

TO THE MOST REVEREND NUN XENIA

ON THE PASSIONS AND THE VIRTUES, AND WHAT GIVES RISE TO THE ACTIVITY OF THE INTELLECT

Those who truly desire to live in solitude need to hold themselves back not only from any commerce with the multitude, but also from any commerce with those who lead a life similar to their own. For such commerce interrupts the continuity of the agreeable relationship which we have with God, and it breaks the unity of the intellect, that unity which makes a true monk, the interior monk: it pulls God and the monk apart, and sometimes indeed it makes a tear. That is why a Father, questioned about the reasons he retreated from other people, replied: 'I cannot be with God when also interacting with men.'¹ Another, who explains this reaction while speaking from experience, not only sets aside not only commerce with people, but even the possibility of seeing them, to the same extent that seeing them can destroy the equilibrium and the calm of thought of those who live the life of stillness. And if one were to pursue this to its conclusion, even the memory of relationships, and anticipation of visits and meetings which they implicate, will not allow the thoughts of the soul any rest.

As for one who entrusts his words to writing only, he surrounds his intellect with a still heavier set of cares. If he is part of a group of those who have progressed, and so as to give power to their soul have acquired the love of God, he who writes has in him an active love, but he does not have it directly and purely. And if he belongs to a group of those who have fallen back into numerous illnesses and passions of the soul, as I myself have in truth, and who have continually to call out to God: 'Heal me, because I have sinned' (Ps. 41 : 5. LXX), it is not reasonable that such a man lets prayer fall aside before being cured, and put himself voluntarily to doing something else. Additionally, by means of writing, he addresses himself to men who are not there with him, and he transmits to a great number of men and times, sometimes even to those he does not intend to, the message of his letters naturally made to remain in existence even after the death of the one who wrote them. That is why many among the Fathers arrives at the summit of the life of stillness, and were not attached to writing, even though they were capable of exposing a great many things, and very useful knowledge.

As for me, one in every way denuded of their rigour, I have this habit of writing, but under the pressure of necessity. Now meanwhile those who have seen with an evil eye any of my

letters and who look through them for material to work with to do me harm, they make me yet more reserved. They, according to the great Dionysios,² have a liking for strange themes and letters, looking for hitherto unknown syllables and words, which do not penetrate into the intellect of their soul. Now it is in truth unreasonable and an error, and it is not at all the property of those who want to understand the divine, to attach themselves, not to the power of the thing itself, but to the words. But I bear their reproaches in all justice, when I know, that I have not written contrary to the Fathers, for tradition, through the grace of Christ, is what I have carefully guarded in my letters; no, rather because I know that I have written on things of which I was not worthy, like another Uzzah who had tried to set upright with mere words the overturned chariot of truth (2 Sam. 6 : 6-7). And for this my punishment has not been the anger against me, but rather the appropriate correction for things that I had written badly. That is why those who attacked me have not been able to hurt me. And that was without doubt bound up with my unworthiness. For I was not worthy, nor capable, it seems, to suffer for the truth, and to share in any way in the joys and pains of the saints. For instance, our Father Chrysostom, he who was bound up in the heavens to the Church of the first born (cf. Hebr. 12 : 23), even when he was still clothed in a body, so that he could demonstrate with his writing an assured piety in words of clarity and honeylike sweetness, was it not such a great man, was thrown out of the Church and condemned to exile, on the charge of having written about and professed the opinions of Origen? And Peter, the chorus leader of the most excellent of the disciples of the Lord, says that ignorant people misconstrued, for their own perdition, what was difficult to understand in the words of the great Paul (cf. 2 Pet. 3 : 16). [So the saints have been misunderstood and suffered for it.]

Because of the aggression of those who have attacked me, even though they have all been made to retreat, I would have completely renounced all writing, if you had not been there meanwhile, o holy elder, unceasing in your prayer and your requests in your letters and your messages, until the point where you persuaded me to go back to work and to send you messages of encouragement, though you have no real need to be exhorted like that. For you possess, through the grace of Christ, with the watchfulness of age, the venerable intellect and the law of the

¹ *Apophthegmata*, alphabetical collection, Arsenios 13; E.T., Sister Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (2nd ed., London/Oxford, 1981), p. 11.

² St Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, iv, 11; P.G. iii, 708C; E.T., trans. C. Luibheid, Pseudo-Dionysus, *Paulist Press* (New Jersey: 1987), p. 80.

holy commandments, which have given you a life and experience of many years in the course of which you have divided your time between obedience and the life of stillness, and by means of this you have made the tablets of the soul smooth ready to receive and conserve the divine characters. That is the stronghold of the soul, that strong point invested by desire for spiritual education: it is never completely satisfied. That is why wisdom says of itself: 'Those who feed from me will still be hungry' (Eccl. 24 : 21). And the Lord, who put this desire in the soul, says on the subject of Mary, who chose the better part, that it would never be taken from her (cf. Luke 10 : 42). Still you might need my encouraging words, for the daughters of the Emperor, who have led their lives under your direction; and also particularly for the intellect with which you desire, on behalf of your people, to be the spouse of Him who grants incorruptibility. It is true that you imitate Him. Just as He has taken on our form for us, so you have taken on the appearance of those novices who you direct and who need to be taught. So I also, even though it is not easy for me to make instruction, and such instructions as this, do so out of obedience and following the command to give to those who ask (cf. Matt. 5 : 42), which is why I have taken it on myself to develop my thoughts, so that I can repay the debt of the love of Christ.

Know then, holy elder, or better let the young novices called to lead the life following God around you know: there is a natural death of the immortal soul. It is thus that the beloved Theologian says: 'There is a sin which leads to death, and there is a sin which does not lead to death' (1 John 5 : 16-7). Here he assuredly means the death of the soul. The great Paul says likewise: 'The sadness of following the world arouses death' (2 Cor. 7 : 10); and it is assuredly also the death of the soul. And again: 'Awake, you who sleep, get up from among the dead, and Christ will surround you with light' (Eph. 5 : 14). From among which dead is he ordered to arise? Assuredly from among those who are dead under the envy of the flesh, that covetousness which makes war on the soul (cf. 1 Peter 2 : 11). That is why the Lord also calls them dead who live in this world of vanity.

When the disciple who asked him, he did not allow him to go and bury his own father. But he ordered him to follow, and leave the dead to bury their dead (cf. Matt. 8 : 22). The Lord has here called dead those living ones who are assuredly dead in their soul. For just as the separation of the soul from the body is the death of the body, so the separation of God and the soul is the death of the soul. This death, that of the soul, is death properly speaking. It is this death which God means with the commandment given in Paradise, when he says to Adam: 'On the day in which you eat of the fruit of the tree which I have forbidden you to eat from, you will die' (Gen. 2 : 17). It was then that the soul of Adam, separated from God, was put to death through the transgression. From that moment on he lived in his body for nine hundred and thirty years (cf. Gen. 2 : 17). Now death supervened on the soul through the transgression, not only corrupting the soul itself and rendering man cursed, but also burdening the body with labours and passions,

rendering it corruptible and finally releasing it to death. Then in fact after the death of the interior man through transgression, the earthly Adam heard this: 'The earth will be cursed by your works. It will give you thorns and brambles. You will eat your bread in the sweat of your brow, until the point where you return to the earth from which you were taken. For you are earth, and you will return to the earth' (Gen. 3 : 17-9).

