

AN EXACT METHOD AND RULE: WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF GOD FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO LIVE THE LIFE OF STILLNESS AS A MONK, ILLUSTRATED WITH TESTIMONIES FROM THE SAINTS

1. DEALING WITH THE WAY OF LIFE, THE CUSTOMS AND OBSERVANCES, AND THE RICHNESS AND ABUNDANCE OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH STILLNESS CONFERS ON THOSE WHO PURSUE IT WITH INTELLIGENCE. THE PRESENT WORK IS DIVIDED INTO ONE HUNDRED TEXTS. THIS EXORDIUM, THE FIRST TEXT, CONCERNS THE SUPERNATURAL GIFTS AND THE GRACE WHICH THE FAITHFUL RECEIVE FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is our part, as the holy prophets demonstrate, to be led by God (cf. John 6 : 45) when we bear the new law, inscribed and yet ineffable, brighter than a torch of fire, in our hearts (cf. 2 Cor. 3 : 2 - 3). It falls to us to be guided by the Spirit of generosity and good works, children and heirs of God as we are, heirs alongside Christ (cf. Rom. 8 : 17). We should direct our lives like angels, and not distance ourselves from Him, who showed us how to know the Lord. However, since our first fall, our incomprehension before the better way and our distraction by the worst because of the illusions of the devil, and his implacable tyranny over us, we have strayed along a way leading us damnably far from the healthy commandments given by God, and we have fallen into ways which destroy the soul. So, it ends up that we are engaged in thoughts and actions contrary to our own self-interest. Which is why, according to the divine word, 'there is no one with knowledge, no one who calls out to God' (Ps. 14 : 4). 'Turned from the right path, we have become useless' (Ps. 14 : 3), we are entirely flesh (cf. Gen. 6 : 3), and, deprived of the luminous grace of God, so that we lack the inner impulse and the assistance which we ought to receive from each other, to orient ourselves toward the good.

2. THAT THIS WORK IS A RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS AND RESEARCHES OF A BROTHER, BUT ALSO IN OBSERVANCE OF THE INJUNCTION OF THE FATHERS ON US

Because you desire to probe the Holy Scripture which gives life to us (cf. John 5 : 39), as ordered by the Lord, and to provide yourself with complete certainty, you have often requested of us, useless though we might be, some guidance

and a written rule for your own good, and for the good of others too, as you have said yourself, we have judged, partly because we have not done so before, that it is right to satisfy your praiseworthy desire, and to forget our habitual negligence, for the sake of your love and your advantage, admiring you as we do to a high degree, your zeal for goodness and your consistent appetite for work, dear spiritual child. But above all we have feared the judgement of God, the threat of which is terrible, fearing what we see exercised on the man who hid his talent (Matt. 25 : 25).

It will also give us opportunity to carry out the paternal duty which was assigned to us by the fathers and our spiritual masters: to confer on others who love God that in which we ourselves were instructed.

Just as God, the Father of love, who widely dispenses what is good to all people constantly, on many occasions accorded to animals the inspiration of speech, even though they lack reason (cf. Num. 22 : 28), for the good of those who were listening, so too he has given us an opportunity for speech and opened our mouths (cf. Eph. 6 : 19), though usually we are slow and we find it difficult to talk (cf. Ex. 4 : 10). And to you and to all those who will read this, as you have said yourself, God has accorded an ear capable of hearing what follows with insight and knowledge, so that they can lead a right and steady life which will please Him. For without Him, just as it is written, we cannot do anything useful (John 15 : 5) and healthy, and 'if the Lord does not build the house, those who build work in vain' (Ps. 127 : 1). And it is just so.

3. THAT IN ALL THINGS THE END IS FIRST, AND THAT THE END OF THE PRESENT WORK IS TO TEACH WHAT IS FUNDAMENTAL

In every undertaking the first thing to be considered is the end. This applies to our aims and ends as to yours. Ours is to express as well as possible that which helps spiritual growth, and yours is to live in reality what we describe. It is necessary therefore at the start to examine how we will finish off the edifice that we are building, and examine our aims by self-examination as if looking in a mirror. Because, when we have laid the first foundations properly, later on, when the time is

right, and more correctly, when we have received abundant help from above, we will have to put a roof on, and this will have to be worthy of the architectural designs of the Spirit.

4. THAT THE FIRST THING TO DO FOR GOD IS TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE SAVIOUR. AND THE LAST THING IS TO RETURN TO THE PERFECT GRACE OF THE ALL HOLY SPIRIT WHICH IS THE ORIGIN OF LIFE, THE GRACE WHICH SINCE THE FALL HAS BEEN GIVEN IN BAPTISM

Let us make a start with the main point, that the first thing we must do for God is to control ourselves in every way and with all our force to live according to the laws of the deifying commandments of our Saviour. And the last thing is, during the observance of these commandments, to return to that which, since the origin itself, has been given from on high by the sacred water of baptism: the regeneration and the new perfect creation by grace. Or it is well to call such a gift in whatever way pleases you. We must divest ourselves of our first father, Adam, with his acts and jealousies, in order to dress ourselves in the new and spiritual (cf. Col. 3 : 9-10) clothing which is our Lord Jesus Christ. As St Paul says: 'My children, you for whom I suffer again the miseries of infancy, just so that Christ can be visible again in you' (Gal. 4 : 20). And: 'You, who have been baptised in Christ, have been clothed in Christ' (Gal. 3 : 27).

5. WHAT GRACE IS, AND HOW WE CAN DISCOVER IT. WHAT TROUBLES IT AND WHAT PURIFIES IT

But what grace is, and how we can uncover it, and what troubles it, and what by contrast renders it pure, has been revealed by him whose soul and language were more luminous than all the gold of the world, John Chrysostom, when he said: 'Reflecting as if in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are transfigured into that image itself' (2 Cor. 3 : 18). What does this mean? It is the same thing which was displayed very clearly when a miracle was brought about in the old days. But to him who has the eyes of faith, it is not difficult to see similar things in our times. For 'at the same time that we are baptised, the soul shines more than the sun, purified by the Spirit. And we look not only into the glory of God at that moment, but we receive such splendour ourselves. Similarly, when pure silver is placed in the rays of the sun, and it shines, it does so not only because of its own nature, but because it is reflecting the sun's brightness; so in the same way the soul, purified and more luminous than all the silver in the world, receives a ray of the glory of the Spirit which approaches toward the soul to cover it in glory,'¹ and of that glory which gathers around the Spirit of the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 3 : 18).

Do you want me to show this with a more material example, by way of referring to the apostles? Referring to Paul, whose clothes had miraculous properties (cf. Acts 19 : 12). Referring to Peter, whose mere shadow had a similar power (cf. Acts 5 : 15). These things could not have happened if the apostles had not carried in themselves the image of the King, if the light which escapes from them were not the unapproachable light, at the moment when their clothes and shadow performed these miracles, unapproachable because the image of the King strikes fear into thieves.

Do you also want to see the image of God shining through a body? It is written: 'Looking on the face of Stephen, they believed they saw the face of an angel' (Acts 6 : 15). But this example of visible light is as nothing beside the glory which radiates within. For that which Moses had once about his face (cf. Ex. 34 : 30) became the face and image of the soul of those who saw it, and that is better. For though the light of the transfiguration of Moses was something which the senses could experience, the image inside the soul was incorporeal. And just as luminous bodies shed their light on those who are nearby and transmits to them their proper clarity, it is just the same for the faithful. This is why those who experience this light distance themselves from the earth and clothe themselves in things of heaven; but, alas: it is as well to pause here, because it is a bitter thing. For there, in that state, we enjoy such nobility, and we don't know how to explain it, so quickly it passes, to the extent that we are frightened by what we feel. That mysterious and terrible glory, in fact, does not remain with us more than a day or two. We extinguish the light when coming back down to the dreary season of things such as this life is, and then we repel its rays with a barrier of mist.

It is written elsewhere: 'The bodies of those who have pleased God dress themselves in such glory that it would be impossible with the physical eyes to see it. But God has arranged that we have received, in the Old and New Testaments, obscure signs and traces of these bodies. There the face of Moses flames with such glory that it blinded the Israelites and had to be covered with a veil. But in the New Testament the face of Christ shone more than his.'²

Have you understood the words of the Spirit? Have you understood the force of this mystery? Do you know what anguish the new spiritual creation brings in us, perfected in the sacred bath of baptism, and what the fruits are, what the final state, and the generous benefits of it? It depends on us whether this supernatural grace is to increase or diminish, whether we manifest it or render it obscure, because it is subject to what is particular to us: the storm of things in the world, and the darkness and the passions which these things engender. Our world, in effect, presses on us, like a winter or a savage flood of water. Things drown the soul and do not let us either breathe or contemplate true beauty or true beatitude, for which the soul is made: the passions overshadow, burning the soul up entirely, and sicken it under the noise and the

¹ St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Corinthians* §7, 5; E.T., ed. P. Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 12, *The Christian Literature Company* (New York, 1889), p. 313-4.

² St John Chrysostom, *Letter to a Young Widow* §3; E.T., ed. P. Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 9, *Charles Scribner's Sons* (New York, 1908), p. 123-4.

smoke of pleasure, and draw it down under the waters. However, the contrary of these things, is born from the deifying commandments, and is given to those who walk not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. For it is written: 'Walk in the Spirit, and do not fulfil the desires of the flesh' (Gal. 5 : 16). There, (in the commandments of our Saviour, and walking in the Spirit), he finds good and health who, as by a ladder, is carried to the summit and to the most extreme degree, namely to love, which is God (cf. 1 John 4 : 8).

6. THAT IN HOLY BAPTISM GRACE IS GIVEN TO US FREELY. IF WE HAVE HIDDEN IT BY FOLLOWING THE PASSIONS, WE CAN FIND IT AGAIN IN ALL ITS PURITY BY FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENTS

Long ago, in the bosom of God, which is to say in the holy waters of baptism, we received the totally perfect gift of divine grace. And if, in what follows, by poor habits in the temporal affairs, by involvement in the things of existence and by the getting lost in the smoke of the passions, we were to hide away and bury that grace as we ought never to do, it is possible here again, by repentance and by observance of the deifying commandments, to find it again completely, to acquire afresh that joyous supernatural light and to see that most clear revelation.

But grace is manifested in any one of us only to the extent that we are watchful over ourselves in our faith, and if there is more grace in us than that, then it is by the assistance and by the kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ. As St Mark the Ascetic has written: 'Christ being perfect God, he has given to the baptised his perfect grace through the Holy Spirit, to which nothing can be added.'¹ But it has been revealed to us, and it is manifested in us to the degree, that we live by the commandments. If anything is added, then that would be an addition to our faith, just to the extent that we can all arrive at the plenitude of Christ' (Eph. 4 : 13). If we have anything to offer therefore, having been renewed by the new birth in him, this goes back to him, comes from him, and already was to be found inside us.

7. THE WHOEVER LEADS HIS LIFE IN THE PATH OF GOD SHOULD TAKE TO HEART ALL THE COMMANDMENTS. THAT HE SHOULD DIRECT TOWARD THE FIRST OF THEM, WHICH ARE THE MOST GENERAL, THE GREATEST PART OF HIS WORK

The beginning and the root of all this work, we have said, is therefore to lead a life conforming with the health-giving commandments. The conclusion and the fruit is to return to the perfect grace of the Spirit which at the origin was given to us in baptism, and which is to be found within us. For it is written that God does not retrieve what he has given us (Rom. 11 : 29). But grace is hidden by the passions, and unveiled by

the work of the divine commandments. By the accomplishment of all of these commandments as much as possible, it appertains to us to force ourselves by every means, to unwrap the manifestation of the Spirit in ourselves (cf. 1 Cor. 12 : 7), and to see it very clearly. 'Your law, the blessed David said to God, is a candle for my steps and a light for my way' (Ps. 119 : 105) And: 'The commandment of the Lord is clear, it opens my eyes' (Ps. 19 : 8). And: 'I am committed to all of your commandments' (Ps. 119 : 128). And the well-loved Apostle: 'Whoever looks after these commandments rests in God, and God rests in him' (1 John 3 : 24). And: 'These commandments are not heavy' (1 John 5 : 3). And the Saviour: 'Whoever knows my commandments and observes them, he loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father. I will love him and I will reveal myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will pay attention to my words, and my Father will love him. We will come to him, and we will find in him our rest, and 'he who does not love me does not listen to my sayings' (John 14 : 21 - 24).

