

St. Nicholas of Myra

Life, by Michael the Archimandrite

(Vita per Michaellem)

Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 1348

Translated by John Quinn and Bryson Sewell¹

2014

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Introduction

The fictional figure of Santa Claus is familiar to everyone. The legends about him are mostly modern, but some derive from the Greek orthodox saint, St. Nicholas of Myra, who is the original of “Santa Claus”.

It is unclear, unfortunately, whether St. Nicholas of Myra ever existed. The legends locate him in the 4th century A.D., when, as an old man, he attended the First Council of Nicaea. But the only historical evidence for this appears in later lists of attendees of the council, themselves of doubtful accuracy. During the Dark Ages, folk-stories about saints sprang up everywhere, and among them, some about a St. Nicholas of Myra. This material was gathered into a number of full-length *Lives*, and revised by Simon Metaphrastes in the 11th century to create the standard Greek *Life* of St Nicholas. The process of improvisation did not cease there. Still further stories were created during the Middle Ages, notably the story that, at Nicaea, St Nicholas slapped the heretic Arius. Extracts from some of this legendary material circulate every Christmas, in newspapers and on the internet, although rarely referenced to any source, and invariably derived from fifth-hand retellings.

When we consider the popularity of these legends, it is remarkable, therefore, that very little of the literary material about St Nicholas of Myra has ever been translated into English or become known directly to the public. The St Nicholas Center website has collected most of what little exists.

The *Life* of St Nicholas of Myra attributed in the manuscripts to Michael the Archimandrite dates from the first half of the 9th century, between 814 and 842 AD. It seems to be the earliest complete life of the saint, but is based on older material.

Various episodes of the saint’s life appear to have circulated independently, before being assembled here. This text contains the following four standard episodes:

- The story of the three daughters, chapters 10-18.
- The story of the sailors, chapters 34-36.
- The story of the corn-ship in port, chapters 37-39, which seems to be a later addition to the *Vita per Michaelem*.
- The miracle of Artemis, chapters 44-48.

The Greek text used is that published by G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos: Der Heilige Nikolaus in der Griechischen Kirche*, Leipzig: Teubner (1913) vol. 1, pp. 113-139. Anrich listed the following manuscripts of the text which he used to create his edition:

- *A* = Ambrosianus Graecus C 123 sup., 11-12th century.
- *B* = Bodleiano-Laudianus Graecus 69, 11-12th century.
- *L* = Lipsiensis II, 26, 10-11th century.
- *N* = Neapolitanus Graecus II C 26, 11th century.
- *P* = Parsinus Graecus 1463, 11th century.
- *p* = Parisinus Graecus 1458, 11th century.
- *V^a* = Vaticanus Graecus 2000, 11th century.
- *V^b* = Vaticanus Graecus 1641, 10-11th century.
- *V^c* = Vaticanus Graecus 1673, 11th century.
- *V^d* = Vaticanus Graecus 2073, 11th century.
- *V^f* = Vaticanus Graecus 824, 11th century.

- W = Vindobonensis Hist. Graecus 31, 12-13th century.
- W^2 = The same manuscript, but the changes made by the second scribe.

He also indicated the agreement of groups of manuscripts thus.

- S = the agreement of six manuscripts: $PNpWLB$; from chapter 25, $S = PNWLB$;
- T = the agreement of the three codices, V^bAV^a .

No complete translation of the *Vita per Michaelem* has ever been made into English. However a German and a Dutch translation do exist.

This translation was begun by John Quinn, Professor of classical languages at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. Unfortunately it remained unfinished when he suddenly and unexpectedly collapsed and died while out jogging on June 19, 2008. His unfinished translation (sections 1-11) is offered as a memorial to his work. Bryson Sewell translated sections 12-52 in 2014.

The Life, Spiritual Program, and Selected Account of the Miracles of our Father among the Saints, Nicholas the Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

1. Appearing to us as the brightest dawn of piety and the epitome of the wondrous stars, Nicholas, the holy hierarch of Christ, trains everyone to give praise to God. As we annually commemorate him, he illuminates the way ahead of us like a light-filled beam of the sun of justice, casting the radiance of his virtues like gold-gleaming rays. Moreover, he stirs lovers of the poor, and indeed those who love Christ and those who pardon humanity, to celebrate his memory with psalmody and with hymns and, by the example he set, with mercy for those in need and, through this, to purify themselves in anticipation of sojourning with us of the divine Word made flesh of the holy Virgin. For I think there is no believer throughout the world who has not found him a help in danger and a keen ally amid various troubles. For this reason every tongue that reverences him in Christ hastens, as a debtor, to honor him with song and is roused to have him as an advocate before God.

2. This Nicholas, the holy companion and heavenly helper of those who reverently call upon him, we also, ever fixing fast the anchors of hope, pray to have as presider over our whole life in the Lord. For we have much experience of his fervent and very rapid help in all sorts of trials. Therefore, with every joy we have received your command, Leo, you who are the most God-loving of mortals and a wooer of what is good, when you urge us to publish a clearer account of this great high priest and to present, for others unaware of him, a summary that is very profoundly and yet plainly wrought, that the counsel of the virtues of the saint may be useful to them. Until now the spiritual program of this illustrious pastor was unknown to many people, as you yourself suppose, although some had knowledge of his grace from the lone Acts dedicated to him. And so eagerly stationing him before us, unworthy as we now are, as blessed helmsman of the Word and traveling-companion of God, we begin his story.