In the same way if on the course of this new birth in the future, in the resurrection of the righteous, the bodies of the wicked and the sinners are raised, it is in order for them to be sent to the second death (cf. Rev. 20 : 14), to eternal punishment, to the worm which never sleeps (cf. Mark 9 : 44), to the gnashing of teeth (cf. Matt. 8 : 12), to outer and tangible darkness (cf. Matt. 8 : 12), to the obscure and inextinguishable fires of Gehenna (cf. Matt. 5 : 22), according to the prophet who says: 'The wicked and the sinners will be burnt, and there will be no one to extinguish them' (Jer. 4 : 4). For such is the second death, as John has taught us in his Apocalypse. But listen also to the great Paul who says: 'If through the spirit you put to death the works of the body, you will live' (Rom. 8 : 13). He speaks here of the life and the death of the age to come: of the life which is the joy of the eternal Kingdom, and of the death which is perpetual damnation. And that is true death: that the soul should be separated from divine grace and will be united to sin. This is the truly terrible death which they should flee who have intellect. This is also the death which, more than the punishment of Gehenna, frightens those who look for the good.

This death, we also, must escape from with all our force. Reject all, repulse all, renounce all, our relations, our actions, our wishes, everything which drags down, separates from God and arouses such a death. For he who is frightened and who keeps watch will not fear the death which comes, the death of the body: he has in him the true life, that which attaches itself to the irreducible rather than to death, for the life of the soul is life properly understood. The life of the soul is union with God, as the life of the body is union with the soul. For just as the separated soul finds death, through the transgression of the law of God, so through obedience to the commandment the soul newly united to God is vivified. That is why the Lord says in the Gospels: 'The words I say are Spirit and they are life' (John 6 : 63). That is also what Peter says, who knew it by experience: 'You have the words of life' (John 6 : 68). But the words of eternal life are for those who hear them. As for those who transgress, this commandment of life leads toward death (cf. Rom. 7 : 10). So it went with the apostles: they were the odour of Christ, and for some it was an odour of death leading to death, and for others an odour of life leading to life (cf. 2 Cor. 2 : 16).

Additionally, this life is not only the life of the soul, but also that of the body. For it life gives immortality equally to the body in the resurrection, because it is delivered not only from mortality, but also from the death which never ends: that of the punishment to come. It gives the gift of eternal life in Christ, disengaged from all pain, from all sickness, from all sadness,

and truly immortal. For in the same way that the death of the body, the dissolution in the earth and the return to dust follow the death of the soul, that is to say transgression and sin, and that condemnation of the soul in hell follows the death of the body, likewise the resurrection of the body newly united with the soul follows the resurrection of the soul, which is to say the body returns through obedience to the divine commandment. And this resurrection will itself be followed by true incorruptibility and the eternity which they will enjoy with God who will be rendered worthy, having become spiritual, carnal though they were, and will lead a life in heaven of the divine angels. For it is said that we will be ravished into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and that we will always be with the Lord (cf. 1 Thes. 4 : 17). As the Son of God, having become man through love of man, died in the flesh, his soul separated from the body but not separated from the divinity, and that is why his revived body arose by itself to the heaven in glory; and likewise those who have lived here following God, when they will be separated from the body but not separated from God, they will be joined by their bodies before God at the resurrection: they will enter with unspeakable joy there where Jesus has entered for us as forerunner (cf. Heb. 6 : 20), and they will rejoice in the glory which will be revealed in Christ (cf. 1 Peter 5 : 1). For it is not only in the resurrection that they will have a part, but also in the ascension of the Lord and to all the divine life.

But it will not go the same way with those who will have lived in this life according to the flesh: they will not find themselves in communion with God at the time of the exodus. For if all are revived, it is said that each will be revived in his own way (cf. 1 Cor. 15 : 23). He who through the Spirit will have put to death here below the actions of the body, will live in the beyond the divine life and truly eternal with Christ. But he who through covetousness and the passions of the flesh will have put to death here below the Spirit, and will be condemned, alas, with the creator of evil, and will be delivered to insupportable and irresistible punishment, that is to say to the second and irremediable death (cf. Rev. 20 : 14). For where are the roots of true death, those which arouse and provoke in the soul and the body both the temporal death and the eternal death? Are they not in the country of the living? This is why, and on the field, alas, man has been condemned to exile outside the Paradise of God: his life carries death and was not accorded to Paradise. So that the true life, that which arouses in the truly immortal life in the soul and the body, will have its roots in this place: in the place death.

He who does not force himself to possess the true life in his soul here below, he must not lie to himself (cf. Ephes. 5 : 6) with the vain hope of receiving it in the beyond. And he must no more hope to receive then and there the love which God shows to men. For it will be the time of retribution and punishment (cf. Is. 63 : 4; Jer. 28 : 6), not of compassion and love for man: it will be the time for revelation of wrath, of anger and just judgement of God; the time where he will show the power of his raised hand (cf. Is. 5 : 25) ready to punish the

indolent. Woe to him who falls into the hands of the living God (Hebr. 10 : 31)! Woe to him who in the next world experiences the wrath of the Lord, to him who will not know the fear of God down here and the power of his anger, and who through his works will not know in advance God's love of man: for there will be found what is assigned for the present age. And it is assuredly for this reason that God has accorded us this life, giving it to us as a place for repentance. For if it were not so, man would sin and then be deprived of life in this life. And what would be the point of life then?

That is why despair does not always have a place among men, even if the evil one, in many ways, inspires it not only in them who live in indifference, but sometimes even in those who fight him. Because the time of life is the time for repentance, this same life, still submitted to sin, in the case of one what wants to return to God, responds by putting us before him [so we do not despair]. For freedom is the other half of life in this world. Like matter, the way of life revealed on high and the way of death are submitted to the freedom to chose or to turn away from the either of them with as much will as possible. So where will despair have a place, if in time, when they want to, everyone can acquire the eternal life? But do you see the greatness of the love which God bears toward man? With a fair judgement, he does not use his power against those of us who have been unfaithful, but, employing patience, he allows us the time for retreat. In this period of patience, he gives us the power, if we want it, to be adopted by him. What do I mean by adoption? To be joined to him and to become with him one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6 : 17).

But even in the time of patience, if we walk on the way contrary and if we love death more than the true life, he does not remove from us the power he has given us. And not only does he let us keep them, but he reminds us. And he comes closer to us, searching a returning toward the activities of life, as in the parable of the vineyard (cf. Matt. 20 : 1 ff.), from the morning to the evening of this existence. But who is it paying out the wages? The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God of all consolation (cf. 2 Cor. 1 : 3). Who calls the worker into the vineyard? The Son of God, who has said: 'I am the vine' (cf. John 15 : 1). For nobody can come to Christ, as he himself has said in the Gospels, if the Father does not pull him in (John 6 : 44). And who are the branches? We are. For hear it said: 'You are the branches, my father is the husbandman' (John 15 : 1-5). It is the Father who, through the Son reconciles us with himself, without consideration of our faults (cf. 2 Cor. 5 : 19), calls us, not because we should give ourselves to bad actions, but because we do not labour, even though idleness is a sin, and we will have to render account for every empty word (cf. Matt. 12 : 36).

But as I have said, God, passing over the errors committed in the past by each person, calls us still and always. He calls us to do what? To work in the vineyard: that is to say, to occupy ourselves with the branches, therefore with ourselves. And after that – o the incomparable greatness of this love of man! – he

permits us a salary and he gives it to us, to us who gives ourselves trouble. He says: 'Come, receive the eternal life which I give in abundance. I will pay a wage – for it is I who owe it to you – for the trouble of your voyage and for this wish to receive from me such a life.' Who does not need the price of his ransom from Him who has delivered us from death? Who will not give thanks to Him who has given us life? But it is he who promises to send the salary in advance, and an indescribable salary. 'I am come,' he says, 'so that they will have life, and that they will have more of it' (John 10 : 10). What does more mean? Not only to be and live with him, but to become brothers and co-inheritors for him. This more, it seems, it is the wage given to those who run toward the life-giving vineyard, who make themselves branches of that vine, who labour for themselves and who cultivate themselves. But what do they do? They cut off all that is too much and does not contribute to development, but also all that which stops the vine from bearing fruit worthy of the divine vintage. What is too much? Wealth, the pleasures of the world, fame and ambition, all which comes and goes, all blameworthy passion and sickness of the soul and body, all the filth which brings distraction of thoughts, all that which, in whatever one hears, what one sees and what one says, can introduce evil into the soul. For if one does not make an immense effort to cut out all these things, and take the tree of the heart out of the world, one will never bear fruit in the eternal life (cf. John 4 : 36).