It is therefore to the primary commandments, which are the most general, and as it were the parents of the others, that we need to attribute the most work. Thereby we can attain with God, without fuss, without fault, the end that we have set ourselves, that good origin and that conclusion: namely, the manifestation of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12 : 7).

8. THAT THE BEGINNING OF ALL WORK LOVED BY GOD IS THE INVOCATION WITH FAITH OF THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THAT THAT WORK WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE PEACE AND LOVE WHICH ARISE FROM PRAYER

The beginning of all the work loved by God is the prayer with faith of invocation of the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he himself said: 'Without me, you can do nothing' (John 15 : 5). And the beginning of any work is also peace, for it is said, that one must pray without anger and without disputes (1 Tim. 2 : 8). And the beginning is also love; for 'God is love', and 'whoever rests in love rests in God, and God rests in him' (1 John 4 : 16). This peace and this love do not simply make the prayer acceptable, but they grow and rise from the nature of prayer itself. Like two twin rays of God, they increase and fulfil it.

9. THAT BY DOING THESE WORKS, EACH ONE INDIVIDUALLY AND ALL THREE TOGETHER, THE TOTALITY OF GOOD THINGS IS GIVEN TO US IN FULL MEASURE

It is by these works - prayer, peace, and love - each individually and all three together, that the totality of good things is given to us in full measure. By the prayer of invocation, with faith, of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we hope in full certitude to receive the mercy and the true life which is concealed in Him (cf. Col. 3 : 3), as if it were a

¹ St Mark the Ascetic, *De Baptismo*; P.G., vol. lxxv, p. 936 ff.

divine and eternal source of life overflowing into anyone who calls purely from his heart the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the peace which surpasses understanding and which has no limits (cf. Phil. 4 : 7 & Is. 9 : 7), we are rendered worthy to reconcile ourselves with God, and to reconcile ourselves with others. By the love, the glory of which is incomparable, because it is the end and the foundation of the Law of the Prophets (cf. Matt. 22 : 40) – and God himself says that He is love (cf. 1 John 4 : 8) – by which we unify ourselves entirely with God. Our sin is thereby abolished in the justice of God, and in grace which adopts us, grace which is awakened with the paradoxically arousing quality of love. It is written that love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4 : 8). And: ‘Love forgives all, believes all things, hopes all things, supports all things. Love never fails’ (1 Cor. 13 : 7 – 8).

10. THAT OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AT THE TIME OF HIS PASSION, LEFT TO HIS DISCIPLES, IN HIS PARTING COMMANDMENTS, A DIVINE INHERITANCE. AND LIKEWISE AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

That is why our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is all good and all gentleness, when he went to his voluntary passion for us, and when he appeared to the apostles after her resurrection, and so too when he returned to his Father by nature and our Father by grace – real and affectionate Father – left to them farewell commandments, consoling gifts, and so to speak certain and gentle ties: the inalienable inheritance of God.

Foreseeing his salvific passion, he said to his disciples: ‘Whatever you ask in my name, I will give it to you’ (John 14 : 3). And: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, that which you ask of the Father in my name, I will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be perfect.’ And: ‘In that day you will ask in my name’ (John 16 : 17 – 18). And again, after his resurrection: ‘Miracles will accompany those who have believed. In my name they will expel demons, they will talk in new languages ...’ (Mark 16 : 17 – 18). The well-loved disciple added: ‘Jesus made many other signs before his disciples, which are not written in this book. These are written so that you will believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and so that in believing you will have life in my name’ (John 20 : 30 – 31). And the glorious Paul: ‘In the name of Jesus all knees will bend ...’ (Phil. 2 : 10). Likewise, in the Acts of the Apostles it is written: ‘Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said: That this should be known by you and all of Israel. It is in the name of Jesus of Nazareth that you have crucified, that God has revived the dead, it is by his name that this man presents himself before you’ (Acts 4 : 8 – 10). And a little later: ‘In no other is there health than in him. For there is no other name given to men, by which it falls to us to be saved’ (Acts 4 : 12). And the Saviour: ‘Power has been given to me over all the heavens and the earth’ (Matt. 28 : 18).

And here with reference to peace and love, when the Lord, the God Man, said to his apostles before the cross: ‘I leave you my peace (John 14 : 27), I give you my peace’. And: ‘I say these things so that you may have the peace in me’ (John 16 : 33). And: ‘Here is my commandment. Love one another’ (John 15 : 12). And: ‘And by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13 : 35). ‘As my Father loves me, I also have loved you. Rest in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will rest in my love, as I have kept the commandments of my Father and I rest in his love’ (John 15 : 9 – 11). And likewise after the resurrection, he came many times, at different moment, to give peace. He appeared to them and said: ‘Peace be with you’ (John 20 : 19). To Peter, on whom he conferred the authority among the disciples, he said three times, to signify to him, that concern for the herd was bound up with fervent love for him, the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘Peter, if you love me, feed my sheep’ (John 21 : 15ff).

One can say not without reason, that with these three miraculous revealed virtues, there arise in us three other admirable virtues, which are: the purification of the soul, enlightenment, and perfection.

11. THAT WITHIN THE THREE WORKS, OF PRAYER, PEACE, AND LOVE, ARE WOVEN ALL OF THE VIRTUES

If one were to examine this matter with precision and clarity, he would find that the whole royal cloak of the virtues created by God has been woven using this thread made up of three filaments and is almost unbreakable (cf. Ecc. 4 : 12). Life in God is, that is to say, like a precious chain, a tread of gold where one virtue depends on the next, and where all virtues gather together in the same place. While being many, they compose a single unique work: to deify the man who lives purely with them; and as if with rings or chains, they enrich him with the invocation of the name of the well-loved lord Jesus Christ, in faith, and if you want, with peace and humility; they also enrich him with peace and with love: this tree with three trunks which God has planted, and which is the tree of life. Those who eat here and are nourished by its fruit, do not harvest death, as our first parents did, but rather eternal life which does not fail.

12. THAT THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE FAITHFUL BY GOD THE FATHER, AND HIS ADVENT, ARE DISPENSED IN CHRIST JESUS AND IN HIS HOLY NAME

Yes, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the faithful by God the Father, and his advent, are dispensed in Jesus Christ and in his holy name. As the more than divine Lord Jesus Christ who loves all said to the apostles: ‘It is expedient for you that I go away: For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you’ (John 16 : 7).

And: 'When the Comforter has arrived which I will send from my Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father' (John 15 : 26), and again: 'The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name' (John 14 : 26).

13. THAT WITH REASON OUR HOLY FATHERS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO RESTS IN THEM, ORDERS US TO PRAY TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND TO ASK FOR MERCY

This is why our glorious guides and teachers very wisely, and with the Holy Spirit which abides in them, teach that before any other good work and before any other exercise, everyone, and especially those who wish to enter the arena of the deifying life of stillness, and wishes to consecrate himself to God, to break with the world, and to live this life of stillness according to reason, must pray to the Lord and resolutely, requesting his mercy; and they must work and focus attention constantly on this very holy and very gentle name, to carry it into their hearts, into their intellect and onto their lips; to breath in and with the name, to live, sleep and wake, walk, eat, and drink with it; and so to speak to force themselves to do everything in this way. Because without him everything goes badly. Nothing is given us which we need. But with him in us, all that is contrary to us is pushed aside. What we need we have, and the good things which would otherwise be impossible to achieve, we have those too, as our Lord says himself: 'Whoever rests in me, I am in him. He bears many fruits. Because without me you can do nothing' (John 15 : 5). So this reality, this terrific name which gave birth to all creation, and which underlies all reality and every other name (cf. Phil. 2 : 9), we, the unworthy, when we invoke it loyalty, and unfurl with it the sails of everything we have said so far in our current discourse, shall make entry into the further regions of what we have to say.

14. THAT WHOEVER WANTS TO WALK WITHOUT MAKING A BAD STEP ON THE ROAD OF HESYCHIA IN THE LORD, SHOULD BEFORE EVERYTHING CHOSE TOTAL RENUNCIATION, PERFECT SUBMISSION

In the name of our great God the Saviour Jesus Christ, who has said: 'I am the light (John 8 : 12), the life, the truth, the way (John 14 : 6), the doorway to God the Father', and: 'If anyone goes by way of me he will be saved, he will enter, he will exit, he will find his pasture' (John 10 : 7 - 9), which is to say his health, be attentive to your words, to the advice which we give you, in a spirit of loyalty.

First, with total renunciation, chose for yourself the truth and perfect submission which holy revelation demands. Search, push yourself to find a guide and an upright master. You will know that he is upright: because he will submit what he says to the proof of Holy Scripture. He leads a life which bears the Spirit and which is in accord with his words. His intellect is elevated, but his heart is humble, and he is gentle

in everything he does. Such is the Master in the image of Christ: he teaches the words which God has given us. If you have found him, like an affectionate son ally yourself to him in body and spirit as if he were your father; staying entirely with the things he gives you, follow his instructions, like somebody obeying Christ himself, and keep your eye toward him and not on anyone else, rejecting from yourself any lack of belief or incertitude, and more than these rejecting any pride, all desire of your own will. In this way, simply and without affectation, follow the master's footsteps, while keeping before you your conscience like a mirror of clear certainty, to that you can be certain of your extreme and pure obedience to your master.

But if at any time the devil, who hates good, plants in your intellect one or other contrary thing, get away from him quickly, as from fornication or as from fire, and enter into yourself; respond wisely to the imposter who has sought to suborn you, so that he who is being led does not start to lead, but that he who leads conducts him who is led. It is not for me to judge who commands me, but it is for him to cleanse my judgement. I am not his judge, but he is my judge, as St John Klimakos says¹ among other similar sentences of his. Nothing, to speak directly, is more truthful than this conduct, that is to say obedience, if one has resolutely decided to rip up the manuscript of one's own faults, and to have oneself written into the divine book of the saved. According to the blessed Paul, the Son of God, our God the Saviour Jesus Christ, who has taken on our form for us, and very wisely set at work the Father's kindness, has opened up the way. Despite the carelessness shown by mankind, he received the words which the Father spoke. 'For he put himself down, he says, in being obedient even up to death, and death on the cross. Which is why he has raised him and given him a name...' (Phil. 2 : 8 - 9). Who then would have the impudence, not to say the ignorance, to await his own entrance to the glory of the Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and receive a reward from the Father, without having chosen to march on the same road of his guide and master, Jesus Christ? The disciple, if he wants to become like the master, should bear all the beauty of the imprint of the model. He tends therefore with all his soul to remain focused on the conduct and the way of life of the one who shaped him, determined to imitate him every day.