3. Nicholas, the famous champion of those languishing in travails and prophetic high priest, by God's choice, of the metropolis Myra, was born in the city of Patara, one of cities then illustrious in the province of Lycia, although now it is said to scarcely preserve the appearance of a village. His parents were thoroughly noble and well-off, and surpassed many in their reverence toward Christ, on account of which they kept themselves free of worldly glory and were always eager to devote themselves to the works of justice. For the ever-pious understand that the person who touches tar is not free of its stain.

4. Since their wishes were in accord with God's, at the first coupling with each other there was conceived a fruit of righteousness: Nicholas, the lover of purity and of foresight. At the time of his conception a certain miracle occurred regarding the mother who bore him. Having become sterile from him, the all-blessed woman remained childless from then onwards for the whole span of her life, so that Nicholas, his parents' first and only begotten child, might be an image, in reverse, of the creation of the great John, the baptizer of the Savior according to his earthly existence. John, sent ahead into the world as the lamp of the light without beginning, rid his mother's womb of affliction; Nicholas, as he was born, provided his mother with it. After conceiving him in the flesh, she became sterile, but she became extraordinarily fertile in spirit. She was filled with virtues in Christ and was eager, along with her spouse, to serve God, for she had yoked herself to His commands.

5. When Nicholas, sanctified by God, was born from his mother's belly, he was nurtured, as befits an infant, at the maternal breast. Then the Lord who commonly works miracles amid the servants who recognize Him showed what sort of person, in regard to his spiritual program, the great Nicholas would be in the life that would follow. For, sucking milk from his mother's teat on the other days of the week according to the custom of infants, the blessed one took milk on Wednesdays and on Fridays once in the day at the appointed hour, letting himself nurse according to the priestly rule rather than the fullness of his stomach. And so he gave an early example of the dwelling-place of a blessed and propitious way of life. As Scripture says: "A righteous son is born for life".²

6. What could be clearer than this sign to demonstrate the sun that, by the flashings of the virtues of the hierarch's spiritual program, was going to illuminate justice? Truly "a just man flourishes like a palm tree and increases like a cedar on Lebanon".³ In fact, from his very budding, so to speak, all the way to his mature yield and indeed to his death, the renowned Nicholas appeared equal in his virtue and miracles, in proportion to the advance of his age both ripening the fruits of his virtues alongside each other and multiplying the proofs of his prophetic wonders. In this way also upon him the eloquent expression of the apostle Paul would reach its fullness: "whom God foreknew, he also foreordained that they become conformed to the image of His Son"⁴ — but foreknowledge is not the cause of someone being virtuous or worthless, but it is from each person's own mind that there is this or that cause — "and whom he foreordained, these he also called. And whom he called, these he also justified. And whom he justified, these he also glorified."⁵

7. Observe: the Lord who knows, since he is God, all things before their birth, foreknew the angelic perfection of the way of life of the Nicholas who was coming into existence — and that he, by his own confession, would become a protector of the commandments and, because of this, in addition to his archpriestly rank, would reasonably be honored as the salvation of many people. This was the person who, from his very swaddling clothes, the Lord set up to be distinguished in the eyes of those who were familiar with him, since he was nurtured in his mother's arms on a miraculous type of diet and was thought by those who observed well to be someone set apart for God.

8. Brought up in such an amazing way, the boy carefully conformed himself to the character of his parents. He avoided all political involvement and the corruption of the business world. He absolutely renounced meeting and associating with improper and arrogant young men. In his attention to right-mindedness, he utterly rid his heart of the desire for women, and his eyesight for theatrical spectacles. He loathed worldly amusements and the rashness of the rabble, on the grounds that they were corrupters of the virtue that makes one a friend of Christ. He did not at all shy from the sacred spaces; on the contrary, the universal church without ceasing refreshed him, tending him as though he were the chick of a turtledove. On her teachings he enlightened his mind daily, divinely elevating it to the pure and truest devotion. He preserved unquenched the lamp of his virginity, maintaining its fullness especially with the oil of charity.

9. After his parents had gone to the Lord and left him much property and an abundance of money and possessions, he reckoned that he had God as his father. Gazing chastely on Him

² Proverbs 11:19.

³ Ps. 92:13.

⁴ Romans 8:29.

⁵ Romans 8:30.

with the eye of his soul, he firmly begged the good God that he surrender his life and all his possessions, if that seemed good to Him. He said: "Teach me, Lord, to do Your will, because You are my God"⁶ as well as "Make known to me, Lord, the path upon which I am to journey, because to You I have lifted my soul from all triviality and worldly lowliness."⁷ He seemed to hear God, as it were, speaking clearly through the holy prophet David: "Even if wealth abounds, do not surrender your heart"⁸. And similarly the author of Proverbs plainly teaches: "Let almsgiving and acts of faith not abandon you, but fasten them around your neck and you will find grace"⁹ as well as "That person benefits his soul, who has pity on the destitute and those who happen to be poor in their livelihood."¹⁰ Nicholas did not cease to continually hand over his abundance — to store it up in the secure treasure-houses of heaven. So he was repaid in full by the impoverished.

