugerianum," *The Art Bulletin* XXIX/2 and 4 (1947): 19-21, 287. The history of the abbey church and its successive structural changes are exhaustively treated in the monograph by Sumner McKnight Crosby, *L'Abbaye royale de Saint-Denis* (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1953). For a more recent critical interpretation of Suger's text see Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 3-24.
2. Suger's distinction between bronze *casters* and bronze *sculptors* implies a division of work between the casters, who were called in from the outside for the highly specialized job of casting, and the sculptors, who were artists who probably came from among a crew already in the employment of the monastery. It was they who made the models for the door reliefs and later chased and polished the cast door leaves; Panofsky, *Suger*, p. 159 n. 146.
3. Both Panofsky, *Suger*, pp. 161-63, and Frankl, *The Gothic*, pp. 17-18, attribute Suger's choice of a mosaic for the old northern portal of the west façade instead of relief sculpture, which would have been more in accordance with the rest of his new facade, to his love for shiny and glittering things. This interpretation seems to oversimplify the facts, for it seems highly improbable that Suger should not have "comprehended" that mosaic had become old-fashioned, as Professor Frankl implies; the wording of this passage is explicitly apologetic; Suger's remark on the subject sounds as if the mosaic had been forced upon him by others-possibly for reasons of tradition. Whatever the reason, Suger clearly wished to make sure that posterity would be aware that he knew what he was doing when he selected the old-fashioned over the new in this particular instance.
4. There is a curiously prophetic note in these words, and one may perhaps venture to think that Suger, the astute diplomat and interpreter of human emotion, was aware, as early as his own time, of the covetous desires among his countrymen and others for the accumulated treasures of the Byzantine Empire, appetites which sixty years later were to lead to the sack of Constantinople in the fourth crusade in 1204.
5. This chalice of sardonyx (agate), gold, silver gilt, gems and pearls was in the treasury of the abbey of Saint-Denis until the French Revolution. Its history during the following century and a half is filled with intrigue, mystery and, eventually, good luck, for it was rediscovered unharmed in 1923 after it had been acquired for the Widener Collection in Philadelphia in 1922. With the rest of this collection it entered the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 1940; Panofsky, *Suger*, p. 205, and William D. Wixom, *Treasures from Medieval France*, Exhibition Catalogue, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, Ohio: 1967), pp. 70, 353, with an excellent photograph facing p. 70.

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Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 6

Excerpts from The Holy Bible

FIRST CENTURY A.D.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN

Chapter 8

12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Chapter 10

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MATTHEW

Chapter 24

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end the world?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them,

29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other . . .

Chapter 25

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked and ye clothed me not sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee:

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

THE REVELATION OF SAINT JOHN THE DIVINE

Chapter 1

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

Chapter 20

1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands;

and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Chapter 21

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, or crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life

freely.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16 And the city Beth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it.

23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour to it.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

27 And there shall in no wise enter it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 7

Jacobus de Voragine, The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

1260

AUGUST 15

The manner of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is told to us in an apocryphal book which is attributed to John the Evangelist.

There we read that when the apostles set forth to preach in the divers regions of the world, the Blessed Virgin dwelt in a house hard by Mount Sion. Throughout her life she continued, with pious devotion, to visit the holy places of her Son, namely the places of His Baptism, His Fasting, His Prayer, His Passion, His Burial, His Resurrection, and His Ascension. According to Epiphanius, she lived for twenty-four years after the Ascension of her Son. He says that when the Blessed Virgin conceived Christ she was fourteen years of age, and fifteen when she bore Him; she lived with Him for thirty-three years, and survived Him by twenty-four. Thus she was seventy-two years old when she died. But we read elsewhere-and this seems more likely-that she lived but twelve years after her Son, and thus died at the age of sixty; for according to the *Ecclesiastical History*, the apostles preached in and about Judea for that length of time.