It is written that our Lord Jesus Christ was submissive to his father and to his mother (Luke 2 : 51). The Saviour said it himself: 'I am not come to be served, but to serve' (Matt. 20 : 8 - 9). But what about somebody who wishes to live otherwise, in a carelessness and arbitrary way, and without a guide? Does such a man think he can walk according to reason in the divine life? It is not possible, in any manner, because he will miss his destination. John Klimakos says it well: 'In the same way as a man without a guide easily fools himself that he is on the right path, so whoever walks on a unique way with

¹ St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4 (P.G. lxxxviii); E.T., Fr. Lazarus Moore, *Missionary Society of St Paul*: (New York, 1982), Step 4 §7.

total independence gets lost easily, even if he knows all the wisdom of the world.¹ This is why most of those, not to say all of those who walk and refuse advice, sow in pain and with sweat and are for most of their time engaged with dreams. In truth, they harvest very little. Some of them, alas, receive a poisonous feed, rather than the good. They follow their spirit of independence, they please themselves. But nothing is worse. John Klimakos attests to this, when he says: 'You who have undressed yourselves when entering into the arena of intelligent confession, you who want to bear on your neck the yoke of Christ, you who seek to set your own burden on the shoulders of another, you who are rushing to write out the price of your own sale, and who want it to be written that, for that price, you are to be set free, you who are swimming with the help of the hands of another across a great ocean, do you know that you have set out to proceed on the difficult and short way, which has in it a single but unique means of deluding you, which is called independence. By contrast, whoever has once and for all renounced in full to God all that he himself judges beautiful, spiritual and agreeable, arrives at the end of his journey before he even set out. For obedience is this, to refuse to believe, to the point of death itself, that one bears in oneself anything of value.'²

Therefore, taking these things to yourself into your entire intellect, attaching yourself to the demand to live in the best way (cf. Luke 10 : 42), the way which cannot suffer defect, that of stillness which raises itself to heaven, follow those who have brought ordered good to you, and the laws as they have been revealed to you. Above all embrace obedience with joy. Then you will discover the life of stillness. For, just as ascetic and liturgical activity is the foundation of contemplation, so obedience is the foundation of the life of stillness. And do not try to remove the landmarks or destination points which the fathers have given, it is written (cf. Prov. 22 : 28). And: 'Unhappiness belongs to the solitary man' (Ecc. 4 : 10). If you begin by building on such foundations, with time you will cover the house which the Spirit builds with a glorious roof. When the beginnings are not sound, all will be lost. By contrast, when the beginning is sound and tried, what follows is beautiful and securely and well ordered; and if the opposite happens sometimes, it does so on account of our own intention and resolution.

15. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF TRUE SUBMISSION, THOSE WHICH SHOW REAL OBEDIENCE, WHICH REALLY PROVE IT IN A PERSON, AND ARE THE SIGNS OF FAULTLESS SUBMISSION

It is difficult and long to speak of how the submissive person conducts himself. Those who come to live in such a way do so by different approaches. But you must imprint on yourself with a seal some basic things touching that conduct. If you keep them as a benchmark and an infallible rule, you will live

blessedly. We say therefore: whoever vows himself sincerely to obedience, it seems to us, should keep the following five virtues, at all costs. The first is loyalty. There must be pure loyalty without pretence for a spiritual father, a loyal faith such that the submissive one sees Christ in his father and submits himself to him as to Christ, as the Lord, Jesus has said: 'Whoever has heard you has heard me. Whoever rejects you rejects me, and rejects him who sent me' (Luke 10 : 16). John Klimakos brings to our attention that all that is not done out of loyalty is done in sin.³ The second is truth. He must be honest in work and in language, and in the exact confession of his thought. For it is written: 'Your word is truth from the beginning' (Ps. 119 : 160; LXX). And: 'The Lord searches for the truth' (Ps. 31 : 23; LXX). Christ himself said: 'I am the truth' (John 14 : 6). You must call up truth in yourself. The third is not to do one's own will. For it is said: 'Whoever vows himself to obedience loses himself if he does his own will.' He must constantly break his own will by his own choice, which is to say without being constrained to do so by his spiritual father. The fourth is not to dispute or argue in anything. For argument and dispute are not the behaviour of somebody vowed to piety. St Paul wrote: 'If anyone wants to dispute, we have not that custom, no more than the Churches of God' (1 Cor. 11 : 16). Now, if Christians hold it in common that they simply forbid these things, monks have much more reason to do so. It is the order of the Lord: there must be strict submission. To argue and dispute are the actions of a mind mixed with doubt and pride, just as it is written: 'The monk who is proud argues violently.'⁴ The contrary – to know how to avoid arguing and to avoid disputing – comes by virtue of loyalty and humility. Finally, the fifth virtue is the duty of maintaining exact and sincere confession before the spiritual father. For on the day of tonsure next to the fearful altar of Christ, we promised before God and the holy angels to put at the origin and the end of everything, along with the profession and the alliance which we attach to the Lord, the revelation of the secrets of our heart. The divine David said: 'I will go to the Lord to confess my sins. And you have taken away injustice...' (Ps. 32 : 5; LXX). And John Klimakos: 'The bruises that are uncovered do not grow worse. They will be cured.'⁵

Whoever keeps these five virtues wisely and consciously such as we have listed them here, should know without doubt that he will a token here of the beatitude of the righteous which will come in full hereafter. All of this is tied up with obedience.

Such is the root and the trunk. But understand also the branches and the fruits, and what the canopy of leaves is. 'From obedience, says John Klimakos, is born humility. From humility discernment. From discernment foresight. And from that, prophetic vision.'⁶ Foresight is the work of God alone, a marvellous and supernatural gift which he accords to those who serve him in complete beatitude. Regardless of whatever

³ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 4 §7.

⁴ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 22 : *passim*.

⁵ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 4.

⁶ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 4 §105.

¹ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 26 §53.

² *ibid.*, E.T., Step 4 §5.

else we say, this needs to be said clearly: humility does its work in you in the measure of your strict submission; and discernment does its work in the measure of your humility; and the same goes for every marvellous gift.

Compel yourself, therefore, as much as you can, to make your way along the route of humility, without straying. Then you will arrive at the more advanced stages of the art. But keep an eye on whether you limp and start to slow down as you run toward the finish line. It would be bad for you if you gave up before the end of the journey, which is the life in Christ, and you will not be crowned with the wreath given to champions if you fall short or give up. That is why obedience should be your guide. Keep it close to yourself, all the things we have said about obedience, like the landmark which mariners keep in their sights when they round a headland, so that with your eye always on it, you can cross the great ocean of the virtues, and arrive at the calm port of dispassion. Even when tempest and waves assail you, submission will carry you on. For the devil himself, the fathers say, cannot harm one who is truly obedient.

Before giving you a glimpse of how great a prize the height of obedience is, we will recall a saying of a holy Father. The torch for the life in Christ, our latter day Bezaleel (cf. Ex. 31 : 2) of the celestial Ladder said: 'The fathers showed that psalmody is a weapon, and prayer is a wall, and honest tears are a bath; but blessed obedience in their judgement is confession of faith, without which no one subject to passions will see the Lord.'¹ This, it seems to us, suffices to show very clearly, and to praise the inimitable imitation of, the three times blessed obedience.

But we should also still to try to demonstrate this matter by examples, to look toward the great summits of the mountains before us, things which have happened in the past which shape the terrain; thus, if we attend to the first thing which broke us and brought death to the world, that event which happened at the beginning, we will also see what thing can bring us regeneration and immortality. We find self-sufficiency at the origin of our corruption, independence; the first disobedience of Adam, from which derives rejection and the transgression of the divine commandment (cf. Gen. 3 : 6); and by contrast, at the origin of our incorruptibility and healing is the obedience to his Father of the second Adam, our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the single will of Father and Son, as a consequence of which the divine commandment was observed and not broken: 'For I have not spoken for myself, says the Saviour. But the Father who sent me has himself ordered what I ought to say and do. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. That which I say, I say it as the Father has said it to me' (John 12 : 49 – 50). Just as the root and the mother of all the afflictions for our ancestors and those who came after them was presumption, so in the new man, in the God Man, Jesus Christ, and in those who desire to live as he lived, the origin and source and foundation of all good is humility. The world of the divine angels, the

superterrestrial sacred world which rules over us, and our earthy Church also, keeps to this very attitude and this rule.

But those who set aside this law which has been given to us, and who want to live apart from it, or even live with malice toward it, we have understood them and we believe that they break themselves, and that they are banished far from God, far from the bright cleared place of the heavenly and Catholic Church, and that they are making their way toward the shadow and the fire of Gehenna. It is there that the evil workers who surround Lucifer suffer, and also those boasters who followed the lying heretics of times past. We say it as Holy Scripture describes it. Because of their self-sufficiency and their pride, just as it is written, they have been thrown out of glory and divine reward and from the assembly of the saints.

There are contraries, a sage has said, which cure their contraries. For the cause of all sadness is disobedience and presumption. And the cause of all joy is obedience and contrition. Whoever desires to live without fault ought to lead an existence submissive to an experienced Father, one who has rejected all error, who has gained authority from experience in time and from the science of the things of God, and who has spent his life in the beauty of the circle of the virtues. The orders and the advice of such a Father ought to be considered as if they were the voice and the will of God. It is said, in effect, that health comes from numerous counsels that you receive (cf. Prov. 11 : 14), and that whoever does receive counsel fights with himself. One or another of the glorious fathers could, without passing through the asceticism of submission, come to deifying stillness and the perfection of the divine life. Such a person has received a revelation from God. But this is rare. Now, it is written, that what is rare is not the law of the Church, in the same way that a single starling does not make Spring. As for you, confine yourself to true submission as to a science which can allow you to enter into the whole beauty of stillness. Leave aside those things which happened once because of a particular decision of God, and conform yourself to the commonly accepted decisions of the venerable fathers. It is in this way that you will be judged worthy of the reward due to those who live according to the law.

Why is this a big deal? Nobody, if he lacks experience, would choose to go this way without a guide by his side; nor cross the high seas without a good navigator; nor, likewise, take up an art or science without an authoritative teacher. Now, standing before the art of arts and the science of sciences, before the road which leads to God, before this infinite spiritual ocean, which is the solitary life equal to the life of angels, who would attempt to dedicate himself to set off on the ascetic life, and believe that he could see it through to the end, without a guide, a pilot, a proven and real Master? Such a man, whoever he may be, can do nothing but deceive himself (Gal. 6 : 3); before he even begins he has lost his way. Because he does not follow the law. And by contrast, whoever, even before making his first steps, has submitted himself to what the fathers have required, has already arrived at the destination.

¹ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 4 §8.

If we are outside of the influence of the fathers, how will we know, for example, if we walk according to the flesh in the way of natural men, or if we do what is right and make combat with the passions and the demons? For vices, as it is written, attach themselves to virtues, and are close neighbours of them. Who, if he is outside of the influence of the fathers, can educate us about the senses of the body, and pluck as on a harp the abilities and powers of the soul? And above all, how will it be possible for him to discern the voices and the revelations, the consolations and the visions of God, as things different from the tricks, the illusions and the phantasms of demons? To say everything in a single word, how will we be judged worthy to arrive at union with God, to join in celebrations of the servants of God, in mysteries, if we have not been initiated by an enlightened and true guide? This simply cannot happen. It is not possible. When we see that vase or jar of election, the blessed Paul, the initiate of ineffable mysteries, the mouth of Christ himself, the light of the world, the sun visible to all, the leader of all the people of the world, who transmitted and deepened the Gospels with the other apostles, saying 'I fear, he said, to run or to have run for nothing' (Gal. 2 : 2), or when we see our Lord Jesus Christ, wisdom in person, say of himself: 'I descended from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of the Father who has sent me' (John 6 : 38); when he says of the life-giving Holy Spirit: 'It will not talk of itself, but it will tell you what it has heard' (John 16 : 13); when we see this great order which holds between heaven and earth, we are seized by terror, by a stupor and anguish before our nothingness and failure, particularly those of us who chose stupidly and dangerously, out of foolishness and pride, to live by their own way and in obedience to nothing.