10. There was a certain man among those who were recently famous and well-born, and he was a neighbor, his home being next to Nicholas'. Owing to the plotting and envy of Satan, who always has a grudge against those who prefer to live a life in accord with God, this man was squeezed by great poverty and lack of resources. He had gone from being well-off to extreme indigence. He had three daughters who were both shapely and very attractive to the eye, and he was willing to station them in a brothel so that he might thereby acquire the necessities of life for himself and his household. For no man among the lordly or powerful deigned to marry them lawfully, and even among the lower-classes and those who owned the least bit of something there was no one well-minded enough to do this. And so the man looked away from his salvation and, as it were, fainted at the thought of prevailing upon God with persistence and prayer. By this logic he came to assent to situating his daughters in the abyss of such dishonor.

11. But the Lord who loves humankind, who never wishes his own creation to become hostage to sin, sent him a holy angel — I mean the godlike Nicholas — both to rescue him, along with his whole household, from poverty and destruction, and to restore readily his previous prosperity. For when he learned of the situation, the man who was and who was proven to be the all-honored and truly faithful steward of the Lord pondered in his mind this advice of Solomon's that is full of help: "God loves a person who is a cheerful giver"¹¹ and "The one who pities a beggar is himself nurtured"¹². And again: "Provide good things before God and humankind"¹³. And that one from the same place that is apt in various ways: "Save those who are led away to death"¹⁴. By the expenditure and very generous donation of his own money, Nicholas became a most ready resource for their defense, and he saved them, though they were already being led away to a death of profligacy.

12. But behold the righteous man's understanding and the manner of his charity, and wonder greatly at how unassuming his virtue was. Or rather, emulate him most eagerly in order that you, too, may be shown mercy, having great need of the kindness of God, since "He who is

⁶ Ps. 143:10.

⁷ Ps. 143:8.

⁸ Ps. 62:11.

⁹ Proverbs 3:3.

¹⁰ Proverbs 11:17.

¹¹ Proverbs 22:8.

¹² Proverbs 22:9.

¹³ Proverbs 3:4.

¹⁴ Proverbs 24:11.

merciful will be shown mercy,”¹⁵ according to the Lord’s saying. The true model of purity and author of sympathy, Nicholas, wishing to use his own money to help the man, and to lead him with his daughters away from the shameful and dishonorable deed which had, in truth, already been decided for them – what does he do? He does not appear to him in person or speak about a gift or any other type of relief, thereby freeing him from shame while at the same time very carefully¹⁶ taking the trouble not to trumpet his own charity. After hurling a bag containing a large amount of gold into the house through the window at night, he quickly hastened home.

13. When the man who had been shown this¹⁷ mercy found the bag¹⁸ when it had become day, he was seized with joy and with ungovernable tears and gave thanks to God with amazement and astonishment, wondering in himself where so great a blessing had come to him from. The father of the girls, after receiving this bride-price in the belief it had been provided to them from God, and considering that the godsend was a sufficient contribution for a dowry, without delay contrived a marriage for his first daughter, having acquired for her an honorable life with joy and pleasure granted by the mediation of saint Nicholas.

14. When Nicholas, the man of God and benefactor who was generous in his charity, looked and saw that his beneficence had resulted in a good and saving deed, when the young woman’s marriage-rite had passed, he threw another bag of gold, equal to the previous one, through the same window later at night, and hastily went to his own home.

15. As daybreak was dawning, the father,¹⁹ after shaking off the torpor of sleep, unexpectedly found this gift of gold. He fixed his face on the ground, giving prayers of thanksgiving to God with groans (as is reasonable), unable to wholly open his mouth to him because he was struck dumb at the doubling of his kindness. With cries of prayers that were only in his heart and unuttered, he said “Show me, O merciful Master, your angel among men, who has recently been proven kind to be good to us. Show me who the person is, who is seasoning for us this rich feast of yours, and what type of person he is who is ministering the wealth of your immeasurable goodness to us who are lowly, through whom, beyond hope, you saved us from spiritual death, sin, and from our calamitous poverty. For behold, through your inexpressible help, I am giving my other daughter in lawful marriage and am freeing her from the impiety which we formerly practiced because of our unexpected desperation, glorifying your all-holy name and exalting your unending goodness toward us who are unworthy.”

16. Accordingly, after the father yoked his other daughter in the same way as his previous daughter and shared in the gifts of God through his servant Nicholas, he vigilantly and attentively stayed awake the following nights, confidently expecting that the person who had secretly furnished such money for her sisters would provide the dowry for his third daughter; for then he would get hold of him so long as, at any rate, he didn’t elude him when he entered

¹⁵ Matthew 5:7.

¹⁶ Or, “most piously.”

¹⁷ Supplied for clarity.

¹⁸ lit. “this.”