One day when the Virgin's longing for her Son burned fervently in her heart, and her ardent spirit was troubled and poured forth a torrent of tears, and for a space she bore not serenely the lost comforts of her departed Son, an angel stood by her in the midst of a great light, and greeted her with reverence as the mother of his Lord. 'Hail, blessed Mary,' he said, 'receive the blessing of Him Who sent His salvation to Jacob! Behold I have brought unto thee, my Lady, a branch of the palm of Paradise! This thou must cause to be carried before thy bier; for three days hence thou shalt be called forth from the body, because thy Son awaits thee, His venerable mother!' Mary responded: 'If I have found grace in thy sight, I pray thee make known thy name to me! But this I ask more urgently, that my sons and brothers the apostles be gathered unto me, that I may see them with the eyes of the flesh before I die, and may be buried by them, and may give back my spirit to God in their presence. And this also I beg and beseech, that when my soul goes forth from the body it may see no evil spirit, and that no power of Satan may come upon me!' The angel said: 'Wherefore, Lady, needest thou to know my name, which is great and glorious? And behold, all the apostles today will come and gather about thee, and they will give thee noble burial, and in their sight thou shalt breathe forth thy spirit! For he who once suddenly carried the prophet from Judea to Babylon by the hairs of his head, can doubtless bring the apostles to thee in a moment. And why fearest thou to see the wicked spirit, who hast wholly crushed his head, and stripped him of all his power? Yet thy will be done! Thou shalt not see them.' With these words the angel ascended into Heaven with much light. The palm indeed shone with a great brightness, and for its greenness was like to a new branch, but its leaves gleamed like the morning star.

And while John was preaching in Ephesus, it came to pass that thunder pealed from Heaven, and a bright cloud caught him up, and set him down at Mary's doorstep. He knocked at the door and entered it, and reverently the virginal one greeted the Virgin. And looking upon him with joy, Mary was much astonished, not was able to withhold her tears of gladness; and she said: 'My son John, be mindful of the words of thy Master, whereby He commended me to thee as a mother, and thee to me as a son! Behold I am called by the Lord, and am about to pay the debt of man's estate; and I commit my body to thy zealous care. For I have heard that the Jews have conspired among themselves, saying: "Let us wait, men and brethren, until she who bore Jesus be dead, and straightway we shall seize her body and cast it into the fire!" Do thou therefore cause this palm branch to be carried before the bier, when you shall bear my body to the tomb!' And John said: 'Ah, would that all the apostles, my brothers, were here, that we might

prepare seemly obsequies for thee, and might pay thee fitting praise!' And as he said these words, all the apostles were plucked up by clouds from the places wherein they were preaching, and put down before Mary's door. And seeing themselves thus gathered together, they wondered, and said: 'For what cause has the Lord brought us together here?' John therefore went out to them, and told them of their Lady's coming departure from the body. And he added: 'See to it, brethren, that when she dies, no one weep for her, lest seeing it the people be troubled, and say: "Behold, these men preach the resurrection to others, yet they themselves fear death!"'

Dionysius, the disciple of Saint Paul, gives a like account in his *Book of the Names of God*. He says that the apostles came together at the death of the Virgin, and that he himself was there, and that each discoursed in praise of Christ and the Virgin.

When the Blessed Mary saw all the apostles gathered together, she blessed the Lord, and sat down among them, in the midst of lighted lamps and candles. At about the third hour of the night, Jesus came with the ranks of the angels, the troop of the patriarchs, the host of the martyrs, the army of the confessors, and the choir of the virgins; and all took their places before the throne of the Virgin, and their voices mounted in sweet and solemn song. And the aforesaid book, ascribed to John, tells us what obsequies were then celebrated. Jesus Himself began and said: 'Come, My chosen one, and I shall place thee upon My throne, for I have desired thy beauty!' And she answered: 'My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready!' Then all who had come with Jesus sweetly intoned: 'This is she whose bed was free of sin, and who shall have fruit in the refection of holy souls!' And she herself sang: 'All generations shall call me blessed, because he that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is his name!' Then Christ, singing more fairly than all, intoned: 'Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come: thou shalt be crowned!' And she responded: 'Behold I come, for in the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will, O my God; for my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!' And in this manner Mary's soul went forth out of her body, and flew upward in the arms of her Son; and she was spared all pain of the body, as she had been free from corruption from without. And Our Lord said to the apostles: 'Carry the body of the Virgin My mother to the valley of Josaphat, and lay it in the new tomb which ye will find there; and await Me for three days, until I come to you!' At once the Virgin was surrounded with red roses, signifying the troops of the martyrs, and with white lilies, signifying the hosts of the angels, confessors, and virgins. And the apostles called after her, saying: 'O Virgin most prudent, whither goest thou? Be mindful of us, O Lady!' Then the assemblage of those who had stayed behind in Heaven, in admiration at the choring of those who ascended, went swiftly forth to meet them; and seeing their King bearing in His own arms the soul of a woman, and her leaning upon Him, they began to exclaim, saying: 'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?' And those who accompanied her answered: 'Fair is she among the daughters of Jerusalem, as ye have seen her filled with charity and love.' And in this wise she was taken up into Heaven rejoicing, and placed upon a throne of glory at the right hand of her Son. And the apostles saw that her soul was of such whiteness as no tongue of mortal man could express.