Such combat is truly terrible. The thieves are innumerable. The traps which brigands put out are myriad. And the ship wrecks have no measure. And so among so many of us, only a small number are saved (cf. Luke 13 : 23). But they walk as they like. 'Fire will prove what works were done by each person' (1 Cor. 3 : 13), as it is said. And: 'You render to each according to his works' (Ps. 62 : 12; LXX). Above all it suffices not only to want, but to want and to live properly. May God give everyone intelligence (cf. 2 Tim. 2 : 7). But you, and whoever wants to live with God and to attempt to understand him, as if by hanging onto the fringes of such words as these, the fringes of the spiritual cloth of made wholly of gold which is blessed obedience, you should quickly find a reliable and perfect master, as has been shown.

Solid food, says Paul, who carried Christ within him, is the food of those who have attained the monastic degree of perfect and who have, in part because of their maturity in years, trained their senses to discern good from evil (cf. Heb. 5 : 14). If this is what you are looking for, then in pain and with faith, you will not go without but you will have the final thing which is offered to us. For, Scripture says, whoever asks receives, whoever searches finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Matt. 7 : 8). Such a master will initiate you in all necessary things in the proper sequence and order, in all things which God loves, and in addition, he will lead you

toward the most spiritual things, which please God still more and which are not given to many, when he sees you rejoicing in your soul with the measure, with the soberness, with the simplicity which you give to eating, drinking, clothes and other ornamentation, and he will see you content with things useful and necessary for the moment, and not complaining about vain and soft things which are enjoyed and celebrated by people who live stupidly in negligence and frivolity, people who point their own sword against themselves and their own health. The great Apostle says: 'Be content with food and clothing' (1 Tim. 6 : 8).

Now you have asked, you want to grasp, you want to know from us in writing, what accords with the beginning, the middle, and the end of the life in Christ. The question is praiseworthy, but the answer is naturally difficult. However, Christ gives you the right to an answer, and we will force ourselves to accede to your request. As we are building the glorious temple which will contain all spiritual constructions, basing it on the solid and firm foundation of venerable and perfect obedience, we now need to talk about deifying life of stillness. In what we have to say further, the words of the fathers inspired by the Spirit do our work for us, and we are supported by them as if by unshakable columns.

16. THAT IN THE NAME OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH, WHOEVER WANTS WITH COMPLETE FIDELITY TO LIVE THE LIFE OF STILLNESS WITH GOD, SHOULD AIM TO BE FULL OF GOOD WORKS. FAITH IS TWOFOLD. THAT WITH FAITH ONE MUST BE PEACEFUL, LIVE OUTSIDE ALL DISTRACTION, REMAIN WITHOUT INQUIETUDE AND WITHOUT DESIRE, QUIET HIMSELF, BE CALM, GIVE THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, EXAMINE HIS OWN WEAKNESS, NOBLY UNDERGO TEMPTATIONS, HOPE IN GOD, AND AWAIT FROM HIM WHAT IS GOOD FOR US

A. The Saviour said: 'It is not the one who says to me 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7 : 21). You, therefore, well-loved, if it is not only in words that you love out of love for deifying stillness, which is known to make the light of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God appear in those who receive it with all their loyalty, and which will make it appear yet more completely and more perfectly in the age to come, but if your desire of love is real and true, then in the name of the orthodox faith, desire also to be full of good works. Push yourself for your part to be gentle with all, don't let yourself be distracted or unsettled, that is to say desire nothing, be silent, calm, aware of things, and conscious of your own weakness. To say it all, maintain a sober and watchful eye on the different and numerous temptations which come with every new day, fight with patience and perseverance the tempest and torment which will assail you in every way.

For the first and second points – that is, in the name of the orthodox faith do good works – the glorious brother of God

should be your clear master, when he says: 'Faith without works is dead. And the same for works without faith.' And: 'Show me your faith by your works' (Jam. 2 : 17 - 18). But above all the guide and master of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, said to his disciples: 'Go and teach all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Tell them to keep the commandments which I have given you' (Matt. 28 : 19 - 20). And Gregory the Theologian says that God demands these three things of anyone who has been baptised: faith in the soul, chastity in body, and truth in speech.

That faith is twofold

B. Note that, according to divine tradition, faith is twofold. The one part is the general faith of orthodox Christians, in which since the start of our lives, we have been baptised, and in which we will depart this life. The other is found among rare men, men who, having fulfilled all the deifying commandments, have returned to that state in which they are the image and resemblance of God, and having been made rich by the divine light of grace, they place in the Lord all their trust (cf. Ps. 73 : 28; LXX). And they are such that when they pray, according to the instruction of the Lord, they do not know what they ask of God (cf. Matt. 21 : 21), but they search for it with faith and – what reward! – they easily receive what is best for them. The blessed have acquired the certainty of faith which comes with doing pure works. They have thrown out of themselves all knowledge, all prejudice, all doubt, all desire. And completely plunged in the divine drunkenness of faith, with trust and love for God, they have been transformed by the excellent and blessed transformation of the right hand of the Most High, as the divine David said (Ps. 77 : 10; LXX).

There is no room here to expand on the first kind of faith. But it is entirely opportune to speak of the second faith which, like a divine fruit, flourishes and grows from the first. Faith is, in effect, like the root and the branch of stillness which we describe as deifying. 'For it you do not believe,' says John Klimakos, 'how can you practice the life of stillness?'¹ The divine David also says: 'I have believed, and that is why I have spoken' (Ps. 116 : 10; LXX). And the great apostle Paul: 'Faith is the foundation of what I hope, the proof of what cannot be seen' (Heb. 11 : 1). And: 'The righteous will live by faith' (Rom. 1 : 17). The Lord himself said to the disciples when they asked him how to increase their faith: 'If you were to have faith like a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree: "Uproot yourself and throw yourself into the sea", and it would do so' (Luke 17 : 6). And: 'If you were to have faith were had no doubt, not only could you do what I have done to the fig tree, but if you were to say to this mountain: "Rise and throw yourself in to the sea", it would do so. Everything which you will ask for in belief and by prayer, you will receive it' (Matt. 21 : 22). And: 'Your faith has

saved you' (Matt. 9 : 22). St Isaac writes in the same vein: 'Faith is more refined than knowledge, just as knowledge is more refined than physical things. All the saints judged worthy of finding this way of life, which throws them into the fear of God, pass over to the delights of this way of life of the supernatural world, in effect, by virtue of their faith.

'What we call faith is not the belief in the distinction of the divine and beloved Persons, or in the extraordinary nature belonging to the Divinity, or in the admirable economy which has given divinity to mankind, so that our nature is part of it, so elevated as these things may be. The faith of which we speak raises itself with the light of grace in the soul with the oversight of conscience. This faith comforts the resolute heart with the obvious certainty of hope, far from any presumption or wilfulness. One does not find it in what is given to the ears to hear, but it shows to the spiritual eye the hidden mysteries of the soul. It distributes the secret riches of God, hidden from the eyes of the sons of the flesh, and revealed to the spirit of those who eat at the table of Christ and converse together about his laws, as it is said: "If you want to keep my commandments, I will send to you the Comforter, the Spirit of truth which the world cannot receive. And he will teach you all truth..." (John 14 : 17; & 16 : 13).' And again: 'Until he comes, he who is the fulfilment of the mysteries, and until we are worthy to see their revelation, faith must celebrate the liturgy of these ineffable mysteries between God and the saints. We can be found worthy of the revelation here, too, as if such vision were a pledge given to us by the grace of Christ himself, and we will see it in the beyond, too, at the source of truth itself, in the kingdom of heaven, alongside those who love him.'²

That you must be peaceful

C. As for the third order – be at peace with all – , know that the word of the blessed David should be a clear instruction; and that, at the same time, the word of Paul who bore Christ, which resounds more loudly than a trumpet. The one said: 'A great peace is in them who love your law, and they will not fall' (Ps. 119 : 165; LXX). And: 'With those who hate peace, I remain at peace' (Ps. 120 : 7; LXX). And: 'Look for peace and follow it' (Ps. 34 : 14; LXX). The other says: 'Search for peace with everyone and that sanctification without which you will not see the Lord' (Heb. 12 : 14). And: 'If it is possible for you, be at peace with everyone' (Rom. 12 : 18).

That you must live away from all distractions

² 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), §62-65, 18-20, pp. 420-22.

The English translation by A.J. Wensinck (Amsterdam, 1923) does not follow the Greek numbering of the fragments, and has not been referred to here.

¹ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 27 §68.

D. The fourth order – to live away from all distractions – , St Isaac demonstrates this when he says: ‘If covetousness grows from the senses, then they should be quiet, who say that they guard the peace of their intellect while leading a life of agitation.’¹ And: ‘Do not share the life of distracted people.’²

That you should be without restlessness and without desires

E. The lesson of the fifth order – remain without restlessness and without desire for things good and bad – can be given to you in what the Lord says in the Gospels: ‘This is why I say to you: do not unsettle your soul about what you will eat, nor about how you will dress your body. Isn’t the soul more than food and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap. They don’t gather in storehouses. And your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you worth more than them? Who among you, by his desires, can add a second to the span of his life? So why do you worry about your clothing?’ (Matt. 6 : 25 – 28). And a bit later: ‘Do not worry yourself then, saying: What will we eat, what will we drink, with what will we be clothed? All of these things, the unbelievers care about. Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. Instead, search for the kingdom of God and his justice. And all of these things will be given to you with interest. Do not concern yourself for tomorrow. For tomorrow will look after itself. The trouble of one day is enough’ (Matt. 6 : 31 – 34). St Isaac says: ‘If you still worry or hesitate, do not look for light in your soul, nor for calm and repose in the vanity of your senses.’³ And John Klimakos: ‘A single hair bothers the eye, and the least desire destroys stillness. For stillness is the retreat of thought and the renunciation of reason to desire. Whoever truly has received the life of stillness has no desires deriving from the flesh. The Lord promises and is faithful.’⁴

That you should be silent

F. As for the sixth order – be quiet – , we are forced to speak of it by following our overall plan. St Isaac says on this subject: ‘Whoever closes his mouth against idle talk keeps control of his heart and its passions. And whoever who purifies his heart its passions contemplates the Lord at all times.’⁵ And: ‘If you place all the works of an active life in one pan of a scale, and in the other pan all the works of silence, you will find that the latter weighs more.’⁶ And: ‘Love silence more than anything, for it comes to you with fruits. Language is unable to explain it. Therefore we should force ourselves to be silent. Now, from silence something is

born in us which leads us into silence itself. I wish that God would let you know this thing which comes from silence. If you begin to lead this life aside from life, I am not able to describe the light that will shine on you.’ And again: ‘Silence is the mystery of the age to come. And words are the organs of this world.’⁷ It is thus that the divine voice prescribed to St Arsenios: ‘Arsenius, flee from men, be quiet, look for stillness, and you will be saved.’⁸

That you should be calm

G. Regarding the seventh order – live in stillness – you can believe both what Basil the Great demonstrated and also in a different way St Isaac. The first said: ‘Stillness is the beginning of the purification of the soul.’⁹ And the other: ‘The end of stillness is the silence far from everything.’¹⁰ The one by his words signified concisely the beginning, the other the end, of stillness. It is said in the Old Testament: ‘Have you sinned? Hold yourself in stillness’ (Gen. 4 : 7). And: ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Ps. 46 : 10; LXX). John Klimakos says: ‘The first task which leads to stillness is to rid ourselves of desire for any thing, good or bad. For whoever works for the good falls in every case into the bad. The second work is active prayer. And third, the work of the heart, which is immaculate. It is impossible for somebody who does not know how to read to learn from books. But it is still more impossible for those who have not acquired the first skill to achieve the other two.’¹¹ And St Isaac: ‘The love of the life of stillness is the constant anticipation of death. Whoever enters into stillness outside of this meditation on death will not be able to support what we must endure and hold onto in every way.’¹²

That you must give thanks for everything

H. As for the eighth order – give thanks for everything – , we say that it suffices to look to the divine apostle Paul for guidance, who orders: ‘Give thanks in all things’ (1 Thess. 5 : 18). And St Isaac: ‘When a person gives thanks for something received, it leads to the giver making more generous gifts later on. Whoever does not give thanks in the smallest things becomes a liar and to be unjust in bigger things.’¹³ And: ‘What opens the charism of God to a man is the heart which is lead by the constant giving of thanks. But temptation, to which the soul is open wide, would like to tell us, that our heart is always raised by murmuring.’ And: ‘A mouth which offers

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *Apophthegmata*, alphabetical collection, Arsenios 1; E.T., Sister Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (2nd ed., London/Oxford, 1981), p. 9.