Those who lead a conjugal life can also force themselves to arrive at this state of purity, but this will be more difficult. That is why all those who, since their youth, have experienced the providence of God have better discerned this life with the eyes of their intellect, have been seized by the blessings which are in that, and have rightly avoided marriage, because in resurrection, as the Lord said, one is not married and one is not betrothed, but one is like the angels of God (cf. Matt. 22 : 30). Then he who wants to be like an angel of God and resemble the sons of this resurrection in this life down here (cf. Luke 20 : 36), put himself justly above the union with the body, because the body is the bridegroom who has manifested sin by giving himself to it at the origin (cf. Gen. 3 : 1-6). So those who of their own will do not want to give themselves to the enemy (cf. 1 Tim. 5 : 14) should refuse marriage.

But if the body is difficult to master and to direct toward virtue, or better if we relate to it as an opponent, then how, in the measure that we are in the body and make it hard to move toward virtue, can we ever give ourselves wholly to God, attached as bodily people are to any number of other bodies? And how will we have liberty, which we are meant to seek with intense passion, when by the attachments of nature, there is a wife, children, and a number of people who are blood relatives to us? How can that one remain without distraction in front of the Lord, one who is engaged in taking care of so many others? How would she attain the calm, when attached to a crowd of other people? That is why the one who is truly a virgin consecrates herself to Him who is virgin, who is was born of a virgin and is the spouse of souls which live as they should in

virginity, and they not only flee the marriage of the flesh, but also frequentation of the world, renouncing all parentage, until she can, with assurance, like Peter, say to Christ: 'We have given everything up and followed you' (Luke 18 : 28). And while the terrestrial wife abandons father and mother for a mortal husband and attaches herself to him, following Scripture (cf. Gen. 2 : 24), it is not as extraordinary as the virgin who abandons them for a place of wedding and a husband higher than the world? How will it be permitted her to have a parent on the earth, when her life is passed in the heavens (cf. Phil. 3 : 20)? How can one who is not a child of the flesh, but of the Spirit, have a father and mother in the flesh, or parents by blood? How can she who has fled her own body and who always shunned it as much as possible, when she has rejected the life of the flesh, have a relation in a word with the bodies which are not even her own? If resemblance gives birth to friendship, as it is said, and if every being embraces others just like itself, will the virgin resemble those she loves, and will she fall back down into the sickness of love for the world? 'The love of the world is the enemy of God' (cf. Rom. 8 : 6; James 4 : 4), says Paul, he who dressed the bride to send her into the spiritual wedding. She will face the risk there not only of leaving that place, but of taking an aversion to the Husband higher than the world.

Do not be amazed and do not accuse yourself if Scripture does not condemn those who are married, women who are involved in the things of the world and not the things of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 7 : 34), even though anyone who is set aside and promised to God as a virgin, is forbidden to touch the things of the world, and is not been allowed to live in ease and idleness. Nevertheless Paul also addresses himself to the husband: 'Time is short. Those who have wives will be like those who never had them, and those who live in the world will be like those who never did' (1 Cor. 7 : 31): and this is, I think, a struggle harder to endure than that of virginity. For experience shows that fasting is easier than temperance when living among strong drink and delightful food. And one would say something true and right when affirming that, if anyone does not chose to be saved, we can say or do nothing for him. But if he is distracted by the thought of being saved, he should know that the life led in virginity is much more effective and much less punishable than the conjugal life.

But let us move on. Virgin, wife of Christ, branch of the vine of life, consider what has been said above. For the Lord says: 'I am the vine, you are the branches, my Father is the winemaker. Every branch in me which bears fruit, my father prunes it, so that it will bear yet more fruit' (John 15 : 1-2). In return for the care which he takes over you, give a sign of your virginity and of the love which the Husband has for you. Rejoice as well, and force yourself to be docile before him. It is when we have added brass to it, that the gold is said to be fake and counterfeit; but when brass is mixed with a bit of gold powder, it enhances the brass. Just so those who are not virgins look at your with nostalgia, o virgin, you and your works, because they are honourable; but that you would look with nostalgia on them in return, that is dishonour: for your desire

makes you return into the world, partly because you who are dead to the world, you have relationships with those who live in the world and you live with them; and following that because by attaching yourself to them, you want the same as they would want for themselves and those close to them: the abundance of all the kinds of good one can have in this life, the wealth, the external appearance, the glory and the happiness which they give. So it is it will happen you cut yourself clean away from the will of your Husband.

All of this, he himself clearly looked upon it all as an evil, when he said: 'Woe to you who are rich, woe to you who laugh now, woe to you who are satisfied, woe to you when everyone says good things about you' (Luke 6 : 24-6). Why does he call down misfortune on them? Is it not because their souls are dead? So what parent gives the bride of life to the dead? Who attaches himself people going a way contrary to his own? For the way if wide and spacious along which they are going (cf. Matt. 7 : 13). If they do not stop themselves, while mixing with their lives something which belongs to you, they fall entirely into perdition. But you, you enter by the straight gate and the narrow path which leads to life. Now through the door and the straight way none will pass if they are devoted to the splendour of glory, to the effusions of pleasure, to the concern for money and possessions. But do not consider that this way, of which you have heard talk that it is wide, escapes from sadness, for it leads to numerous and heavy evils. It is said that it is large and spacious, for many pass that way. And each of them is surrounded by the immense collection of material things which flow there.

But, virgin, your gate is straight: two people cannot go through side by side. So many of those who have been surrounded by the world, when they remain widowed, alone, separated from their husband, renouncing the world for the sake of imitating your life, which is higher than the world, they have chosen to walk on your road, to have a part of your crown: these are such as Paul says deserve honour (cf. 1 Tim. 5 : 3), because they persevere in the supplication and prayer, and they hope in God. For if a certain affliction attaches to such a life, there is also a source of consolation, a doorway of the Kingdom of heaven and a cause of salvation. Delight and affliction are to such a person equally mortal. It is said in fact that sadness in the world arouses death, but sadness in God arouses repentance which leads to salvation and is not something to regret (cf. 2 Cor. 7 : 10).

This is why the Lord praises what is contrary to the good of this world, when he says: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5 : 3). But why, after having said 'Blessed are the poor' does he add 'in spirit'? To demonstrate that he praises and embraces modesty of soul. Why did he not say: 'Blessed are the poor of spirit' – for what would have meant something like this, those at the edges of the intellect – , but rather, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'? He did so to teach us that poverty in the body can be called blessed and can open the Kingdom of heaven, but if this is assumed to be owing to humility of soul, that it is united to humility and takes

it as its origin. For in praising the poor in spirit, he demonstrated admirably what the root and source of that poverty manifested by the saints: that is their spirit.

This spirit, which has in this way welcomed the grace of the evangelical preachers makes the source of poverty spring up of its own, which bedews the face of the whole earth (cf. Gen. 2 : 6), that is to say the external man, and transforms him into a paradise of virtues. It is such a poverty that God says is blessed (cf. Luke 6 : 20). By reducing it to a single word on the earth, following the prophet (cf. Is. 10 : 23. LXX), when he showed and said blessed the cause of all the forms of voluntary poverty, and the cause of that poverty, the Lord, who taught in few words, pointed at many real effects of it. For one can possess nothing, but be vile; he can be continent, and voluntarily so, but be so for the glory of men. Such a man is not poor in spirit. For hypocrisy is born from presumption, and that is the contrary of poverty of spirit. But to him who has a broken spirit, modest and humble, it is impossible not to rejoice in his apparent low estate and his humility, for he thinks of himself as unworthy of glory, of happiness, of the idleness and all which resembles such things. The poor person who God says is blessed is thus that one who thinks of himself as unworthy of these goods, and such a poor man, who is truly poor, does not arrogate this name to himself by halves. That is why the divine Luke says: 'Blessed are the poor' (Luke 6 : 20), omitting 'in spirit'. Such are those who hear and follow the Son of God, and who make themselves similar to him who have said: 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matt. 11 : 29). That is why the Kingdom of heaven is also to them. For they are the inheritors with Christ (cf. Rom. 8 : 17).