When three virgins who were present divested her body to wash it, the body at once gave forth so dazzling a light that they could touch it indeed, but could not see it; and the light shone for as long as the virgins were washing the body. Then the apostles placed the remains upon a litter with all reverence. And John said to Peter: 'Thou shalt carry this palm before the bier, Peter, because the Lord has placed thee above us, and made thee shepherd and chief of His flock!' But Peter answered: 'It beseems thee rather to carry it, for thou wert chosen a virgin by the Lord; and it is fitting that the Virgin's palm be carried by a virgin! Thou hast been worthy to lean on the bosom of the Lord, and thence more of wisdom and grace have flowed into thee than to the others; therefore it seems good that thou, who hast received a greater gift of the Son, shouldst pay a greater honour to the Virgin. Do thou therefore carry this palm of light at the funeral rite of her holiness, who hast drunk the cup of light from the fountain of eternal light; I, for my part, shall carry the holy body upon the bier, and these our other brethren shall surround it, and offer songs of praise to God.' And Paul said to him: 'And I, who am the least among you, shall bear it with thee!' Then, as Peter and Paul raised the bier, Peter began to sing and say: *Exiit Israel de Ægypto, Alleluia!* And the other apostles sweetly took up the chant; and the Lord covered, the bier and the apostles with a cloud, so that they were not visible, and only their

voices were heard. And angels also were present with the apostles, singing with them and filling the whole earth with the dulcify of their music.

Aroused by this sweet sound and harmony, all the townsfolk came quickly forth, and asked most curiously what this might be. Then stood forth one who said: 'The disciples of Jesus are carrying out that Mary dead, and about her they sing this melody which ye hear!' Then all ran to arms, and exhorted one another, saying: 'Come, let us put all the disciples to death, and burn the body that bore the seducer!' And the chief of the priests was struck with wonder at the sight, and filled with rage, and he said: 'Behold the tabernacle of him who brought disturbance upon us and upon our people, what honour is now bestowed upon it!' Saying this, he laid his hand upon the litter, seeking to overturn it and cast it to the earth. In a trice his two hands withered, and held fast to the bed, so that he hung therefrom by the hands, and, being grievously tortured, wailed and lamented. At the same instant the rest of the folk were stricken blind by the angels who were in the clouds. Then the chief priest cried out, saying: 'Holy Peter, despise me not in this extremity, but pour forth prayers to the Lord for me, I entreat thee; for thou shouldst be mindful that I once stood by thee, and made excuse for thee when the portress accused thee!' Peter answered: 'We are busy with the obsequies of our Lady, and cannot attend to thy cure! Nevertheless, if thou believest in Our Lord Jesus Christ and in her who begat and bore Him, I have hope that thou wilt speedily obtain thy weal!' The chief priest replied: 'I believe that the Lord Jesus is truly the Son of God, and that this is His most holy mother!' At once his hands were loosed from the litter, but his arms were still shrivelled, and the stark pain did not abate. Then said Peter: 'Kiss the bier, and say: "I believe in Jesus Christ true God, Whom this woman bore in her womb, remaining a virgin after she brought Him forth." And when he had done this, he was at once made whole. And Peter said to him: 'Take the palm from the hand of our brother John, and hold it over the folk who have been stricken blind; and whosoever shall believe shall receive his sight, but he that shall not believe shall not see forever!'

The apostles then laid Mary in the tomb, and sat about her, as the Lord had commanded. On the third day Jesus, coming with a multitude of angels, greeted them saying: *Pax vobis!* And they responded: *Gloria tibi, Deus!* 'Glory to Thee, O God! Who alone doest great wonders!' And the Lord said to the apostles: 'What of grace and honour, think ye, shall I now confer on My mother?' They answered: 'To thy servants, O Lord, it seems right that as Thou, having vanquished death, reignest unto the ages, so Thou, Jesus, shouldst raise up the body of Thy mother, and place her at Thy right hand for all eternity!' He nodded his consent, and instantly Michael the Archangel appeared, and presented Mary's soul before the Lord. Then the Saviour spoke, saying: 'Arise, my dear one, My dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple, in order that, as thou hast not felt the plague of sin in carnal dealings, so thou mayst not suffer the corruption of the body in the grave!' And straightway Mary's soul went to her little body, and she came forth glorious from the tomb, and was assumed into the heavenly bride chamber, a multitude of angels mounting withal.