⁹ St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 2 (2); E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ascetical Homilies*; §79, 17, p. 480.

¹¹ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 27 §46.

¹² *Ascetical Homilies*; §34, 13, p. 272.

¹³ *ibid.*; §30, 1, p. 235.

¹ *ibid.* §1, 15, p. 72.

² Evagrius the Solitary, *Rerum monachalium rationes*; P.G. xl (1251); E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, *On Asceticism and Stillness*, p. 31.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §13, 2, pp. 420-22.

⁴ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 27 §51-2.

⁵ *Ascetical Homilies*; §43, 1, p. 305.

⁶ *ibid.*; §34, 7, p. 269.

thanks continually receives benediction from God.’ And: ‘Into the heart which remains in a state of giving thanks grace descends.’¹

That you must understand your own weakness

I. How much he gains who has arrived at the condition of knowing his own weakness: this is the ninth order. We say that you should listen to and take in the sixth psalm of holy David, where he says: ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak’ (Ps. 6 : 3). And elsewhere: ‘I am a worm and not a man, the shame of men and the reproach of the people’ (Ps. 22 : 6. LXX). And St Isaac: ‘Happy the man who knows his own weakness. This knowledge is the foundation in him, the root, the beginning of all goodness. When one has grasped, in better, when one has felt in truth his own weakness, then he has separated his soul far from the vanity which obscures knowledge, he has regained in himself the treasure of watchfulness.’² And: ‘The man who has arrived at the stage of knowing the measure of his own weakness has arrived at perfect humility.’³

That you must bear with temptations

J. The last text of this discourse, the tenth, which concludes our exposition, establishes how to nobly bear with the diverse temptations of every sort which will confront you, and how to resist them with perseverance and patience. Hear therefore what Scripture says on this subject. Christ-bearing Paul says: ‘Brothers, we do not have to fight flesh and blood, but the dominions, powers, and princes of the world who reign in the darkness of this time, spirits of evil in celestial places’ (Eph. 6 : 12). And: ‘If you have no experience of the chastisement which all of you have received, you are bastards and not sons’ (Heb. 12 :8). And: ‘The Lord corrects those he loves. He beats every son he accepts (Heb. 12 : 6; cf. Prov. 3 : 12). And the brother of God: ‘The man who has no experience of temptation has not been proven’ (James 1 : 12). And St Ilias the Presbyter: ‘It is permitted every Christian to have an upright faith in God, to live away from all desire, but he must also to wait continuously for and to receive temptation, so that when it arrives he is not surprised, not troubled, but able to support the pain of its affliction while giving thanks, and to understand what is meant when we chant with the prophet: “Save me, Lord, test me” (Ps. 26 : 2; LXX). He must not say: “Your education has destroyed me,” but: “It has stirred me at last” (Ps. 18 : 35; LXX).’⁴ No longer search for the cause of temptations, nor unsettle yourself about where they come from. Only pray God you can support them while giving thanks, as St Mark the Hermit says: ‘When temptation arises,

do not search why or by what means it has come. But find out how to support it while giving thanks without resentment.’ And again: ‘Because it is not easy to find a man who leads an agreeable life far from temptations, you must give thanks to God for everything which comes your way.’ And: ‘Every affliction brings to light the power which pushes the will sometimes right, sometimes left. This is why any affliction which comes can also be called a proof. It gives to him who receives it the knowledge of his unconscious will.’⁵

St Isaac equally, along with others, says: ‘Temptation is useful to every man. Just as it was useful to Paul, who said that every mouth must close, so that the whole world would know itself guilty before God (cf. Rom. 3 : 19). Those who fight are tested hard, so that they can add to their wealth. And those who lead an easy life are tested, too, so that they can learn to keep away from what harms them. And those who sleep are tested, so that they will be ready to get up. And those who are far from God, so that they will approach. And those who live in the house, so that they can be confident living there. Any son who has not been proven will not receive the riches of the house of his father, and will get no help. That is why God begins by testing and tempting him, before giving any reward. Glory to the Master who gives a hard remedy which later on takes us to the reward of health. He should be exhausted when he exercises. And he should find it bitter when the time comes to taste the poison of temptation. But it is impossible without these hardships to acquire a good constitution.’ And: ‘The ability to endure alone does not belong to us. How can a vase made of clay hold the water which flows in it, unless it has been baked by divine fire? If we submit ourselves humbly in prayer in a continual tension, it is given to us to endure everything with Christ our Lord.’⁶ It is written in the Book of Sirach: ‘My child, if you come to serve the Lord your God, prepare your soul for temptation’ (Sir. 2 : 1). And: ‘Make your heart straight, persevere, do not let yourself go when you are in distress’ (Sir. 2 : 2).

That you must hope in God and await all that is good from him

Throw the anchor toward God who can save, and for your benefit you will receive from him deliverance from temptations. It is written: ‘God is faithful and does not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear. But with temptation, he will give to us the means of escape from it’ (1 Cor. 10 : 13). And: ‘Affliction engenders perseverance, success in the trial; and this success is hope. Now, hope never misleads’ (Romans 3 : 3,15). And: ‘Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved’ (Matt. 10 : 22). And: ‘By your perseverance you will save your souls’ (Luke 21 : 19). The brother of God said, likewise: ‘Consider, my brothers, that it is a great joy to be

¹ *ibid.*; §73, 3, p. 453 (both citations).

² *ibid.*; §21, 1, p. 175.

³ *ibid.*; §73, 2, p. 453.

⁴ Ilias the Presbyter, *Gnomic Anthology*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, *Gnomic Anthology* I, §1, p. 34.

⁵ St Mark the Ascetic, *On Those who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works* 198, 200, 204; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, pp. 142-3.

⁶ *Ascetical Homilies*; §48, 5, p. 335.

exposed to diverse temptations, knowing that the test of your faith engenders patience. But patience makes its works perfect, so that you yourselves will be perfect and finished, failing in nothing' (James 1 : 2, 4). And: 'Blessed the man who undergoes temptation with patience. When he has been tested, he will receive the crown of life, that the Lord has promised to those who love him' (James 1 : 12). And: 'The suffering of the present time cannot be compared to the glory to come which will be revealed to us' (Romans 8 : 18). And: 'I have put my patience with the Lord, and it is returned to me, he has heard my prayer, he has delivered me from the pit of misfortune and the mire of clay. He has placed my feet on rock, he has direct my footsteps. And he has sent put in my mouth a new song, a praise of our God' (Ps. 40 : 2, 3. LXX).

The blessed Symeon Metaphrastes writes: 'The soul tied up in the cords of the love of God does not consider at all what it suffers. It makes delight from miserable events, and blossoms when harm is done to it. But when it suffers no afflictions on account of the one it loves, then truly it feels sadness. In that case, the soul flies from comfort as if it were damnation.'

17. OF THE FEAR OF GOD. THAT IT IS TWOFOLD. THE ONE IS THAT OF BEGINNERS. THE OTHER THAT OF THE PERFECT.

It is necessary meanwhile to go back to the two types of divine fear, the more so, because we have decided hitherto only to talk of the fear which belongs to the perfect, which we did during the ten texts which we have written up to now, so that we have left the topic unfinished, and reversed the order, making the second first. Fear has been placed next after faith by the fathers.

Of the first type of fear, the fear belonging to beginners

Know then, beloved, that divine fear is twofold: the one is that of beginners, the other than of the perfect. It is written concerning the first: 'Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 1 : 7). And: 'Come, children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord' (Ps. 34 : 11. LXX). And: 'In fear of the Lord, every man refrains from evil' (Prov. 14 : 27). And: 'Fear is the observance of the commandments.'¹ Saint Isaac says: 'The fear of God is the beginning of virtue. It is said that it is born from faith.'² And: 'It is sowed in the heart when the intellect separates itself from worldly distraction in order to gather those thoughts which went awry in dispersion and gather then in constant meditation on future re-establishment.' And: 'The fear of God is the beginning of the true life of man. It cannot abide staying in the soul of those who disperse their concentration.' And: 'Have the

wisdom to base your wayfaring on the fear of God. In a few days you will find yourself back before the gates of the kingdom, free from circular wandering.'

Of the second type of fear, divine perfect fear

As for the second type of fear, divine perfect fear, it is said: 'Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who puts all his will into following his commandments' (Ps. 112 : 1. LXX). And: 'Blessed all those who fear the Lord, they walk in his ways' (Ps. 128 : 1. LXX). And: 'Fear the Lord, all his saints. For they will lack nothing who fear him' (Ps. 34 : 9. LXX). And: 'Behold, thus the man who fears the Lord is blessed' (Ps. 128 : 4. LXX). And: 'The fear of the Lord is clean, it stays firm through the ages of ages' (Ps. 19 : 9. LXX).

St Peter of Damaskos says: 'A sign of the first fear is hatred of sin, to bear oneself against it, like one who has been bitten by an animal. But here is a sign of the perfect fear: to love virtue and to guard against being turned. For everything can change. At all times in this life we should anticipate a fall.'³ That is why you also, who understand these things with the intellect, must force yourselves, to bear the second fear as you must the first. For it is a treasure more sure than any good work. If you do so, you will guide your steps toward the work of all the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ. And moving along that way, you will acquire perfect and pure fear (cf. Ps. 19 : 9), in the desire for virtue and the love of our good God.

18. THAT FOR THE SAKE OF THE COMMANDMENTS AND THE FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT FAITH WHICH IS IN THE COMMANDMENTS, WHEN THE TIMES COMES, WE SHOULD BE READY TO GIVE UP OUR LIVES

Further to what we have just said, you should also know this: for the sake of the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ who grants life, and for the sake of the faith which passes through them, we ought, in times to come, give up this same life with joy. That's to say, that we do not need to manage our lives. It is this which the Lord Jesus Christ himself says: 'Whoever loses his life in my name and for the Gospel, he will save himself' (Mark 8 : 35). You should believe without hesitation, and have no doubt that the God Man, Jesus the Saviour, is himself the resurrection, the life, and that which leads to safety, as he said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, he lives.' And: 'Whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11 : 25, 26). And: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him will not die, but will have eternal life' (John 3 : 16). And: 'I am come so that they will

¹ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* XXXIX, 8; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 354.
² *Ascetical Homilies*; §1, 1, p. 69.

³ St Peter of Damaskos, *Book II – Twenty-Four Discourses* 3; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, pp. 218.

have life and so that they will have it more abundantly (John 10 : 10).

Do this, therefore. Forget what is behind; head toward what is in front of you (cf. Phil. 3 : 13). Go your way with Christ Jesus our Lord without turning aside. But it is good here, it seems to us, and completely useful, to describe the physical method of the blessed the great Nikiphoros [seems to mean, Nikiphoros the Monk, Vol. 4, 194 ff.], when he taught us how to enter into the heart alongside our breath through the nose, something which tends in a certain manner to collect together the intellect. Thus, with the help of God, the course of the present work will progress in good order. Among other things which derive their authority from the witness of the saints, this divine says this:

19. PHYSICAL TECHNIQUE BEARING ON THE ENTRY AND THE EXIT OF BREATH IN THE HEART BY RESPIRATION, AND ON THE PRAYER WHICH, WITH THE RESPIRATION, DOES ITS WORK IN US. THIS PRAYER IS: LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME. SUCH A TECHNIQUE TENDS IN SOME MANNER TO CONCENTRATE THE INTELLECT

‘Know, brother, that the breath which we breathe is air. And we never breathe this air unless for the heart. The heart is, in effect, the source of life and heat in the body. The heart attracts breath in order to send outward its own heat by exhalation, and to give itself a suitable temperature. The author, or better the servant of such a process, is the lung. It was made with porous by the Creator. Like a bellows, it makes the air enter and exit without difficulty. Thus the heart, attracting the cold breath and expelling the hot, keeps and never breaks the order by which it is ruled with a view to maintaining the living being.