¹⁹ Added for clarity.

the house²⁰, by falling asleep. As the man was meditating on these matters and staying awake with great effort, the worshiper of the Trinity, and of one member of the Holy Trinity, Christ, our true God, the servant Nicholas appeared. And again, at his usual point late at night, in order escort²¹ the man's third daughter as he had done to the others,²² he threw in through the same window a gift of gold similar to the ones he had previously thrown in,²³ and withdrew quietly from the place.

17. But the father perceived his arrival because of the gift of gold that fell into the house, and, going quickly from the house, overtook the saint at a run. When he recognized who he was, he threw himself face-first at his feet with cries, and gave thanks to him over and over with many words and called him his and his three daughters' savior, after God, and said, "If our common Master, Christ, hadn't stirred your goodness, we would have long ago destroyed our own lives by a shameful and destructive livelihood.²⁴ But as it is, the Lord has saved us through you, most blessed one, and rescued us from the filth of immorality. And so we ought, like a debt, to give thanks to you all of our days, because you stretched out a hand of help to us and caused the poor to rise from the ground and raised the destitute up from a dunghill²⁵ through your generous and truly wonderful gift." When saint Nicholas heard these words, he raised him up from the ground and, binding him by an oath not to make any of these blessings, of which he had thought him worthy,²⁶ known to anyone for as long as he²⁷ should live, he let him go in peace.

18. O the compassion of the holy man toward the needy! O the beneficial and beautiful purpose of all-blessed Nicholas! The care of his good-natured soul revealed in visible form a model of our Savior Christ's compassion toward us. He showed a shepherd's consideration toward those who were sick in soul even before his visible episcopal profession.²⁸

19. Truly, "a tree of life grows from the fruit of righteousness,"²⁹ great Nicholas grew just from just parents, from a pious and god-loving root he blossomed as a tree of life for those in the world, nourishing, to so speak, and rekindling many people from the fruit of his own deeds. And indeed, for this reason God, too, exalted him exceedingly, and as befits what is good, placed him on a high-priestly lamp-stand as a brilliantly shining lamp for the salvation of many, in order that by running to him the oppressed might in many ways remove from themselves the cloud of despondency and obtain suitable help according to their need. And so it was necessary, it was necessary that one who had so prepared himself to be well-pleasing to God should be advanced to a pastoral dignity, in order that, by mixing his righteous action with authority, he would be able both to check and strike down those who wanted to do harm,

²⁰ Supplied for clarity.

²¹ i.e. figuratively, but making it possible for her to marry.

²² lit. "equally."

²³ lit. "similar to the ones thrown in."

²⁴ i.e. by prostituting his own daughters.

²⁵ cf. Psalm 113:7 and 1 Samuel 2:8.

²⁶ "Worthy" added for clarity.

²⁷ Probably referring to Nicholas.

²⁸ A difficult phrase, but the sense seems to be, "Even before he officially took on the role of a bishop, he already showed a shepherd's care..."

²⁹ Proverbs 11:30.

and to rescue, as quickly as possible, those who were wronged from people who were corrupting them and making hostile plots against them.

20. And so when this divine Nicholas, after steering his life with utter self-control and holiness, had risen above his passions and sin and, perfecting holiness, concluded his life in the fear of God, always subjecting his passion and desire to reason – inasmuch as a fast had nursed him from his swaddling clothes and had reared him into manhood, and a radiant treasure of virginity made him known to all as “a tree of life planted along the banks of the waters”³⁰ of the church, or rather, of its teachings, and made and truly established him as a fruitful olive-tree in the house of the glory of the Almighty, fattening those who were distressed by hardships and comforting those who were afflicted by the thirst and heat of poverty – by a righteous decree of God, he was entrusted with the rudder of the notable metropolis of Myra.

21. When the leader of the holy church of God of Myra at that time left behind his earthly pursuits and traveled to God³¹ and rightly received the rewards of his sweat, a divine fervor arose among the bishops of the surrounding cities, as well as among the leading people of the clergy of that church, to seek a man worthy of God who should become the successor to the see of the man who had died, and who should not be second to him in holiness or lacking in foresight in everything.

22. One of these people, moved by God, advised them (as was right) to pray about the task that was set before them all. The Lord, who brings to pass the will of those who fear him and hears their prayer, revealed to one of these men the manner of the appointment of the person who was going to take in hand the reins of the office of bishop in a manner pleasing to Himself,³² saying to him, “Go to the house of God at night and stand at the entrance, and whoever comes to enter the church quietly before anyone else, take this man and appoint him to the office of bishop. His name is Nicholas.”

23. Accordingly, after the person who heard this God-sent voice communicated the message³³ to the bishops who were around him and to the clerics who were in prayer with them, who remained farther within the church and were still industriously persisting in their prayers to God, he went out to the place which had been revealed to him. And during the early hours of dawn, great Nicholas was sent by God, and since he alone wanted to enter into the Church, the bishop took hold of him and said, “How are you called, child?” And with an unaffected and mild voice, he responded, “Nicholas, a sinner, a servant of your Holiness, O master.” When the bishop heard this, he was deeply moved by the humility of the righteous man and he said to him, “Come with me, child, because I have something to show you.” He then led him to his fellow bishops with whom he had prayed. When they saw the holy man, they sent up glory to almighty God and led him out to the middle of the temple, showing to the crowds who had come with them the shepherd who had been sent to them by God. They said, “This,

³⁰ Psalm 1:3.