Thomas, however, was absent when these things took place, and on his return refused to believe. But suddenly the girdle where with her body had been begirt fell unopened into his hands, that so he might understand that she had been assumed entire.

All that has so far been said, however, is apocryphal, as Saint Jerome says in his letter to Paula and Eustochium: 'This little book must be deemed apocryphal, except as to certain things which are approved by the saints; and these are nine, namely that every sort of consolation was promised and given to the Virgin, the gathering of all the apostles, the death without pain, the preparation for burial in the valley of Josaphat, Christ's pious part in the obsequies and the assistance of the whole heavenly court, the persecution by the Jews, the flashing forth of miracles in every worthy cause, and the assumption in soul and body. Many other things are set down therein rather as symbol than as fact, as for instance that Thomas was absent and refused to believe when he arrived, and other like things, which manifestly are to be left aside rather than believed.

It is said that the Virgin's garments were left behind in the tomb for the consolation of the faithful; and the following miracle is related to have come about through a part of her vesture. Once when the duke of Normandy was besieging the city of Chartres, the bishop of the city took the Blessed Virgin's tunic, which was there preserved, and fixed it to a spear in the manner of a standard. Then in all safety he went out to meet the enemy, and all the people

followed him. And instantly the whole host of the enemy was stricken with frenzy and blindness, and stood quaking in heart and stupefied in spirit. When the townsfolk saw this, they added to the judgement of God, and began to slaughter their enemies pitilessly. This, however, much displeased the Blessed Mary, as was manifest when her tunic immediately vanished, and the hostile host recovered their sight.

We read in the *Revelations* of Saint Elizabeth that once when Elizabeth was rapt in spirit, she saw, in a very distant place, a sepulchre illumined with a great light, and the form of a woman within, and a host of angels standing round about; and after a little time the woman was seized from out of the sepulchre and raised aloft with the assistant host. And there came from Heaven to meet her a man admirable and glorious, bearing in his right hand the banner of the Cross, and with him uncounted thousands of angels, and they took her right speedily, and led her off to Heaven with great chanting. A short while later, Elizabeth asked that angel with whom she oftentimes spoke, about this vision; and the angel answered: 'In this vision it has been shown thee how our Lady was assumed into Heaven both in the flesh and in the spirit.' In the same *Revelations*, Elizabeth says that it was revealed to her that the Blessed Virgin was assumed in the body forty days after her passing. Once the Blessed Mary, speaking to her, said: 'After the Ascension of the Lord, I abode in the flesh for a whole year and as many days as there are between the Ascension and my assumption. All the apostles were present at my falling asleep, and reverently gave burial to my body. But on the fortieth day I rose from the dead.' And when Elizabeth asked whether she should make this known or keep it hidden, the Virgin replied: 'Neither is it to be manifested to the carnal and the unbelieving, nor is it to be concealed from the devout and the faithful.'

We may note that the glorious Virgin Mary was assumed and exalted wholly, honourably, joyously, and in an excelling manner.

She was assumed wholly, in body and soul, as the Church piously believes: and this many of the saints not only assert, but set themselves to prove with many reasons. Bernard's reason is that God has exalted the bodies of the saints as being of great price. So for instance He rendered the bodies of Peter and James so glorious and venerable, and exalted them with such wondrous honours, that He set aside a fitting place for their veneration, and thither the whole world flocks. If therefore Mary's body be said to be still on earth, and yet is not visited with devotion by the faithful, nor has a place of honour set aside for it, then forsooth Christ will seem to have treated the body of His mother with contempt, since He so honours the bodies of other saints upon earth. Jerome likewise says that Mary ascended into Heaven on August 15, and this he says of the bodily assumption of Mary; but the Church elects piously to doubt, rather than rashly to define. But Jerome proves that it is to be believed by the following reasons. If those are not wanting who say that for them that rose with Christ the everlasting resurrection is already complete, and if there are some who believe that John, the guardian of the Virgin, already rejoices with Christ in his glorified body, why is this not much more to be believed of the mother of the Saviour? For He Who said, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' and 'I am not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil the Law,' surely has honoured His mother above all, nor do we now doubt that He did this in Mary's regard. Augustine also not only affirms this, but proves it with three reasons. The first is the oneness of Christ's flesh and the Virgin's. For he says: 'The rotting and the worm are the common shame of man's estate. Since Jesus is stranger to this shame, Mary's nature is excepted, because Jesus is known to have taken it from her.' The second reason is the dignity of her body, whence he says: 'The throne of God, the bride chamber of the Lord, the tabernacle of Christ, is worthy to be where He is; it is meet that so precious a treasure be preserved in Heaven than on earth.' The third reason is the perfect integrity of her virginal flesh. Whence he says: 'Rejoice, O Mary, with inenarrable gladness of body and soul, in Christ thine own Son, with thine own Son, through thine own Son.' Nor should the ill of corruption pursue her, who suffered no corruption of her integrity in bearing so great a Son; that she may ever be incorrupt, upon whom so much grace was poured out, she may ever be wholly living, who begat the whole and perfect life of all, she may ever be with Him, who bore and nursed and fed Him, Mary the mother of God, the minister and handmaid of God! Whereof since I dare not think otherwise, I dare not say else. To this the words of the great versifier pertain:

Scandit ad aethera
virgo puerpera,
virgula Jesse
non sine corpore
sed sine tempore
tendit adesse.

The Blessed Virgin was assumed joyously. Of this the bishop and martyr Gerardus says in his homilies: 'With joy the heavens have taken up the Blessed Virgin this day, the Angels rejoicing, the Archangels jubilating, the Thrones exalting, the Dominations psalming, the Principalities making harmony, the Powers playing upon the harp, the Cherubim and Seraphim hymning and leading her to the supernal throne of the divine majesty.'

She was assumed with honour, because Jesus Himself, and all the host of the celestial army, went forth to meet her. Whence Jerome says: 'Who shall suffice to think, how gloriously the queen of the world today marched forth, with what stirring of devotion the multitude of the heavenly legions trooped out to her encounter, with what chants she was led to her throne, with what placid mien and peaceful face, with what divine embraces she was welcomed by her Son, and raised up above every creature!' And the same author says: 'We believe that today the heavenly militia came forth to greet the mother of God with festive celebration, shone round her with unbounded light, and led her even to the throne of God with lauds and spiritual canticles; and that the army of the heavenly Jerusalem then exulted with unspeakable joy, and celebrated her with ineffable courtesy and with gladsome welcome. And because this feast, which comes to us today in its yearly round, is made unto them without ceasing in Heaven, we believe also that the Saviour Himself went forth in all gladness to meet her, and with joy placed her beside Himself on the throne. Else He would not have fulfilled what He Himself commanded in the law: *Honour thy father and thy mother.*' Thus says Jerome.

She was assumed in an excelling manner; whence Jerome says: 'This is the day in which the inviolate mother and virgin went up even to the height of the throne, and being raised up in glory next to Christ, took her place in the royal seat.' And Gerardus, in his homilies, says: 'The most ineffable Trinity itself applauds her with unceasing dance, and since its grace flows wholly into her, makes all to wait upon her. The most splendid order of the apostles extols her with unspeakable lauds, the host of the martyrs pay every reverence to so great a queen, the innumerable army of the confessors sounds an unending chant to her, the shining array of the virgins sings a ceaseless chorus in her honour, unwilling Hell itself howls to her, and the wanton demons shriek her praise!'

Saint Augustine, in one of his sermons on the Assumption, speaks as follows: 'If the death of all the saints is precious, the death of Mary is beyond price. Therefore I deem that it must be confessed that Mary, by the bounty of Christ, was assumed into the joy of eternity, and was received more honourably than others, since she was honoured above all others by grace; and that she was not dragged down to the common lot of humanity, which is corruption, the worm, and the dust, since she had borne her Saviour and the Saviour of all. If the will of God had chosen to preserve unscathed the vesture of the children in the fiery furnace, why should He deny to His own mother what He had willed for the garments of strangers? By His sole mercy He willed to preserve Jonas incorrupt in the belly of the whale; and shall He not by grace preserve Mary incorrupt? Daniel was saved from the hunger of the ravening lions and shall Mary not be spared, who is already endowed with so many merits and honours? We well know that all these things could not be preserved in the order of nature, but we doubt not that in behalf of Mary's integrity, grace was more powerful than nature. Christ therefore made Mary to rejoice in her own Son, in soul and body nor allowed any blemish of corruption to come upon her who has suffered no impairment of her integrity in bringing forth so great a Son, that she whom such excelling grace had bathed might be ever without stain, and she who had begotten the flawless Life of all might have life in its fulness. If therefore, O Christ, I have spoken as I ought, do Thou and Thine approve; if not, do Thou and Thine, I pray, forgive me!'