Because the soul has three parts, and is considered according to their three faculties – the intelligent faculty of the intellect, the incensive faculty of wrath, and the appetitive faculty of desire – and that it is unwell in all of them, it is natural that Christ, who heals it, began to take care of it by paying attention to the first of them, desire. For desire is the material of wrath. But the matter for distracted thoughts, is both of the other two together. Wrath of soul will never be healthy, if the desire is not cured. And thought will not be healthy, if both desire and the wrath are not taken care of.

If one looks carefully, one will find that the first fruit of desire is the love of possessions. For desires which come to men so as to help them to live are not reprehensible. These are the desires which grow with us, since our first years. The love of money, however, grows in later years, when we are yet children. From this it appears that this love does not come by nature, but by the will. The admirable Paul has justly called it the root of all the vices (cf. 1 Tim. 6 : 10). Among vices it is the one which gives rise to absence of generosity, trafficking, vandalism, theft, in a word all the forms of cupidity, that covetousness which Paul called the second idolatry (cf. Col. 3 : 5). And to nearly all of those which do not issue from idolatry, it gives the matter to them from which idolatry is made. All those vices

which are born from love of material things are from passions of the soul which do not burn to do good. For vices which come of the will transmit themselves more easily than the passions which take their origin from nature. And having no trust in the providence of God makes it difficult to reject the passions born of the love of money.

Now, he who does not trust in providence puts his confidence in money. And when he hears the Lord say that it is more difficult for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 19 : 24), such a man who holds the Kingdom as nothing, the heavenly and eternal Kingdom, desires the earthly wealth which passes, that wealth which, though it is not in the hands of those who desire it, causes the greatest evil by the very fact that it is desired. Those who desire to be rich fall into the temptations and the traps of the devil, as Paul says (cf. 1 Tim. 6 : 9). But when the wealth comes of its own accord, it shows that it is nothing. Then when it is not there, those who have not received the intellect by experience have a hunger for it.

For this unhappy love does not derive from a lack of something. On the contrary. The love of money comes of the madness of which the man who pulled down his barns and built greater ones was accused by Christ (cf. Luke 12 : 15), our universal Master. For how is he not mad, he who, on account of that which cannot be truly owned (for even in abundance the life of a man does not depend on what he owns (Luke 12 : 15)), and therefore because of it, sets aside what is most useful to him, and does not become a wise businessman. A wise merchant adds as much as possible what is necessary to his capital from commerce and agriculture, accumulating a great deal of things which allow him to gather money. So he will be interested particularly in the agriculture which, before the time of harvest, multiplies a hundred fold what has been sown: indicating in advance future gain and a great harvest when the time comes; this is a thing unthinkable and inexpressibly good, and all the more paradoxical in that these seeds come from the smallest of granaries.

Thus men have not been short of a reason to direct themselves toward wealth for their good. But they fear want, because they do not believe in Him who has promised that the things here will be given to surfeit to those who search for the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 6 : 33) and, being possessed by the fear of being poor, even if they are surrounded by everything, never disengage from their mortal and sick desire. But always adding to their wealth, they load themselves with a useless burden, or better, although still in this life, they build a tomb around themselves. For those who die among men are buried in the earth, but the intellect of the avaricious living man is buried in a mountain of gold dust. And for those who enjoy the health of their senses, this tomb feels worse than the other. And it feels worse the more the avaricious man accumulates more of the dust. For the evil by which these unfortunate slaves are injured is stronger than them. And their plague is carried right up to heaven, almost to the angels of God, almost to God. With it

they inspire horror, they become truly men from whom one turns away, so much sickness is felt when seeing their madness, as David says (cf. Ps. 38 : 5. LXX). That which disengages a man from this nauseating passion which brings death, it is voluntary poverty, without any interest in other men: that is to say, poverty in spirit, which the Lord says is blessed.

It is impossible that a monk who has this passion for money can submit. If he persists in giving comfort to this passion more and more, there is much to fear that he does not fall into incurable sickness of body. Gehazi and Judas, in the Old and the New Testaments, are sufficient proofs. The one was covered with leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 5 : 27): the mark of an incurable soul. The other, in the field of blood, lost power to stand, fell forward, burst in the middle, and his entrails spilled out (cf. Acts 1 : 18). But if renunciation precedes submission, how can what is behind precede what is in front? And if renunciation precedes the monastic life also, because it is an elementary principle, how can one who has not yet abandoned money be able to lead another person through the warfare of renunciation? How, in fact, if he is not capable of submission, can such a man live through himself in the state of the life of stillness in his cell, consecrating himself to solitude and giving himself to prayer? But 'where your treasure is, says the Lord, there also is your heart' (Matt. 6 : 21). How then can one who amasses treasure on the earth direct the eyes of his intellect on Him who sits on the right hand of the most high Majesty at the highest point of heaven (cf. Heb. 1 : 3)? How will he inherit the Kingdom, when the intellect is not permitted to receive it, unless it is purified of all passion?

That is why 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5 : 3). Do you see what passions the Lord has beaten with a single beatitude? But he has not only beaten these passions. We have said in fact that the first fruit of a bad appetitive passion is the love of material things. There is a second, which is must be avoided still more than the first, and a third which is no less vicious.

What is the second? It is the love of vain glory. In fact, when one gets older, it is that passion which used to be the love of the flesh among those who are still young, the one a sick prelude to the other. I say in this way that a form of the love of vain glory is this: attention to the adornment of the body and the sumptuousness of clothing: this is what the Fathers call a worldly vain glory. The other form of vain glory attacks those who distinguish themselves by virtue: it brings with it presumption and hypocrisy through which the enemy engineers the dispersal and theft of spiritual wealth. All of these defects will be perfectly cured by the appetitive passion for being honoured by the highest, and at the same time by the understanding of those who desire such honour that they are unworthy. The same defects can be equally be cured by the constancy in remaining at the bottom of the human condition, all the while knowing that one deserves that condition. They will be cured above all by the consideration that the glory of God is preferable to personal

glory, according to he who said: 'Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory' (Ps. 114 : 9. LXX).

Even if you know that you have yourself accomplished a praiseworthy work, you should impute the cause of this straight action to God. It is God who gives honour, and to God the glory with gratitude, and not to oneself. One will rejoice in that way, because one has received virtue as a gift. And one will not be proud, because one has nothing purely from oneself. But one will live in humility, looking toward God day and night with the eyes of the intellect, like the servant about which the psalm speaks, who keeps her eyes fixed on the hands of her mistress (cf. Ps. 123 : 2), in the fear that by detaching itself from the only God, who gives and who maintains everything in good, it, the intellect, will not be thrown to the bottom of the chasm of evil: that is what the person who is enslaved to vain glory and presumption undergoes. The anchorite monk, the solitary life, remains in the cell, helping particularly the cure of its faults. The hermit truly feels the feebleness of his own will, and he considers that he is not capable of mixing himself among other men. Now this, what else is it if not poverty of spirit, which the Lord has said is blessed (cf. Matt. 5 : 3)?