³¹ i.e. died.

³² God.

³³ “The message” added for clarity.

brothers and children, is the man the Lord made known beforehand and foreordained to now be the bishop over all of us and your most holy universal³⁴ church of Christ.”

24. When the inhabitants of the Metropolis of Myra who had gathered together heard this voice and trusted what their most god-loving bishops said, they joyfully received their testimony about the holy man, and they made the aptly named³⁵ Nicholas mount the throne of the bishop’s office.

25. And he became the best shepherd of Christ’s rational creatures, he who was approved by Him and designated by name to those most holy servants who rightly and under God’s guidance sought for the worthy expounder of the Spirit to come into their midst. And he ministered the gospel of grace in perfect orthodoxy, apostolically teaching them to worship God the Father and his only-born Word and Son, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, and the Spirit, equal in power to him,³⁶ and forming an essential part of the consubstantial and divine Trinity, one God known in three persons, co-eternal and undivided, whose three specific characters are not, because of the oneness of their nature, coalesced into one person, as foolish Sabellius would have it, nor is their divine and uncreated perfect divinity³⁷ divided into three alien and unrelated essences³⁸ because of their triple personhood, as accursed Arius would have it.

26. Such were his thoughts, and he taught the chosen people of the Lord to cling to these³⁹ doctrines in matters of theology, turning away the unholy, foolish talk of those most godless followers of Arius and Sabellius, who were at that time flooding the world like a ship, and were sending to the depth of destruction those who were unstable. And in matters concerning the arrangement⁴⁰ of the one divine Word of the Holy Trinity and our Lord Jesus Christ, even though an opposing teaching had not been openly stirred up at that time, trying to corrupt the real distinction of the two natures that were joined in Christ, nonetheless Nicholas,⁴¹ who was trained to remain in the boundaries of piety, and being a holy abode of the Spirit, obeyed the blessed Apostle when he wrote the following somewhere to his own disciple Timothy. “If I am delayed,” he says, “[I am writing these things] in order that you may know how it is necessary to live in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and support of the truth. And confessedly, the mystery of godliness is great. God was revealed in flesh, was vindicated⁴² by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed in the world, was taken up in glory.”⁴³

³⁴ Or, “catholic,” καθολική.

³⁵ His name was understood to mean “victory of the people,” from νίκη (nikē) “victory,” and λαός, (laos) “people;” probably a folk etymology).

³⁶ Probably referring to Jesus as the Word.

³⁷ τελεταρχία. The definitions contained in the lexica do not fit the sense required in this passage. The translation “perfect divinity” is my best suggestion based on the sense of the passage, since Arius attacks the *divinity* of Jesus as inferior to that of the Father as a member of the Trinity.

³⁸ οὐσία.

³⁹ lit. “the.”

⁴⁰ οἰκονομία.

⁴¹ Added for clarity.

⁴² Or, “proved to be right.”

⁴³ 1 Timothy 3:15-16.

27. And so great Nicholas, correctly and sincerely holding fast to this great and truly mysterious mystery of piety, knew and preached the one who had been revealed in flesh and seen by angles in a servant's form,⁴⁴ this is to say, the Son and Word of the Father who was before all eternity, in two perfect natures,⁴⁵ in accordance with each essence⁴⁶ freely willing and operating in union, but not separately, in order that the distinctive features of his two natures may be known and above censure, and in order that they may possess inseparability in the one person of Christ, in respect of which, after working both divine and human works, he was believed to be God and human by all his rational and godly-minded creation.

28. The holy-minded and true teacher,⁴⁷ Nicholas, while he instructed (if one must speak briefly) those whom he shepherded to cultivate this wholesome and blameless faith, was moved by a divine fervor and was illuminated in his soul by the Holy Spirit that dwelt within him, and arose with great bravery for the utter destruction of the demons. For when he saw the abominations of the deception caused by idols, and their altars still in existence in the metropolis of Myra, and the demons, who rejoice in others' misfortunes, feasting on these, in that the more simple were deceived through certain observances of omens, he was stirred against this ungodliness. And after rekindling himself in his unwavering confidence in God, and, in place of visible weapons, arming himself with his faith in Christ,⁴⁸ he went about all the land of the metropolis that was under his care, razing and overturning the temples of these idols and thereby driving away the demons from that place and rendering their deception and wrongdoing ineffectual.

29. And so when the saint had waged open war against the spirits of evil and was eager to extinguish their deceitful operations once and for all, there came to him a very divine inspiration from God and a purpose that required the greatest bravery: to overthrow the temple of Artemis, which was still left, like the other ones. For this temple excelled all other buildings in height and ornamentation and in the visitations of demons. For this reason, it provided an even greater cause of godlessness for those who were being led astray. And for this reason, he – as it was a cause of deception for the city in that area – hastened on with all the zeal of his soul and with the grace of Christ inside him to remove it from their midst and to finally make this most harmful worship of demons disappear from his own district. He went to this most foul building and overthrew not only its upper parts to the ground, but also dug up the very foundations and rendered the demons who dwelled there exiles. And they were pursued by the unseen, efficacious power of the Master of the universe through the mediation of our most holy father Nicholas, and confessed that they were being harmed by him and were being driven from their own places, pursued by God.