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Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 8

Pope Gregory the Great, On the Proper use of Images

c. 600

St. Augustine and St. Jerome, who had been so critical of images and lavishly decorated churches, lived to see the fall of Rome in 410. It was an event whose significance was not lost on them: from the fifth century on, power in Europe fell more and more into the hands of barbarian kings. The Latin church, showered with imperial gifts during the fourth century, entered upon a period when her resources were stretched thin as a consequence of missionary expansion and barbarian invasion. From then on the building of churches and their maintenance became a difficult matter, which was often achieved only at the cost of great sacrifice and was understandably considered to be a labor worthy of saints. Under such conditions there was little occasion to reiterate St. Jerome's opinions about ecclesiastical luxury. The use of images and of large and splendidly decorated churches formed a distinctive part of Roman customs. Churchmen whose main goal was the preservation and propagation of these customs could hardly be expected to be critical. It is interesting to see how Pope Gregory¹ attacks the iconoclastic bishop of Marseille for his imprudent deviation from generally accepted habits. There were also other reasons for St. Gregory to defend the proper use of images in the church. Their usefulness for the instruction of illiterates had already been pointed out by Paulinus of Nola. They were believed to be even more important in the conversion of pagans. When St. Augustine of Canterbury, Pope Gregory's envoy to Britain, went to meet King Ethelbert, he carried with him a cross and an image of the Saviour.²

ST. GREGORY THE GREAT TO BISHOP SERENUS OF MARSEILLE

The beginning of your letter demonstrated to such a degree your priestly benevolence that we were highly pleased by your fraternal sentiments. But its end is so different from its beginning that we wonder whether the epistle proceeded from one mind or from two. Your doubts about the authenticity of the letter we sent you made you seem very rash. For if you had really paid attention to our fraternal admonishments, you would not only have had no doubts, but you would have known what your priestly dignity ought to compel you to do. The former abbot Cyriacus³ who carried our letters was of such deportment and learning as to make it difficult to suppose that he would have dared to do what you thought, or that he could possibly have been an imposter. Your neglect of wholesome admonition has made you guilty of this doubt, in addition to being guilty of a bad action. Word has since reached us that you, gripped by blind fury, have broken the images of the saints with the excuse that they should not be adored. And indeed we heartily applaud you for keeping them from being adored, but for breaking them we reproach you. Tell us, brother, have you ever heard of any other bishop anywhere who did the like? This, if nothing else, should have given you pause. Do you despise your brothers and think that you alone are holy and wise? To adore images is one thing; to teach with their help what should be adored is another. What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books. This is especially true of the pagans. And it particularly behooves you, who live among pagans, not to allow yourself to be carried away by just zeal and so give scandal to savage minds. Therefore you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church not in order to be adored but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant. It is not without reason that tradition permits the deeds of the saints to be depicted in holy places. If you had tempered your zeal with discretion, you could certainly have better achieved what you wanted, and rather than scatter the flock that was collected, you could have collected the flock that was scattered, and so have enhanced the glory of your name of pastor rather than acquired the guilty name of a disperser. But by following your own rash impulse you, as I hear, have so scandalized

your flock that the larger part of it is no longer in communion with you. How will you lead wandering sheep to the Lord's fold if you are not able to keep in it those you already have? Therefore we exhort you to lay aside false pride, and immediately to do all you can to call back, with paternal love, those disaffected souls that you know to be outside the unity of your communion.

For these dispersed children of the church must be called back, and those passages of Holy Scripture should be shown to them that prohibit the adoration of man's handiwork, for it is written, "Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."⁴ But then you should add that because you saw that those painted likenesses, made for the instruction of the ignorant, so that they might understand the stories and so learn what occurred, were being adored, you were so enraged that you ordered them to be broken. And you should also tell them: "If you wish to have images in church in order to gain from them the instruction for which they were formerly made, I freely permit them to be made and placed there." And explain that it was not the sight of the story there related in a painted text that angered you, but the worship which had been paid to them illicitly.

NOTES

1. Pope Gregory 1 (590-604).
2. St. Augustine of Canterbury landed in Kent in 597, where he was welcomed by King Ethelbert (560-616).
3. Pope Gregory's messenger.
4. 6 Luke 4:8

Pope Gregory the Great, "On the Proper Use of Images (Letter to Bishop Serenus of Marseille)" is reprinted from *Early Medieval Art, 300-1150: Sources and Documents*, edited by Caecilia Davis-Weyer, published by Prentice-Hall, 1971; reprinted by University of Toronto Press, 1986.