If anyone reflects on the crimes done by passion which naturally attaches itself to him, he would fly the vain glory from which it gets its power. For by desiring glory from men, through the same works that he does it acquire it, he falls into dishonour. Looking for opportune moments, taking great care to spread fame of his ancestors, taking care of the lovely smell of his clothes, and other self-promotion of the same kind, he shows clearly that he is prey to a childish sort of mind. For all of this is at the same time simply dust. Now what is more vile than dust? He who does not make use of clothes merely to cover himself and to keep warm, but who is passionately interested in clothes because of his fame and for effect, not only displays to those who see him the sterility of his own soul, but dedicates himself in the end to the indecent behaviour of courtesans. Would that he could hear Him who says: 'Those who wear fine clothes are in the house of the king' (Matt. 11 : 18). But 'our city is in the heavens' (Phil. 3 : 20), says the admirable Paul. So do not, because of a weakness for fine clothes, throw us from heaven down into the tents of the prince of darkness of this age (cf. Eph. 6 : 12).

They go down there who chase after the virtue deriving from the glory of men. For those who have received a share of having their city in the heavens (cf. Phil. 3 : 20), they make their tent, alas, in the dust, in their own glory, drawing on themselves the curse of David. Their prayer does not rise toward heaven, and all their application falls down low, because it is not surrounded by the wings of divine love which carries into the heights what is done on earth. So well that they give themselves pain and do not receive their wages. And why do I say that they do not receive their wages? For they bear fruits, but these fruits are confusion, instability of mind, the captivity and darkening of the intellect. It is said: 'The Lord has dispersed the bones of those who seek to please men. They have been confounded, for

God has reduced them to nothing' (Ps. 53 : 6. LXX). This passion is the most subtle of all the passions. That is why he who engages in combat ought, not to control the arrival of evil or avoid consent to it, but rather he should consider the suggestion of evil itself as consent and guard himself against the mere suggestion, for in this way can he move fast enough ahead, so as to avoid defeat. If the sober and watchful monk acts thus, the suggestion in his mind would become a source of compunction. If not, then he is making way for pride. And he who is touched by pride will find it hard to recover health, and so much so that he will not be able to be cured, for his fall is diabolical.

But even before that, the passion to please men spreads such damage over those who have it, that it leads faith itself to shipwreck, according to Him who said: 'How can you believe in me, you who receive glory from men and do not look for the glory which comes from God alone?' (John 5 : 44) What is there, o man, between you and the admiration of men, or the vanity of a glorious name, which not only lacks but makes you lack glory itself, and not only that, but it engenders jealousy among others, that jealousy which is murder in its power and which was the source of the first homicide, and later on, the source of the deicide (cf. Gen. 4 : 3ff; Matt. 27 : 18)?

So what is it that contributes to helping nature? Whatever maintains it or keeps watch over it, or what receives it in one manner or another in its fall and cures it? One will not know how to speak of it with certainty. I think that what helps nature is this: the refutation of false justifications for evil customs. If one were to examine things with rigour, one would find that at the same time nature both provokes and falsely denies the majority of the worst crimes, that it shamelessly lifts the mask, sometimes here below, and that it brings dishonour to lovers, even if the masters of the Greek doctrines say that any right action in existence cannot happen without nature; alas, what error, when they say that they do not feel shame about this! But we have not been taught thus, we who take our name, the name which is fitting for us, from Him who, by himself, in his love of man, has anointed our nature; it is he who we have to watch over our actions. Those looking toward him lead everything through him and for him toward what is best. They do everything for the glory of God (cf. 1 Cor. 10 : 31) and they do not search in any way to please men. Rather they refuse to please, as Paul, that eminent disciple of our Law-maker and the one who gave us the law, says: 'if I have ever pleased men, then would not have been a servant of Christ' (Gal. 1 : 10).

But let us see whether the third child of this sick appetitive passion is removed by means of the poverty which is said to be blessed. The third child of the soul sick with appetite is gluttony, which is the associate of every impurity of the body. But how can we talk of this third and final one, when it seems to be innate to us at in its origins? For it is not it alone, but also the natural movements in view of procreation which bring about children, are in those so young as to be feeding from the breast. How then do we hold the last sickness to be bodily appetite?

Because these things come to us by nature. Now the things of nature are not opprobrious: they were created by the good God, so that by them we can walk into good works. So they are not manifestations of a sick soul. But they are so when they become bad habits.

In consequence, when we take care of the body to satisfy its desires (cf. Rom. 13 : 14), the passions at that moment are bad, and the love of pleasures becomes the source of the bodily passions and sickness of the soul. In these conditions, the first thing to be damaged is the intellect. That is why, sick passions derive from the mind, the Lord says that wicked thoughts spring from the heart, and that they make a man dirty (cf. Matt. 15 : 19). And the Law, prior to the Gospels, says: 'Watch yourself, in fear that a hidden word becomes an injustice in your heart' (Deut. 15 : 9).

For though the intellect is the first to be carried away by evil, still, from the lower faculties, through the senses, the imagination of the sensible body is shaped and harmed; then it is by the senses that it is carried, and particularly by the eyes which can, even from a distance, become attached to and attracted by the filth, which results in the intellect becoming excited and captured by evil habits. The proof of this is Eve, our first mother: for she saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was lovely to look at and precious because providing intellect, and when her heart consented, she picked it and ate (cf. Gen. 3 : 6). We have therefore reason to say that the defeat in the face of beauty of the body precedes the worst passions and it a prelude to them.

That is why the Fathers recommend that we do not think of the beauty of the bodies of others, and not to indulge these thoughts in our breast. Nevertheless, if one can naturally see the passions in children before impassioned thoughts, such childish passions do not lead to sin, but contribute to the order of nature. That is why, at that time of life, the passions are not evil. But when the passions of the flesh receive their origin from the passionate intellect, it is the intellect which we must attend to. In a fire, for instance, he who wishes to extinguish the fire achieves nothing if he attacks the uppermost flames. But if he removes the matter which burns, the fire is dies immediately. It is the same with the passions which prostitute us. If you do not dry the source of thoughts out deep inside, with prayer and humility, and if you arm yourself against them with fasting and a hard life only, your labour will be wasted. But if you sanctify the root with prayer and humility, as we have said, you will also know the sanctification in the things around it. It is this which seems to be what the Apostle meant, who has told us to put on the truth as an armour around the loins (cf. Eph. 6 : 14). Just as one of the Fathers has explained very well how contemplation reduces and tightens the appetitive faculty: the passions of the loins and the stomach. But equally it is necessary to lead a life which is hard on the body, tempering food with measure, so that the appetite is not too difficult to master and will not be stronger than the mind. The all the passions of the body will not be cured except by a hard life in the body and

prayer springing from a humble heart: that is poverty of spirit, which the Lord has called blessed (cf. Matt. 5 : 3).

If anyone wants to acquire the wealth of sanctification without which nobody will see the Lord (cf. Heb. 12 : 14), he should remain in this way in his own cell, leading a hard life and praying in humility. For the cell of him who lives as he should in solitude is a harbour of chastity. All the things of the outside world, and particularly gatherings in public places and markets and fairs, are full of disorder of sexual licence which excites all that one hears and all that one sees of unruliness, and which submerges the poor soul of the monk who is exposed to it.

One can therefore say that the world of evil is a fire which burns: it transforms them into wood who frequent it and it reduces to ash all their virtues. But the fire which does not consume is to be found in the desert (cf. Ex. 3 : 2-3). You, in the desert, remain in your cell and hide yourself for a while, until the tempest of the impassioned state passes (cf. Is. 26 : 20). For the tempest passed, the life you lead in the free air will not be devastated. It is then that you will be a nun truly poor in spirit, when you will possess the Kingdom opposed to passions and when He, the will call you blessed clearly, who said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5 : 3).