30. And, in brief, let the matters pertaining to the faith of this famous and God-advanced high-priest stand as I have said. But what can we say about his care and protection toward the oppressed and destitute, or of his boldness and severity toward those who were eager to kill

⁴⁴ Perhaps a reference to the chorus of angels who announce the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-21)

⁴⁵ φύσις.

⁴⁶ οὐσία.

⁴⁷ τελετάρχης, which normally means an “initiator” of mysteries.

⁴⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

the innocent in civil lawsuits?⁴⁹ For he became a readily available corn-dealer to all of his fatherland that was under his shepherding care and abundantly provided to those who were in dire straits according to their needs, showing himself to be a father to orphans and a champion to widows and a courageous comforter to the poor among the people. And indeed, because of this everyone revered him like one of the apostles and in their troubles eagerly called to him as savior. He so relentlessly convicted those who wanted to harm the innocent, that the tyrants didn't endure the assault of his just and reasonable rebuke, but, trembling with fear, they immediately bowed to his will and, like suppliants, propitiated his holiness.

31. And you, at least, who have read with inspired joy about the deed which has been ascribed to him, know how he laid down his own soul, imitating his own master, for three men who had received a most unjust sentence from the governor of the province, Eustathius. When they were about to be put to death because of a gift of gold,⁵⁰ he suddenly appeared and rescued them from death, shaking the sword to the ground and releasing them from their deadly bonds. After subjecting the juror who had been blinded by gold to fitting remarks of outrage and, as it were, correcting him from his crime, as being sympathetic, he freed them. The righteous man not only provided for those who were near him who were subjected to predatory accusers and who were godlessly and insolently mistreated by those in power, but also to those far away who were unjustly punished and were going to be given over to death, appearing to the judges in dreams and threatening them with utter horrors. He thus freed them from the calamities that were all but upon them.⁵¹

32. And this will not be reasonably accounted as unbelievable by the devout and those who have been trained in the higher philosophy. For since our holy father Nicholas practiced an angelic life from boyhood and conspicuously came to mature manhood and to the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ and was, from the beginning, completely anointed in the oil of beneficence, he received the grace from God to have compassion toward the oppressed, not only with his physical and visible presence toward those who lived with him, but also toward those who were far from him and who invoked his aid with faith.

33. And this came to be known by all from his many other miracle workings, both those which happened long ago and which are still operative up to the present, but especially in the matter of his most swift aid to the three very famous commanders when he was summoned by them for help with an undoubting and very fervid faith, and appeared to the just emperor Constantine and to the governor of the city, Ablabius, as though in a dream. Through a threat and the exhibition of his own name he corrected the one who had taken mockery upon himself and freed him from innocent blood, while the other, who had willingly brought harm upon himself because he accepted a bribe, he shocked and terrified by the evils that would come upon him unless he should lay deceit aside from his own soul and immediately free the followers of Nepotian from the death-bringing vote.

⁴⁹ i.e. by destroying them financially on false charges. Or, "in matters of money," χρηματικῶς.

⁵⁰ i.e. by a bribe.

⁵¹ lit. "calamities in their hands."

34. When the fame of his holiness and care had been spread abroad to almost all the world and was being borne about on everyone's tongue⁵² because of these virtuous acts and good deeds and those like them, as is reasonable, some sailors, who were once sailing across the sea, when a mighty swell and storm suddenly arose against them by the plotting of a very fierce wind, saw that they were going to be altogether and completely subjected to a most inevitable danger of death. At length they remembered saint Nicholas and called to him by name for aid. Our holy father, who is quick to hear those who call to him in misfortunes with contrition, appeared to them by God's order in the very hour of their distress and said to them, "Behold, you have called me, and I am here to help you." And so, being seen by the sailors as strengthening them and emboldening them and assisting them and enduring with them at every part of the boat, that is, with the ropes and poles, he thus, with God's help, saved them from the danger and, after guarding them closely, restored them to a calm anchorage.

35. After the sailors disembarked from the ship, they inquired with desire and faith after the person who saved them from a most miserable death, and wished to pay him honor with their gratitude. After learning that he was in the church, they went there to see him, and after seeing that the holy teacher of Christ was unadorned⁵³ and that he had entered like one of the many clergy, they who had not seen this man before recognized him without any intermediary, recognizing the appearance of the saint by his manifestation and help on their ship. After slowly approaching him, they fell at his feet, giving him thank-offerings and reporting to him how he had appeared to them at their first call when they were sailing and how by his assistance he had released them from that fearful and harmful trouble.

36. But the holy minister of Christ, after seeing the men and, by the clear-sighted operation of his most-pure soul, perceived what they did in private⁵⁴ and he said, "Know yourselves, children, I beg you, and steer⁵⁵ your hearts toward being well-pleasing to the good and compassionate Master and Savior of our souls. For your companion, Injustice, and the utter avarice of your character, which abound together with the foul and death-bringing sexual immorality, rightly elicit in your life the corrective discipline of benevolent⁵⁶ God, as diseases elicit physicians. Accordingly, 'do not do evil things,' as the scripture says, 'and evil will not overcome you.'⁵⁷ Rather, learn how to live well, and wear the sanctification of the body as an indispensable medicine leading to salvation, "without which no one will see God,"⁵⁸ just as the divine apostle Paul teaches, and in the future may you have the Lord as your helper in the trials that befall you. For the virtue of the soul, gracefully offered to him like a fruit, in turn draws out his help and foresight."