‘So, you, seated in the calm of your cell and gathering your intellect, make it – your intellect – enter by way of your nostrils, inward with the breath so it penetrates the heart. Push it and force it to remain with the inspired breath in the heart. Once it has entered, and it is no longer without joy nor without grace, the things which come afterward will occur to you. Just as a man who has been distant from his home exults with joy when he returns, because he can see his wife and children again, so the intellect, when it is reunited with the soul, is filled with pleasure and with ineffable rejoicing.

‘Therefore, brother, habituate the intellect not leave the heart quickly. For at first it is uninterested in letting itself be closed and trapped inside. But when it has become used to this, it will no longer want to bother itself with movements exterior to the heart. For the kingdom of heaven is in us (cf. Luke 17 : 21). Whoever has contemplated the kingdom of heaven in the heart and who looks for it by way of the pure prayer, all things outside appear odious and hateful.’

And again: ‘It is a thing which you must grasp, when you intellect has arrived at this point: you must not leave it in silence and inertia, but give it work and exercise with the continuous prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have

mercy on me. And see that it never ceases to say this. For prayer keeps guard against dispersion. Prayer stops the intellect from being dragged down and touched by the outrages of the enemy. It raises the intellect every day into the love and the desire of God’¹

And this is the primary aim of the blessed Father: that from its habitual separation, from its captivity, its agitation, the intellect, by the activity of this physical technique, returns to watchfulness; that by means of watchfulness it attaches itself to itself and unites itself to prayer; and then, at the same moment as the prayer, the intellect makes the descent down into the depths of the heart and remains there always. Another sage of God, discussing in another place the practice we are describing, begins naturally with his experience of this sacred work, and says:

20. OF THE NATURAL RESPIRATORY METHOD, AND THE INVOCATION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS ACCOMPANIMENT TO RESPIRATION

‘This is a thing which you should make clear to a person who seriously wants to understand the matter: If when the breath enters, and we introduce our intellect into it, so as to let it descend, then we should be clear that the intellect, should not enter the heart before having renounced all thought, so as to be naked and pure, without any content other than that of the invocation of our Lord Jesus Christ. But when it leaves the heart, it returns to the external world, into multiple memories of things, and splits up again despite itself.’²

21. THAT ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, LIKE OTHERS AMONG THE ANCIENT FATHERS, INSTRUCTS US TO PRAY IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AND TO PRAY INSIDE THE HEART. HE SAYS THT THIS PRAYER IS: LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME.

The great Chrysostom says also: ‘I pray you, brothers, never transgress, never hate the rule of prayer.’ And a bit further on: ‘When he eats, when he drinks, when he sits, when he walks, whatever he does, the monk should say continually: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’’³ And further on: ‘That the name of the Lord Jesus, descended into the depth of the heart, drives away the dragon who holds the lands, that it saves the soul and gives it life. Remain therefore continually with the name of the Lord Jesus, so that the heart absorbs the Lord, that the Lord absorbs the heart, and that the two become one.’ And again: ‘Do not separate your heart

¹ Nikiphoros the Monk, *On Watchfulness*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iv, pp. 205-6.

² Undetermined source.

³ This is the standard form of the Jesus Prayer. The first known occurrence of this form is in the *Life of Abba Philemon (The Philokalia)*, E.T., vol. ii; p. 347), and it is then found in Nikiphoros the Hesychast (*ibid.*, E.T., vol. iv; p. 206), and then in Gregory of Sinai (*ibid.*, E.T., vol. iv; p. 275).

from God. But remain in him and keep the heart always in the memory of our Lord Jesus Christ, until the name of the Lord is planted there, and so that it thinks of nothing else, until Christ is exalted in you.¹

22. OF THE REMEMBRANCE OF JESUS BY RESPIRATION AND PRAYER IN THE INTERIOR OF THE HEART

John Klimakos writes: 'The remembrance of Jesus should be attached to respiration. Then you will know the help value of stillness.'² And St Hesychios: 'If you truly want to shame distracting thoughts, to live the life of stillness without any problem, to easily make your heart watchful, attach the prayer of Jesus to your breathing. You will see what you want coming after a few days.'³

23. THAT WHOEVER WANTS TO BE SOBER AND WATCHFUL OF INTELLECT, AND IN PARTICULAR THE BEGINNER, SHOULD SIT DOWN AT THE TIME OF PRAYER IN A SMALL, DARK AND CALM ROOM, IN ORDER TO RECOLLECT IN A NATURAL WAY, EVEN IF IT IS ONLY PARTIALLY, HIS INTELLIGENCE AND THOUGHT

So, to what has already been said, that which comes from above, and to what the great holy fathers have declared at length in their works, when they argued that we should follow the breath down into the heart in prayer, with attention and watchfulness, and when they argued how we ought to remain in our Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, in his holy and saving name, asking him for mercy, we must add this:

The holy fathers, the masters, those who had experience of this blessed work, taught and prescribed to those who wanted to apply all their intellect to being watchful in the heart, and particularly to novices, that they should sit in quiet, and certainly do so at times designated for prayer, and they should do so in a corner without light. For the sight of the eyes, the vision projected onto things we see or observe, will by its nature distract the intellect, divide it, tear and modify it. But if, as we are going to explain, you shut yourself up in your quiet and darkened cell, the intellect ceases to be divided and modified by what you can see and watch. Then, whether it wants it or not, at least partially, the intellect is carried into serenity, it habituates itself to collecting itself in itself, as Basil the Great says: 'The intellect which is not spread outside, which does not flow into the world through the senses, turns on itself.'⁴

24. THAT THE INTELLECT IS DELIVERED FROM ALL DISTRACTION FIRST AND FOREMOST BY THE INVOCATION IN THE HEART, WITH FAITH, OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST WITH HIS HOLY NAME. THE PHYSICAL TECHNIQUE OF BREATHING IN THE INTERIOR OF THE HEART, MEDITATION IN A CALM AND SOMBRE PLACE, AND SIMILAR THINGS, ARE ONLY AUXILLIARY

But before these things, or above all, the intellect comes to the end of such combat only through the assistance of divine grace, which is given to us through faith by means of the simple and undistracted invocation of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ deep in the heart. But not simply by the physical method, not simply by the breathing and the stillness of body in a quiet and dark place, which we have described. Far from it. For the holy Fathers have seen in these things nothing but ancillary factors helping to concentrate the intellect, to make it return to itself, outside its habitual agitation, and provide it with focused attention.

It is by this, we have said, that the pure prayer, continual and focused, is born in the intellect. This is what St Neilos says: 'If your attention is directed toward prayer it will find it. For prayer follows attention, more than it follows anything else. We must seek to get a grip on attention.'⁵ But that is enough. You, my child, if you want life, if you love to see good days (cf. Ps. 34 : 12. LXX), and want to live in your body as if you were without a body, live according to the following rules and boundaries.

25. HOW THE HESYCHAST SHOULD SPEND THE TIME BETWEEN EVENING AND DAWN. START OF THIS INSTRUCTION

At sunset, after having asked for help from the infinitely good and all powerful Lord, sit down on a pallet in a quiet and dark cell. Collect your intellect into its own sphere and away from its customary wandering in the outside world. Push it gently into the heart while breathing in. And bind into it the prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.' At the same time as the breath, and as if unified with the breath as it moves inwards, make the words of the prayer enter into the heart, as St Hesychios says: 'To your respiration join watchfulness, alongside the name of Jesus and the constant attentiveness to death and humility. For these two are salutary.'⁶ With the prayer and the other things of which we have spoken, also bear in mind the memory of judgement, and retribution for actions good and bad.

Consider with all your soul that you are more of a sinner than all other men, more accursed than all the demons themselves, and that you are destined for eternal damnation. The thought of these things carries you toward compunction,

¹ Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Epistula ad monachos*; P.G., vol. lx, p. 753.

² *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 27 §61.

³ St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 182; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, pp. 194-5.

⁴ St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 2 (2); E.T., p. 110.

⁵ Evagrius the Solitary, *On Prayer* 149; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 71.

⁶ St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 189; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 196.

to grief, to tears. Persevere in this thought until they come of their own accord. But if you do not receive the gift of tears, you should fight, pray with a humble heart for these things. For it is through tears that we are purified of passions and defilements. It is by acquiring these that we have a part in the saving and enjoyable things, as John Klimakos says: 'Just as fire destroys a reed, so pure tears draw away any defilement of the flesh and the spirit.'¹ And another Father: 'He who wishes to purify his faults purifies them with tears, and he who wishes to acquire virtues acquires them with tears.'²

If you do not suffer compunction, know that you suffer vanity. For vanity is what blocks the soul from gathering itself together. If tears will not come, remain sitting for an hour, attentive to your thoughts while praying. Then rise and chant the Small Compline with attention. Then once again sit down, keeping to the prayer as much as you can, in simplicity, calm, that is to say away from all distraction, all anxiety, all thoughts, without forming any images at all, in complete watchfulness, a half hour, as it is said: 'When praying, you should be withdrawn from every other thing other than breathing and eating, if you want to exist as intellect only.'³ Then make the venerable and life-giving sign of the cross. Go to your bed and do the same again. Sit down, considering future happiness and punishment, the flow of things, the illusion of temporal things, and, to be sure, the unforeseen and general necessity of death, and the terrible judgement after it and before it. Rehearse briefly in your memory all the faults that you have committed; ask forgiveness for these in total sincerity, and recall how you passed your day; sleep, and keep the prayer with you. It has been said: 'Always let the remembrance of death and the Prayer of Jesus said as a monologue go to sleep with you.'⁴ Sleep for five or six hours. Or, better, during the hours of the night, take what sleep comes to you.

26. HOW THE TIME FROM DAWN TO MORNING SHOULD BE SPENT

When you wake up, glorify God, call on him to help you, and begin the first duty: pray in the heart calmly, in complete purity, for an hour. This is the time at which the intellect is most serene, most peaceful. And we have received this order concerning this period: offer to God the sacrifice of what is first and best (cf. Ex. 22 : 29), that is, proffer your first thoughts straight toward our Lord Jesus Christ, with the prayer of the heart, the pure prayer. St Neilos says: 'He accomplishes prayer who always gives to God the fruit of his first thought.'⁵ After that, chant the Midnight Office.

If at that time of day, you cannot offer the first fruits of perfect stillness in this way, whether because you are not

strong enough attain to that, or for some other reason, as can be the case with those who are making their first steps in such work, or as is rare yet still occurring in the case of those who are well advanced but have not yet attained perfection (for the perfect can do everything in Christ, who has given them the power (cf. Phil. 4 : 15)), then get up, rise from sleep, wake yourself up as much as possible, and begin by chanting the Midnight Office with attention and awareness. Then, sit down, pray in the heart, meditate, as we have shown already, for an hour, and for longer than that if the Giver of all good allows you to do so. John Klimakos says: 'During the night, give yourself to prayer as much as possible, and only what is left to the recital of the Psalter. And the next day undertake what you can.'⁶

If you carry out this combat, and yet you still find yourself negligent, and if you suffer listlessness, if your intellect is troubled by some occurrence, then get up, shake yourself, and acknowledge your problem, then continue the prayer. Sit down, watching your prayer, as we have written, applying yourself constantly to the task of coming into contact with the purity of God with the pure prayer. Afterwards get up, and in full awareness chant the Hexapsalmos, then Psalm 51 (LXX), and then a Canon of your choice. Sit down again; stay awake, and pray for a half hour in complete purity. And then get up to chant hymns, your habitual doxology of praises, then the First Hour; after that the Dismissal. What your lips say should be said in a low voice, so as to be audible only to your own ears. We have received the commandment to offer to God the fruits of the lips (cf. Heb. 13 : 15), giving thanks with all our soul, with all our intellect, to the God who loves man, who watches us in all his wisdom, who has given us in his infinite mercy a safe journey across the ocean of the night to see the radiant arena of the present day. And for the coming day, we should fervently implore him to accord us a calm crossing of the black and savage tempest of demons and passions, and have mercy on us.