How will they not be said rightly to be blessed, those who do not trust in money, but in God? Those who are not trying to please anyone else but Him? Those who in humility live with such men before them? Therefore let us be poor, us also, by humiliating the spirit, by leading a life hard on the flesh and by refusing to possess anything in this life, so that the Kingdom of God will be ours and we will see blessed hopes realised, until we will inherit the Kingdom of heaven. By exposing certain universal and capital words of the Gospel of our salvation, the Lord has not only gathered so many virtues in a single word, and distanced many evils from the faithful, and not only blessed the repentance against those evils, which people show who do what they should in their souls to bury the passions; but he has also cast aside a number of other evils, not as in an act of circumcision where they are simply cut off, but by exposing those evils to cold, to ice, to snow, to storms and the violence of winds, in short to the vicissitudes which plants undergo in the winter and the summer, when they are exposed to the cold and the heat without which nothing that pushes through the earth can absolutely never come to maturity.

So what are these evils? The diverse attacks of temptation, which must be borne with gratitude so as to bear the future fruit to Him who cultivates spirits. In fact, if anyone, because he has pity for the plants which emerge from the earth and find it hard to break through, surrounds them with a wall, covers them with a roof, and does not let weeds develop near them, he will not grow any fruits from them however, even when he prunes and cleans them and does everything with care. Rather he should let nature take its course. Then, after the difficulty of winter, the season of spring brings growth and flowering, a covering of

leaves, and the plant puts forth green grapes. These, if they are left for a while to the strongest rays of the sun, grow, and will come to maturity and become good to eat and gather. In the same way, he who will not endure the weight of temptations, difficult to bear as they are, even if he does not lack any of the other virtues, will never bear fruit worthy of the divine wine press or the eternal cellar. It is by means of patience in the voluntary labours and the involuntary – those which afflict from outside and those which come from within – that every dedicated monk attains perfection. For these fruits borne by nature by the plants of the earth, thanks to the care of those who cultivate them and to the changes of the seasons, are equal to us, who are the spiritual branches of Christ (John 15 : 5) and we confide in him who cultivates our souls: they attach themselves to those who live in complete freedom. With patience facing what happens to us independently of our volition, even this that we do voluntarily will not receive the divine benediction.

For it is the love paid to God while suffering temptations which is the best means of overcoming experiences. So above all take voluntary asceticism into the soul and, through it, habituated to a dislike of pleasure and glory, we will not have to suffer the involuntarily received attacks. He who, thanks to poverty of spirit, despises these attacks and considers himself a tributary of the most effective remedy, namely repentance, attends continually to every affliction. He accepts all of the experiences as things which are right and proper for him, and he rejoices to encounter them, for in this way he obtains the purification of the soul. He acts in the same way with the matter of prayer to God, about which he gives himself trouble and which leads him straight to the goal. He knows that it embraces and guards the good condition of his soul, and not only does it stop him from having any resentment, but it calls the graces on those who afflict him and he prays for them as if they were his benefactors. That is why he himself not only receives pardon accorded to those who have sinned and the promise which is made to them, but he also obtains the Kingdom of heaven of divine benediction. He is said to be blessed by the Lord for having had patience until the end in humility in spirit.

As for us, having now shown a little of what we might call spiritual circumcision, we will now add some words on the fecundity of which it is the source. Then following that, we will speak of those who possess the inalienable wealth which poverty of spirit gives (cf. Matt. 5 : 3), the uniquely blessed one links afflictions to his own beatitude, when he says: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (Matt. 5 : 4). Why did Christ join sorrow to poverty? Because the one always goes in a pair with the other. But sadness allied with poverty in the world arouses death in the soul, say the Apostle, and sadness allied with poverty in God arouses repentance for the salvation of the soul, which can never be something to repent

over (cf. 2 Cor. 7 : 10). The first, which is involuntary, is followed by an involuntary grief. The other, which is voluntary, is necessarily followed by grief. For grief which is called blessed joins here to poverty in God, it arrives necessarily because of it, it is attached entirely to it as to its cause and because it has this origin it is conceived at the same time as spiritual and voluntary grief.

But see, in proof, how the poverty which is called blessed engenders blessed grief. That which we have said above has then revealed four forms of spiritual poverty: poverty of thought, poverty in body, poverty in possessions of this life, poverty in temptations which come from without. If some of you, if he hears talk of forms of poverty which will add to them while remaining separate, should not set aside the actions which these forms of poverty imply. For they naturally fulfil their job alongside the others. That is why they have been included in a single beatitude, which shows at the same time in an admirable manner what is so to speak the root cause of the others, to know our spirit. He who carries in his breast, as we have said, the grace of the evangelic preaching, makes a source of poverty well up in him which waters all the face of our land (cf. Gen. 2 : 6), that is to say the external man, and he transforms it into a paradise of virtues.

While there are four forms of spiritual poverty, from each of them is born the grief which corresponds to it, and likewise the consolation which is fitting, within the poverty and voluntary humility of body, which are hunger, thirst, and the watchfulness at night, in a word the harsh life and the corporal sufferings and, beyond these sufferings, the contraction of the senses by means of the mind. It is from these sufferings that grief is born, but also tears. For just as insensibility, hardness and cruelty of heart are born naturally of this relaxation, from joyfulness, from pleasure, just as contrition of heart and compunction, which distance all bitterness from us and cause a gentle joy, born from a life led in temperance and renunciation.

So it is said that without contrition of heart, it is impossible to disengage from evil. Now this which breaks the heart, is the triple temperance in sleep, in nourishment, and in relaxation of the body. But the soul which this contrition has disengaged from malice and bitterness, that soul assumes spiritual joy, entirely. And such is the consolation about which the Lord says blessed are those who mourn (cf. Matt. 5 : 4). John Klimakos, who in his words has shown us the spiritual ladder, also says the same: 'Thirst and night watches afflicted the heart, and when the heart was afflicted it tears sprang forth. But on these tears, he says, he who is experienced smiles'¹: this means that he will have been consoled by the blessed smile, as the Lord promised.

Grief, which, through beatitude, consoles them who possess poverty of the body, in this way takes its origin from this

¹ St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 6 (P.G. lxxxviii); E.T., Fr. Lazarus Moore, *Missionary Society of St Paul*: (New York, 1982), Step 6 §13.

poverty loved of God. But how, on the other hand, does it take its origin from the sentiment of fear and of divine humility of the soul? Self-accusation always hand in hand with this humility. Now self-accusation derives with all its force from the most immediate fear, which is the fear of punishment eternally; this fear puts before the eyes the terror of the gathering of enemies, in the place of damnation, and adds still more to the fear, when it is understood that such a place is indescribable, since it is still more awful than what has been or can be said. This gathering of terrors will never have an end, so many evils are stack on evil. The burning heat, the cold, the darkness, the fire, the movement and the immobility, the shackles, the terrors, the attacks of beasts always alive, concentrated in a single place where damnation leads. But such an unhappy situation, of hell, is not presented by these figures and images, for they are things which never rise in the heart of man, as it is said (cf. 1 Cor. 2 : 9).

What then is this vain grief, inconsolable and without end? It is the grief which takes those who have sinned against God, when they recognise their faults. Down here, certainly, for those who have been overcome by error, when they have lost blessed hope and renounced rescue, then the involuntary examination of the conscience intensifies in each person, imposing grief and suffering. And this perpetual grief, in a quantity such that it never runs out, becomes the cause of another grief: other terrible darkness, ardent heat which does not rejoice the heart, and is from a bottomless despair. But down here this grief is very useful. For, in his blessedness, God hears. Just as he is descended down to us, he has promised that when visiting them, he will give to those who are mourning the consolation which he himself is, because he is called and he in fact is the Comforter (cf. John 14 : 7-16).

Do you see the grief of the soul humble soul, and the consolation which is given it? But actually the self-accusation, long posed like a spiritual weight on the mind which is in the soul, crushes, presses and expresses the wine of salvation which gives joy to the heart of man (cf. Ps. 104 : 15), that is, to the interior man. Such a wine is compunction. For, through grief, compunction puts pressure on the passions and it fills the soul with a joy which is called blessed, by disengaging it from terrible weights with which the passions weigh him down. This is why those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted (cf. Matt. 5 : 4).