So much for these matters.

⁵² lit. "in the mouths."

⁵³ i.e. unpretentious.

⁵⁴ i.e. their private lives, their private worship.

⁵⁵ A play on the men's sea-fairing livelihood.

⁵⁶ Or, "God, who loves humanity."

⁵⁷ Sirach 7:1.

⁵⁸ Hebrews 12:14.

[Chapters 37-39 are only found in manuscripts pTV^{cd}; in V^d they are placed between chapters 47 and 48; they are missing in PNWLBV^f]

37. I must, moreover, tell of another miracle he performed which is worthy of wonder. Once, when grain was lacking in the land of the Lycians,⁵⁹ people steered Alexandrian transport ships filled with grain to the harbor of Andriake.⁶⁰ The people of the trading-station informed Nicholas about them, and the holy man came from the city of Myra to Andriake and ordered the captains of the ships to unload a little from each ship, “in order,” he said, “that we may not perish from the famine.” When the captains⁶¹ said that the grain was the state-property of the ruling city and that “we are unable to do this,” the saint replied and said to them, “From each ship remove a hundred measures⁶² from your cargo, and I will ensure your indemnity⁶³ to the treasury official of Constantinople.”

38. So they eagerly did this and gave the grain, and when a favorable wind was blowing opportunely for them, they came to Byzantium. They went to measure the grain and found their cargo in the same state as when they received it from Alexandria. They wondered at this and began to describe the wonderful miracles of saint Nicholas to the treasury officials. And everyone praised God, who always gives grace to those who love him.

39. When the saint received the grain and measured it, he distributed it to everyone as they praised God, who has power over all things, and it came about that the grain sufficed for those who received it from him for a period of two years, as a blessing. They kept some of it for sowing and scattered it in their fields, and thus enjoyed God’s kindnesses through the entreaties of his holy servant Nicholas.

40. As one of his friends and one of the most devout monks described it to me, an account has come down from the beginning, which has its origin in tradition, that saint Nicholas was as follows: venerable and angelic in appearance, and exuding sweet smells full of sanctification, so that just at the sight of him he improved those who were with him and pushed and changed them to a better state which bordered on salvation. And if some heretic ever encountered him as he was passing by, he immediately sent away the disease of his impiety that had been blended with him over a long period of time, and sincerely accepted the faith of the righteous man.

41. And so, after living in this manner in the metropolis of Myra and after anointing everyone with his sweetest smelling and all-holy life and episcopate, he left his mortal life and went to his eternal rest, rejoicing with choruses of angels and exulting together with companies of patriarchs and ceaselessly interceding on behalf of those who call upon him in faith with gladness, especially those who are in the midst of calamities and afflicted by the confiscations of property and are being tried.⁶⁴ His body, honored and anointed with the

⁵⁹ i.e. a south-western region in modern Turkey in which the city of Myra was located.

⁶⁰ The main harbor in Lycia.

⁶¹ Added for clarity.

⁶² lit. “modia,” a dry measure roughly equivalent to 8.75 liters.

⁶³ i.e. I will make sure you suffer no financial loss.

⁶⁴ i.e. unjustly prosecuted in court.

sweet fragrance of his virtues, buried in the church of that district, straightaway gushed forth a sweet-smelling perfume, turning away all adverse and destructive power, but providing a saving remedy that wards off evil for the glory of the one who glorified him, Christ, our true God.

42. From that time up to our own time, the grace of the miracles of our holy father among the saints and champion of the world, Nicholas, is manifestly operative according to the will of God, and this fountain of his acts of kindness toward those who are in need is ever-flowing. For there is no one, there is no one among the sons of man who have been conspicuous in piety and have fallen into any unexpected situations and have taken refuge in him through entreaty, who has not had experience of his active aid or the completely true fulfillment of conspicuous miracles and astounding manifestations and predictions. If someone should want to pass on these matters into a written account, he will not be able to give an accurate account of these matters because one person tells of one and another person tells of another more secret miracle to his friends and neighbors, under the inspiration of the Spirit.

43. For this reason, after we add to what has already been said one of the miracles which occurred after his death, we will put an end to the labors undertaken by us about him with faith.

44. This father of ours among the saints and all-praiseworthy high-priest⁶⁵ of Christ, Nicholas, after he made his journey to God⁶⁶ and magnificently exhibited the remarkable activities of his miracles to those who were worthy even after his death, roused the nations of the pious to come together in his honor and reverence. Among these people were some people who had come from foreign and distant lands who were drawn by their longing for the saint and whose minds, as it were, were enlightened by his grace. They were preparing a tomb in order to obtain his sweet scent and his healing power.