27. WHAT MUST BE DONE DURING THE MORNING UNTIL BREAKFAST

From dawn until breakfast, as much as you can, consecrate yourself entirely to God. From your broken heart ask him to come and ameliorate your weakness, and your negligence, your irresolution. Pass this time in the prayer of the heart, the pure prayer; meditate, and in your reading read from the Psalter, and from the epistles of the holy evangelists which are prescribed to you, consecrate yourself at the same time with prayers to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the most pure Mother of God; then sit to read other works of the holy Scripture. After that, chant with fully committed intellect the Hours, which the shepherds of the Church knowingly put together. With all your being chase from your soul all idleness, the mistress of all the vices, along with the passions and their

¹ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 7 §31.

² *Apophthegmata*, alphabetical collection, Poemen 119; E.T., p. 184.

³ Ilias the Presbyter; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, *Gnomic Anthology II*, §93, p. 44.

⁴ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 15 §54.

⁵ Evagrius the Solitary; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, *On Prayer* §126, p. 69.

⁶ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 27 §77.

causes, even if or especially when they arise in you in a small and inoffensive way.

28. HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST IDLENESS. THAT IT IS NECESSARY THAT THE ONE SEEKING THE LIFE OF STILLNESS KEEP THE ECCLESIASTICAL TRADITION

This is what St Isaac says: 'O well beloved, guard against idleness. For the death that we can experience in life is hidden in idleness. Avoiding idleness, it will be possible for you to avoid falling into the hands of those who set out to capture monks. It is not for reciting the psalms that God will condemn us today, nor for our readiness to pray, but because in abandoning prayer we let the demons gain entry. Now, if they discover in us a place for themselves, they will enter; they close the doors of our eyes, and then they fill us with their tyranny and their impurity, submitting those who do their works to the judgement of God and the violence of punishment. We fall under their control because we abandon the small things which, for Christ's sake, merit our attention, as the wise have said: whoever does not submit his will to God submits to the adversary's will. These things which seem to you small, consider them as the ramparts and defensive works against those who try to capture us. Those who constructed the discipline of the Church wisely commanded also that it the discipline be observed within your hermitage, to protect your life, in the spirit of revelation. But those who lack wisdom let these defensive ramparts fall apart. They consider them small things. They do not see what evil this neglect can lead to. The beginning and the middle of the way of those men is their private freedom and they will not be instructed. Such freedom is the mother of the passions. It is better to force oneself never to abandon the small things than to let them grow and thereby make room for sin. For the end of this freedom is brutal servitude.'¹

He adds: 'How sweet the sources of the passions are! One can sometimes break with the passions, find oneself in the calm, far from them, and rejoice to see them cease. But one cannot avoid their causes. That's because we are tempted despite ourselves. We are unhappy in the passions, but we love to maintain the sources of the same. We don't want to sin, but we tolerate with pleasure the causes which bring it to us. That is why the action of these causes sustains our sins. Whoever loves the sources of passions is mastered by them, even when he does not want it to be so, and he is submissive to them. But whoever hates his own sin will be detached from them. And whoever confesses them will find pardon. It is impossible to abandon the state of sin before having acquired this hatred, or to find forgiveness before having confessed to the fault. For the one is the cause of true humility; and the other the cause of compunction which, with shame, penetrates the heart.'²

And again: 'There is no sin which cannot be forgiven, save the one over which there has been no repentance.'³ But we have said enough on this subject. You, having engaged in psalmody for the amount of the time we have discussed, should eat, yet hold fast to the prayer while taking your food. If you do this, by the force of grace, you will arrive at a state of continual prayer, according to the commandment (cf. 1 Thess. 5 : 17). Our advice on the type of food which strengthens the body by dint of the ineffable wisdom of the Creator can wait a while. Let us continue with advice touching the other type of food, the one which steadies the soul and gives it life as the saints have it, namely, the sacred prayer, the deifying prayer. And to proceed like that is natural, because the soul is more important than the body.

29. PRAYER. THAT PRAYER SHOULD BE CONTINUAL

Just as our body without the soul is dead and foul, so the soul which does not shift itself toward prayer is dead, miserable and corrupt. That we should consider an absence of prayer to be more bitter than any death, the prophet Daniel has taught us as follows: 'I prefer death to being deprived of prayer for more than an hour (cf. Dan. 6 : 11 ff.).

The divine Chrysostom instructs us as follows: 'Whoever prays converses with God. Nothing among living things can ignore the grandeur of the man who meets with God in prayer, and yet no words can do this meeting appropriate honour. For such an honour surpasses the magnificence of angels.' And again: 'Prayer is the work common to angels and men. In prayer there is no longer any distance between the natures of the one and the other. It is what separates you from the animals, it is what unites you with angels. If anyone pushes himself to consecrate his life to prayer and the adoration of God, he will quickly be transported there where the angels live out their lives, in their dwellings, their honour, their nobility, their wisdom and their comprehension.' And again: 'When the devil sees a soul surrounded by virtues, he does not bother to approach it, he fears the force and the power which prayers give, which nourish the soul more than the food of the body.'

And again: 'Prayer is the muscle of the soul. Just as the muscles give the body its structure and composure, shape and co-ordinated life (but if one damages them, one may destroy all the harmony of the body), so by holy prayer the soul gives and gathers itself, easily receives the crown in the arena of mercy. If you deprive yourself of prayer, it is as if you took a fish from water. For, just as the water is life for the fish, so for you prayer. And by contrast, as a fish in water, it is for you to throw yourself above in the air, to rise to the heavens and approach God.' And: 'Prayer and supplication make temples of God out of men. And just like gold, the precious stones and marble constitute the palaces of royalty, so prayer makes of men temples for Christ. Is there an allure about prayer greater than this: it makes us into temples of God? He

¹ *Ascetical Homilies*; §42, 4, pp. 302-3.

² *ibid.*; §55, 1, p. 361.

³ *ibid.*; §30, 4, p. 235.

whom the heavens cannot contain penetrates the soul which lives in prayer.'

And again: 'One may see here the power of holy prayer. Paul, who travelled the world as if carried on wings, was confined in prison, underwent violence, bore chains, lived among perils and injury, chased out demons, raised the dead, cured illness, did not trust in the rescue from other men despite all this, but he strengthened his soul with prayer. After miracles, after the resurrection of the dead, he hurried to prayer, like an athlete to the exercises which would ensure his crown. For it is prayer which dispenses resurrection of dead and all the rest. The force which water gives to trees, prayer gives to the life of saints.' And again: 'Prayer is the source of health, the door to immortality, the strong defensive work of the Church, an inviolable sentry, fearless with demons, but health-giving to those of us who are clothed in mercy.'

And again: 'Just as a queen entering a town should be followed by a train and great wealth, so, when prayer penetrates the soul, every virtue follows behind.' And again: 'What the foundations are to a house, prayer is to the soul. It must be first, like the foundation, like the root buried in the soul, so as to carefully look after chastity, the needs of the poor, and all the laws of Christ.' And: 'Attentive prayer is the light of the intellect and of the soul. It is a constant light, which never goes out. That is why the evil one attacks our intellect with a myriad of other-worldly thoughts during our prayers. He gathers up all that we have never thought before when we pray and throws it over our soul.' And again: 'Prayer is a great weapon which gives great confidence.'¹

And Gregory the Theologian: 'Remember God when you breathe.' And: 'Think of God more often than you breathe.'²

And St Isaac: 'Without constant prayer you cannot approach God.' And: 'If you have any other need in your head when you make yourself pray, your mind will wander.' And: 'Consider that all prayer which does not fatigue the body and does not wear out the heart is an unripe fruit. For such prayer is not inside the soul.'³

And John Klimakos: 'Prayer by reason of its nature is the converse and union of man with God, and by reason of its action upholds the world and brings about reconciliation with God; it is the mother and also the daughter of tears, the propitiation for sins, a bridge over temptations, a wall against afflictions, a crushing of conflicts, work of angels, food of all the spiritual beings, future gladness, boundless activity, the spring of virtues, the source of graces, invisible progress, food of the soul, the illumination of the intellect, an axe for despair, a demonstration of hope, the annulling of sorrow, the wealth of monks, the treasure of those who practice stillness, the reduction of anger, the mirror of progress, the realisation of success, a proof of one's condition, a revelation of the future, the sign of glory. For him who truly prays, prayer is

the court, the judgement all and the tribunal of the Lord before the judgement to come.'⁴ And again: 'Prayer is nothing other than the estrangement from the world, visible and invisible.'⁵

And St Neilos: 'If you long for prayer, renounce all to gain all.'⁶ And: 'Prayer is the ascent of the intellect towards God.'⁷ And: 'Prayer is communion of the intellect with God.'⁸ And: 'Bread is food for the body and holiness is food for the soul; spiritual prayer is food for the intellect.'⁹

Pay attention to these things. But it is the appropriate time now to discuss as briefly as possible the life of the body, and to explain the necessary rules which apply to it as regards quantity and quality.

30. OF THE LIFE IN THE BODY. HOW THE ONE SEEKING THE LIFE OF STILLNESS SHOULD NOURISH THE BODY

It is written: 'Son of man, eat your bread by weight, and drink your water by measure' (Ezekiel 4 : 10 , 11), so that you are able to lead a life of combat for God. For it is said: 'If you do not give your blood, you will not receive the Spirit.'¹⁰ The great Paul also said: 'I treat my body harshly and I bring it under subjection, so that after having preached to others I will never be found exempt myself' (1 Cor. 9 : 27). And the divine David: 'My knees shake from weakness after fasting. Lacking fat, my flesh is disappearing' (Ps. 109 : 24. LXX).

And Gregory the Theologian: 'Nothing serves God so much as a hard life, and in return for man's tears God gives his love.'¹¹

And St Isaac: 'Just as a father watches over her child, so Christ watches over the body which gives itself to hardship. He is constantly by the side of that body.'¹² And: 'Knowledge of the mysteries of God is not found in a full belly.'¹³ And: 'Just as it is said that what is sown in tears is reaped in joy, so joy follows pain when one gives oneself to God.'¹⁴ And: 'Blessed are they who discard the comforts which separate them from the Creator.'¹⁵

And again: 'Tempted a long time on the right hand and the left, often testing myself on these two ways, having received many injuries which the adversary gave me, but secretly filled with a great reward, I have gathered in myself the experience of long years. And in those tests and by the grace of God I have understood this, that the foundation of all good, the release of the soul out of captivity where the enemy holds it captive, the way which leads to the light and to life, depends

⁴ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 28 §1.

⁵ *ibid.*, Step 28 §25.

⁶ Evagrius the Solitary; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, *On Prayer* §37, p. 60.

⁷ *ibid.*, §36, p. 60.

⁸ *ibid.*, §3, p. 57.

⁹ *ibid.*, §101, p. 67.

¹⁰ *Apophthegmata*, alphabetical collection, Longinus 5; E.T., p. 123.

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* XXIV, 11; P.G., vol. xxxv, 1182B.