As for the complete poverty of monks, it is both the poverty touching possessions, and poverty in what belongs to us intimately: it is however all the more a poverty of spirit, of which we have spoken above. All of these virtues, which are fulfilled at the same time, are perfect and pleasing to God. Therefore, let him who hears with the intellect undergo such a poverty, the poverty capable of bringing us grief and the consolation which is in it. In fact, after having renounced money and possessions by rejecting or by giving them away following the commandment (cf. Luke 14 : 33), and after having distanced the soul from interest in things, the man

rejoices in the desire to turn towards a search for a state of soul disengaged from what drags him away from himself. But when the intellect is distanced from all physical objects, has emerged from the deluge of confusion of the goods of this world, and come to consider the interior man, then, seeing the hideous mask covering the wandering life hereunder, it undertakes to clean itself with grief. Since when this deformed veil has been lifted, then the soul, ceasing to be loosely dispersed in relations of all kinds, penetrates without difficulty into the true treasures and prays the Father who is in secret (cf. Matt. 6 : 6). It is the Father who thereafter provides the gift which gives space for all the others, namely thoughts of peace (cf. Jer. 36 : 11. LXX; KJV 29 : 11), with which he accomplishes the humility which engenders and embraces all virtue. This humility is not aroused, in one who wants it, by words and definite forms, but it is attested by the Spirit good and divine, and the Spirit itself builds it, when it is well founded in a clean heart (cf. Ps. 51 : 10). It is there, in the paradise of the intellect, as in a sure enclosure, where all the species of trees of true virtue are planted. At the very centre the sacred kingdom of love is raised. And before their flowering threshold the first fruits of the age to come: inexpressible and undamaged joy.

For complete poverty is the mother of disinterest. Disinterest is the mother of attention and prayer. They are the mothers of grief and tears. And the tears effect presumption. But when vices which make us stumble are rejected among us, the way of virtue becomes easier and conscience ceases to be condemned. It is this that makes joy spring and the blessed smile of the soul. Then, when tears of misery are transformed to delight, the words of God becomes sweet in the throat and better than honey in the mouth (cf. Ps. 119 : 103), the beseeching supplication changes into action of grace, and the study of divine witnesses is a rejoicing of the heart mixed with hope which nothing can confound. This hope is rooted in the future, it is attached to evidence of the experience which we taste now, and it grasps in part the overflowing wealth of goodness (cf. Eph. 2 : 7), according to him who says: 'Taste and see, the Lord is good' (Ps. 34 : 9). It is the exultation of the righteous, the joy of upright hearts, the rejoicing of the humble, the consolation of those who have been afflicted for his sake.

Do the gifts of consolation go any further? Are these graces the presents to his sacred betrothed only? Does the husband of such souls never manifest himself more purely than he does at present, even to those who attain perfection through blessed grief, who are purified and who, through their virtues, are clothed for their marriage? Surely he does so. Other wise we ourselves would be submitted to the imprecations of those who are ready to condemn us. It is as if they had said: 'Do not talk in the name of the Lord (Jer. 11 : 21), or we will efface your name because it is evil (cf. Luke 6 : 22), by trapping and revealing things against you with lies and calumnies.'

But we, without taking count of what they say, shall continue, engaging more than we did before, having faith in the words of our holy Fathers, by calling on them, by looking toward them,

and by persuading others. For it is said: 'I have believed, and therefore I have spoken' (Ps. 116 : 1. LXX), and: 'We believe, that is why we speak' (2 Cor. 4 : 13). In fact, when it is disengaged from all criminal passion which remains in it, as this discourse has already described, the intellect turns entirely toward itself and toward the other powers of the soul, it advances toward something more perfect and, regulating its advance upward on the degrees of such action, through the cultivation of virtues, it loves the beauty which is in the soul. And still better, God willing, it can wash itself, and not only avoid all that has the mark of evil, but lift itself from the middle of all which is foreign, even if in the middle there might be any part or thought which is good. When then it has surpassed the inner essential concepts of things and the inner essential thoughts, things which cannot exist without fantasy, and when they have been disposed of, then while loving and being loved by God, deaf and quiet, as it is written, it presents itself to God.

At that moment, the intellect masters the causes of matter and recreates the most high creation in total liberty: for nothing from the outside knocks on the door, grace of heart leads it toward the best and, what is the most paradoxical thing, it shines a light mysteriously there inside and it leads the internal man to perfection. When the day begins to dawn and the light of morning rises in our hearts (2 Peter 1 : 19), as the first of the apostles says, the true man exits for his true work (cf. Ps. 104 : 23), following the prophetic word and, helped by the light, he climbs the road which rises among the eternal mountains (cf. Ps. 76 : 5). O miracle, he makes himself the contemplator of things which, in this light, are more high than the world, from which he should not be separated, or that he should be separated from only in the guise of matter in which they were at first revealed, depending on how well it knows the way. For he does not rise on the imaginary wings of thought, or he does not rush on blindly all at once: he does not attach himself to the precise and indubitable understanding nor of the absent sensible nor to the inner essential transcendent. But he arises toward the truth through the ineffable power of the Spirit and, with that spiritual indescribable conception, he hears the unspeakable words and see the invisible. And miraculously, he become entirely down here, and also part of the beyond and the adversary with the unstoppable singers: he becomes truly like an angel of God on the earth and, throughout him, all the forms of creation are carried toward the Lord. For he himself, having a part in everything, participates also in what is above everything, so as to be the fulfilment of the image.

That is why the divine Neilos says: 'By its nature the intellect is an intelligible inner essential height which resembles a celestial colour through which the mystery of the Holy Trinity, at the moment of prayer, becomes the light.' And again: 'If anyone wants to see the nature of the intellect, then let him

deprive himself of all mind, and then he will see it, like a sapphire or a celestial colour. But that, it is not possible to attain to it except through impassibility. For it is necessary that God helps and exhales in it the innate light.'¹ St Diadochos says likewise: 'Through baptism, holy grace transmits two things, of which the one surpasses the other infinitely. For the first grace renews in water and makes our being in the image of God shine, while effacing all the marks of our sin. Then it receives the second grace, which works with us. When the intellect begins to taste and feel very clearly the gentleness of the Holy Spirit, then we should know that the grace begins so to speak to paint our being in the resemblance onto our being in the image, in such a way that our senses themselves indicate that our being in the resemblance is taking form. And it is at the illumination that we know that we have attained the perfection of this resemblance.' And again: 'Nothing can possess spiritual love if it has not been illuminated in full plenitude by the Holy Spirit. If in effect the intellect, through the divine light, does not receive in perfection the being in the resemblance, it cannot have in it all the other virtues, and it still does not have a share in the perfect love.'²

In the same way, we hear St Isaac say: 'At the moment of prayer, the intellect which has received grace sees its own purity equal to the celestial colour which has been called by the assembly of Israel 'the place of God' when it appeared to the Hebrews on the mountain.' And again: 'The purity of the intellect is the purity on which, at the moment of prayer, shines the light of the Holy Trinity.'³ But the intellect which has been rendered worthy of such a light transmits to the body attached to it the traces of divine beauty: it is a mediation between the grace of God and the heaviness of the flesh, and it carries in it the force of weakness. There is the state of virtue equal to God and that nothing can fight: it is completely impossible or difficult to push it toward evil. There is the Word which shines light on the causes of beings and which reveals of itself, in its purity, the mysteries of nature by which, following the method of analogy, the thought of those who hear with faith is carried toward comprehension of what is above nature, that comprehension that the Father of the Word has himself conceived entirely in immaterial signs. There are the other miracles of another type: the discernment and the prophetic vision, of things which come from afar, seen as if the eyes had perceived them near at hand; and, what is still greater, as if such mysteries came despite these most blessed men not looking for them. But just as if anyone saw a ray of the sun, he sees the corpuscles which float in the air, though this was not his intention, so such men offer themselves in total purity to the divine rays, to which is attached additionally by nature the revelation of everything, not only that which is or which has been, but also that which follows from them, the length of the road, where the knowledge of things comes in true measure,

¹ Evagrius Ponticos, *Capita practica ad Anatolium*, PG. 40, 1244AB

² St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 89; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 288.