45. When a wicked and mischievous demon, who had formerly dwelt in the temple of Artemis, but who had been chased out of it together with his companions by our holy and wonder-working father Nicholas, perceived that these people were about to make their journey to the Metropolis of Myra, it changed its form into a woman and went up to the men. Upon producing a vessel filled with oil – it was not oil, although it appeared to be oil, but was full of hostile and destructive power – the demon⁶⁷ gave it to them and said, “I entreat you, men, take this too, which I am offering to the saint, and forgive my weakness, which does not permit me to go with you there. But you yourselves, when you get to the much beloved and revered place, pour this upon the lamps that are burning at the precinct in my place.” For since the demons which had been banished by him from the altar of Artemis tried to attack him during the entire course of the saint’s life, but were not able to repay him with any evil, in the time after these events, since they were full of the remembrance of their injuries, they contrived to display their own malice against the all-glorious precinct and his remains which it contained, through those who were going to the saint.

⁶⁶ i.e. died.

⁶⁷ Added for clarity.

46. The men took the vessel from the spirit of deception and sailed the path of the sea that leads to Myra. When they had completed the first day's interval, during the following night Nicholas, who is everywhere swiftly found to be a most fervent defender by those who are being attacked,⁶⁸ appeared to one of the men who had the diabolical vessel and said to him, "Rise at dawn, and throw the foreign vessel you are carrying with you into the depths of the sea." And so when the man arose early, he immediately acted in accordance with the command of the one who had spoken to him in his sleep, and threw the vessel into the sea.

47. When he had done this, a flame immediately began to be stirred up high into the air, and smoke that caused darkness and foul smelling noxious odors were spreading about. When the flow had split open and was bursting forth and was making boiling noises and was sending forth drops that leapt like sparks, the event was terrifying for the sailors. For the whole ship was being violently driven by the swell, and they, driven out of their senses by the invisible blasts of wind and by the fear of what they saw, gave no heed to the rudders and cables that steered the ship. In this way, the means of their safety came into difficulty on every front.

48. But the aid of the one who appeared to them and who ordered them to give that satanic snare to the depth of the sea underwater, quickly took hold of them and rescued them from their most miserable danger and caused them to perceive the demon's scheme. When the ship had gone a little ways away from that place and when the men had been released from their fear and when, as it were, a light of delight was shining in their souls, they recognized that the vessel they had thrown into the sea was full of hostile energy and was treacherously sent against the temple of the saint. For this reason, they sent up thanksgiving to God and to Nicholas for his vindication and for their safety, to the one, as the maker and protector of his own creation, and to the other as the clear mediator of God's blessings and as the one who had himself, contrary to all expectation, brought about their safety.

49. These few stories of the many, as it were, have been commemorated to you, concerning the life and the astounding miracles of our divine father and the universal champion of those who are trained in trials, great Nicholas. From him we have learned that those who have accepted his name on account of him and have shared in his angelic life have been thought worthy of much grace to have become workers of miracles, as emulating his virtue to the full extent of their abilities. And what is more, those who set up his most holy likeness⁶⁹ and greet it, who have it as a constant companion in their houses as though it were the beloved man himself, are conspicuously rescued by his mediations with God from the various nooses and traps of a disturbed life full of tribulation, and they are thought worthy of running the course of a quiet and painless life.

50. But father, initiator into the mysteries, the perfumed residence of the Holy Spirit, the most pure house of real wisdom, the abode of the uncreated Trinity which accomplishes all things, the clear representation of the angels, the aptly named victory of his chosen people, the stoutest destroyer of idols, the most active banisher of demons, the highly extolled teacher of

⁶⁸ Or, "tempted."

⁶⁹ i.e. a monument or image.

temperance, the generous manager of Christ's manifold gifts, the severest chastiser of transgressors, the swiftest liberator of the falsely accused, the inexhaustible sea of astounding miracles, the famous teacher of self-control and virginity, the most loud-voiced, sacred herald of piety, the harmonious and proportional standard of the high-priesthood, the honey-flowing orator of the inspired preaching, the brightest torch of Christ's church, the comfort of the oppressed, furnished by God, 51. be also with us now, we who call on you with yearning and celebrate this festival of yours all around the world. Sanctify us by your angelic presence that is hidden in mystery. May we always have you as our liberator from dangers, we who unworthily offer these paltry things⁷⁰ to you and not blooming, fragrant bouquets of words, and who have piously compelled ourselves to this – we need your help, your intercession, your provision, your management, your beneficial presence. Through these, deliver us who are undergoing trials⁷¹ from our present griefs, set us free from our temptations, save us from our afflictions. Extinguish the flame of the evils that rise against us. By your bedewed intercession, scatter the schemes of those who impiously make false claims against us, destroy the dwelling of those who despise us most unreasonably,

52. in order that we, being thus always guarded by your shelter and care, may be guarded above the calamities that befall [us] and apart from all false accusation. For Christ set you up as a most sufficient helper in the troubles of our life, who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is worshiped by us in accordance with the orthodox faith. For glory and honor and worship befit him together with his Father, who has no beginning, and the all-powerful Spirit who is consubstantial with him, from the beginning of the creation of the universe and now and always and into the endless ages of ages. Amen.

⁷⁰ i.e. the above praises and appellations.

⁷¹ Or, "those being tempted."