³ St Isaac the Syrian (Isaac of Ninevah), *Ascetical Homilies*; (P.G., vol. lxxxvi(a)); F.T., *Discours ascétiques, selon la version grecque*, trans. R.P. Placide Deseille; *Monastere St Antoine le grand* (Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, 2011), §31-2, 15, p. 253.

and in proportion to the purity of the intellect. Thus they know for their good the return of the intellect to itself and its union in God, or better, though it is astonishing to say it, the return of all the powers of the soul into the intellect, and the energy which is at the same time his own and that of God, through which those who recreate themselves in the image of their model are in the good way, when grace makes the ancient and marvellous beauty rise and reform again.

It is to such a height that blessed grief raises the humble of heart and the poor in spirit. On account of the negligence which is within us, and which is stronger than us, we must return to the basis of all that and speak a bit more of grief. It attaches itself assuredly to all of those who know involuntary poverty: poverty in the world. How would they not be perturbed if they lack money, one who suffers hunger because he has nothing, who is overwhelmed and ashamed? But this grief has no consolation, and the more so if the one suffering is distant from spiritual knowledge. For such a man does not submit pleasure and pain which come from his senses to his reason. But moreover, by making a bad use of the uprightness of reason in these pleasures and pains, they grow, as they would not have done, without the least gain, and in the end he suffers a great deal of harm. He himself promotes the sign and the clear proof that he has not received in total certainty the good news of the Gospel of God, and of the prophets who were before Christ, and of those who, with him and through him, would otherwise open and flow with inexhaustible wealth throughout poverty; through simplicity, the unspeakable glory; through temperance, delight liberated from sadness; through patience in the trials which supervene, deliverance from distress and from eternal affliction separated from God, for those who have loved the facile existence down here, and who have not chosen to advance in life through the straight gate and the narrow way (cf. Matt. 7 : 14).

The apostle Paul therefore had reason to say that the sadness in the world arouses death (cf. 2 Cor. 7 : 10). For seen through our reason, sin seems to lead to death. If the true life is the divine light of the soul, born from grief while following with God, as the Fathers said and as we saw, on the other hand the death of the soul comes from the evil darkness which arouses sadness in the soul while following the world. It is of these shadows that the great Basil speak when he says: 'Sin, which derives its existence from the abandonment of good, has for form the spiritual darkness aroused by injustices.' But the divine Mark also says this: 'How can one surrounded by thoughts of evil be able to see the real sin which they cover up, this sin which is darkness and fog of soul, falling on it in the wake of thoughts, words and actions of evil? Now he who has not seen this sin who embraces everything, when, in his prayer, will he be purified? If he has not been purified, who will he find a place of purified nature? And if he has not found this place, how will he see the interior dwelling place of Christ? He must therefore, through prayer, knock at the door with perseverance and ask

not only to possess that dwelling place, but also to guard it. For he is the one who has lost it after having received it. Those who learn late, and the young can have a simple spiritual knowledge or a close experience of this pure nature. But the constant and patient work, only they exercise it, and not without difficulty, who are the most experienced of the old, who have vowed themselves to piety.¹ It is of such old men that Makarios wrote, celestial in his wisdom, and all the choir of saints.

But just as this darkness receives its existence from all of our faults, so if you examine the sadness according to the world, you will find that it comes from all our passions and that it takes its grip on us from them. It carries the image and it is like the first fruits, the prelude and the deposit of grief without end which ought to come on those who have not chosen the grief which the Lord has characterised as blessed (cf. Matt. 5 : 4), this grief which not only procures consolation by bearing as its fruit the pledge of eternal rejoicing, but also comforts virtue by rendering the soul intractable before the worst. For if someone, who is made poor and humble and who is forced to have simplicity according to God, does not acquire at least the grief by making progress toward the best, it is easily carried by its versatility and its negligence to return in thought to what it has abandoned, desire anew this which it had left behind at the start and acknowledging himself a transgressor. But if, persevering and remaining attentive to all which carries toward blessed poverty, he makes entry into grief itself, he will not go backwards: he does not return in the bad sense, toward what he has fled, but acts for good. For the misery according to God, as the Apostle says, arouses a repentance for salvation of the soul, which one does not regret (cf. 2 Cor. 7 : 10). That is why one of the Fathers said that it arouses and guards grief.

This is precisely the gain of grief, that an almost immobile man cannot turn himself toward evil and toward the faults which he has committed in previous times, but it is almost as if those previous faults do not exist. Because when a man begins to weep for these faults, God considers them as if they were done unintentionally. And a man is not responsible for involuntary faults. If in effect penury afflicts a man, and he confirms with his testimony that this is not voluntary (and this is why he will fall into the traps of the devil along with those who desire to enrich themselves or who are wealthy (cf. Gen. 2 : 15), even those who try to get along that route while avoiding the traps), he will still be sent with the rich to his eternal punishment. Just so, he who has sinned against God, if he allows grief for his sins, will see them justly considered by God as involuntary sins and, without encountering obstacles, he will come, along with those who have not sinned and in the same manner, onto the road which leads to eternal life. Such is therefore the gain of the beginning of grief, which is a beginning in sadness, for it brings with it, attached to it, the fear of God. But before that, grief unites marvellously with the love of God, and it brings the fruit of the sweet and holy consolation of the goodness of the

¹ St Mark the Ascetic, *On Those who Think that They are Made Righteous*, 224-5; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 145-6.

Comforter, when she tastes it who has been affected by it, she cannot make those who have not had the experience hear, for she does not know what to say. If, in fact, one cannot speak of the sweetness of honey at those who have not tasted it, how could one describe to those who have not tried the pleasure of the joy and of the sacred grace which come from God? Assuredly one cannot do so. But the beginning of grief resembles a requirement of marriage God, and which appears almost impossible to exhaust: that is why some people add to their promises of marriage those who take the grief on account of their desire of a spouse to whom they cannot actually join. They beat themselves, and they call with cries of unhappiness, as if they were not here and may never perhaps ever be here.

The end of grief is the perfect union in the nuptial purity. This is why Paul called the great mystery the reunion of a couple in a single body, and he asserts: 'I say this concerning Christ and the Church' (Eph. 5 : 32). So as a married couple are one flesh, so those who are of God are a single Spirit with God, as Paul says it elsewhere with wisdom: 'He who attaches himself to the Lord is with him in a single Spirit' (1 Cor. 6 : 17). Where are those who called grace a created thing which remains in the saints of God? They should know, those who blaspheme against the Spirit himself, that it is with the saints in the transmission.

But here is another example of what we have just said, a better way of saying it. For the commencement of grief is similar to a return of the prodigal son. This is why grief fills with sadness those who make this return and makes them pronounce these words: 'Father, I have sinned against the heavens and against you and I am not worthy to be called your son' (Luke 15 : 21). Since the end of grief is similar to the reunion of the most high Father and his estranged son. Discovering in this estrangement the wealth of incomparable pity, and arriving on account of it at great joy and liberty, the son was loved and loved in return. After having entered with the Father, he had a share in his feast, and he enjoyed with him the celestial happiness.

But come, let us also fall into the poverty which is called blessed and weep before the Lord our God (cf. Ps. 95: 6), so as to erase the sins which we have committed, to make no more movement toward evil and to obtain the Comforter, comforted in him and rendering him glory, likewise to the Father who has no beginning, and to the only Son, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.