¹² *Ascetical Homilies*; §56, 7, p. 369.

¹³ *ibid.*; §23, 6, p. 189.

¹⁴ *ibid.*; §23, 2, p. 187, citing Ps. 126 : 5. LXX.

¹⁵ *ibid.*; §43, 14, p. 311.

¹ All citations: St John Chrysostom, *Homilia VI, De Precatione*; P.G., vol. lxiiv, p. 462-6.

² Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* XXVII, 5; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 286.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §13, 2, p. 137.

above all on two things: to compose oneself in a place of solitude, and always fasting, that is to say while ordering life with temperance of stomach, wisely and prudently, unmoving in the search and the constant attention aimed at God. For it is by this that submission of the senses comes; by this that one discovers watchfulness and intellect, by this that the savage passions which agitate the body are pacified; by this that thinking and worry become still; by this mind is illumined; by this that attentiveness to the divine works of virtue is awakened; by this that thought is concentrated and raised up; by this that we come to tears without restraint and to the remembrance of death; by this that we are given pure chastity, utterly distant from every imagination which torments the intellect; by this that we receive the incisive vision, the sharpness of understanding for what is far away; and by this comes profundity of the intellect, so that we understand the mystical signs and the force of the words of God, and the internal movements which arise in the soul, and with it discernment which permits us to distinguish between demons and holy powers, between true visions and vain imaginations; by this finally the fear which guards the roads and ways which furrow the ocean of mind, fear which puts an end to indifference and negligence; and by this the flame of enthusiasm which surmounts all danger and ignores all fear; and the fervour which hates the appetitive aspect of the soul so damaging to reflection, a fervour which makes us forgetful of every memory of things which have happened. In a word, it is by this that we discover the freedom of the true man, the joy of the soul, the resurrection and the rest with Christ in the kingdom of heaven. If anyone is negligent in these two things, he should know that he will not be able to have what we have described, but that in despising these two virtues, he will undermine the foundations of all virtues. Just as they are the origin and the summit of the divine work in the soul, the door and the way which leads toward Christ if one keeps and perseveres in them, just so if one separates oneself from them, if one distances oneself from them, one ends up at their two contraries, what I would call the excitation of the body, tempestuous over-eating, and what follows from these.¹

And elsewhere: 'On the one hand there are those who are nonchalant and soft since the beginning, who are terrified and troubled not only by such combat and the efforts that make a claim on them, but also by the very noise which the leaves of trees make; when hunger brings the smallest necessity to eat, they are overcome with the smallest weakness. They give up and retrace their steps. On the other hand there are those who are true, proven, who barely feed themselves on vegetables. They live on the roots of dry plants, and they refuse to taste anything before the fixed meal time. They remain on the ground in exhaustion and agony of body. And their eyes see the more clearly the more their body is empty. Carried by this need to eat, they are almost ready to leave the body. But in their strong resolution, they do not let themselves run into discouragement nor do they fall. For they search with all their desire to do themselves violence for the love of God. They

prefer to give themselves to pain for virtue, more than to enjoy this life which passes and the sleep which is in it. And when their temptations arise, they rejoice the more for having overcome them, for having become perfect. In their love for God, they do not hesitate to confront the hard pains which temptations bring. Right up to the moment of departure from this life, it is in their heart to welcome difficulty and they do not recoil from it, for it is in difficulties that they become perfect.'²

Walking the paths taken by these men and those who resemble them, obedient to the one who has commanded: 'Go on the royal way, do not deviate left or right' (Num. 20 : 17), we will reveal to you the method and rule of the just mean, defining it truly in what follows.

31. HOW THE ONE WHO CARRIES OUT SPIRITUAL COMBAT SHOULD NOURISH HIMSELF ON MONDAY, WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY

On three days of the week - Monday, Wednesday, and Friday - always take your meal at the ninth hour,³ and only eat once per day. Eat six ounces of bread, and some dry food, with temperance. Eat what suffices and no more. And drink three or four glasses of water, as you need. Follow the 69th canon of the Holy Apostles: If a bishop, a priest, a deacon, a reader, a chanter does not fast on quadragesimal feast of Pascha, or on a Wednesday or a Friday, without the excuse of an illness of the body, he should be deposed. If a layman does the same, he should be excommunicated. The holy fathers added Monday to this canon at a later date.

32. HOW HE SHOULD NOURISH HIMSELF ON TUESDAY AND THURSDAY

The two other days - Tuesday and Thursday - eat twice. At breakfast eat six ounces of bread, cooked food with temperance, and a bit of dry food. Also take some wine mixed with water, as much as three or four glasses, if you need to do so. In the evening try three ounces of bread, some dry food, or some fruit, with a glass of wine mixed with water, or two more of them, but only if you are very thirsty. For thirst encourages tears, and is the associate of attention, as John Klimakos has written: 'Thirst and vigil afflict the heart, and when the heart is afflicted the waters flow.'⁴ And St Isaac: 'Be thirsty for God, so he will fill you up with his love.'

But if, during these two days, you prefer to take just one meal, you will do well. For the first fruits, the mother, the root, the source, the foundation of all good is restraint and temperance. A secular author has said: 'Chose the best life, and once it has become habit it will be pleasant.' And Basil the Great: 'When you find resolve, there is no difficulty.' And

² *ibid.*; §54, 15, pp. 359-60.

³ Toward the middle of the afternoon.

⁴ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 6 §13.

¹ *ibid.*; §26, 1, pp. 209-10.

another of the fathers who bore God: 'The basis of fruitfulness is the flower. And the basis of the active life is temperance.'¹

Perhaps these things, and those which follow, will appear difficult to some people, or even impossible. But those who consider the fruits which such things can deliver or who see what glory they customarily engender, will judge them to be easy. With the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with his own zeal relative to his strength, he will preach in word and action with ease, and he will give his seal of approval as to their effectiveness. St Isaac says: 'A frugal meal on a clean table cleans all passion from the soul of the one who eats.' And: 'At the table of those used to fasting, who voluntarily and painstakingly restrict themselves for God, receive for yourself a life-giving medicine.' And: 'Awaken your soul from death. For the Beloved is sitting in the middle of them, he sanctifies their food, and transforms in his ineffable goodness the bitterness of their hard lives. The heavenly spirits who serve him cover them with their shade, them and their holy food.' And: 'The table of those who pray without ceasing is better than any sweet smell or perfume.' And: 'The life led by a temperate man is loved by God.'²

33. HOW TO EAT ON SATURDAY. OF NIGHT VIGILS. WHAT TO EAT DURING TIMES OF VIGIL

Every Saturday – save Holy Saturday – you should eat twice, as we have said about Tuesday and Thursday, and as defined in the holy canons, and this is so because you should celebrate the night vigil every Sunday throughout the year, save the Sunday which precedes Great Lent. But if there is a vigil for one of the great feasts of the Lord or of one of the great saints, celebrate those vigils instead, and leave those of the Sunday. Whatever the case is, eat twice on Saturday. It is as well to always force yourself through the work of the night vigil. The reason is, if there happens to be a vigil in the middle of the week, you will also have had the advantage of having celebrated one on Sunday too, and you will have made a great gain. Because of this the light will come from you at dawn, as the prophet says, and bring its healing (cf. Is. 58 : 8).

St Isaac says this: 'The hardship of attentiveness and fasting is the beginning of the fight against sin and envy, above all when the sin and the struggle are within us. Those who force themselves to undertake this invisible warfare will see here the sign that they hate sin and its greed. Almost all the attacks of the passions begin to diminish when one fasts. And along with fasting, night watches contribute to asceticism. Whoever, during his whole life, attempts to unite fasting and watchfulness, he is the friend of chastity. Just as a satisfied belly and a comfortable sleep, which enflame desire for fornication, are the beginning of all faults, so the holy

divine way, the basis for all virtue, is fasting allied with watchfulness and attention in the divine liturgy.'³

And again: 'When the soul is night and day enlightened by the memory of God and watchfulness instead of sleep, the Lord gives his assurance, sending a cloud to cover it by night and the brilliant fire which gives light by night (cf. Ex. 13 : 21 , 22). The light shines within his darkness.'⁴ And again: 'Choose for yourself a delightful work, the continuous watching during the night. It is by this that all the fathers have stripped bare the old type of man (cf. Eph. 4 : 22) and have judged the intellect worthy of being renewed. It is in the course of these hours of watchfulness that the soul becomes aware of the immortal life, when it feels that it strips off the shadows of passions and receive the Holy Spirit.'⁵ And again: 'Honour the work of watchfulness, until you find consolation in your soul.'⁶ And: 'Do not imagine, of man, that in all the work of monks, one can find anything greater than the night watch.' And: 'Do not consider that a monk who remains at watch with discernment of the intellect will find himself again in the body. This work appertains truly to the angelic order.' And again: 'The soul which forces itself to lead this angelic life of watchfulness, will have the eyes of cherubim. His vision will be continually tending toward celestial contemplation.'⁷

Pass the time of these vigils in prayer, psalmody, reading, in complete purity, composure and compunction, alone with yourself or with those you love and who share your life. After such vigils, give yourself the comfort of some food and drink, to strengthen yourself after these labours, at the ninth hour. That is to say: eat three ounces of bread. Take some dry food, if you can. Also drink three glasses of wine mixed with water. See that you go without the meal at the ninth hour if there is a fast day and you have carried out a vigil at night; you should observe the fast as well as the vigil. For you must do the one, and not leave the other undone (cf. Matt. 23 : 23). As for the comfort and strengthening of yourself after vigils, we will have more to say of this here.

34. HOW TO TAKE FOOD AND DRINK ON A SUNDAY. OTHER MATTERS. ON LABOUR AND HUMILITY

Eat twice on a Sunday, as for Saturday. This formula should be kept strictly, unless you are unwell. There are days which have been conceded by the holy fathers and as it were freed by long usage or for other reasons more recent, and we would like to speak of the reasons which derive from God, and of reasons which come from other sources. On this day we break with the rule of a single meal and dry food. Rather, we take whatever food is useful and without reproach, in addition to eating vegetables, but always with temperance, and in the

³ *ibid.*; §85, 16, p. 516.

⁴ *ibid.*, §56, 6, pp. 368-9.

⁵ *ibid.*, §Letter 3, 8, p. 558.

⁶ *ibid.*, §23, 5, p. 190.

⁷ *Ascetical Homilies*; §29, 1, p. 229 (all final citations).

¹ St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 165; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 191.

² *Ascetical Homilies*; §43, 12, p. 311 (all citations).

quantity which is prescribed. For it is always better to be temperate in everything.

During times of bodily illness, we have said already, one may eat without blame any sort of food which is useful and fortifying to the body. This is what the holy fathers have taught: 'We must kill the passions, but not the body.'

It is a natural thing, within the bounds of what is taught, that is, within the bounds of what is permitted to a man of the monastic profession, to eat, both so as to give thanks and glory to God, and also as a matter of modesty. But do not eat superfluous things. 'Undergoing some scarcity,' says St Isaac, 'teaches a man temperance, especially when he does not want to learn it.' When we have things in abundance and at our complete disposal, we are in a position to lose our own selves. Do not grow fond of bodily comfort. For the soul which loves God, according to St Isaac, has no comfort other than in God.¹ Chose to labour, choose the hard life, humble yourself. 'Labour and humility, one of the saints wrote, permit us to attain Jesus.'

35. HOW TO EAT AND DRINK AND TO CONDUCT ONESELF DURING GREAT LENT AND DURING HOLY WEEK

On the food and drink which you should take, and the way you should live, during holy Lent, we think it would be superfluous to give a detailed and particular explanation. For you should do during Great Lent, excepting Saturdays and Sundays, whatever is ordered for those days when you break your fast at the ninth hour. If you can, be more rigorous and restrained than usual during holy and Great Lent, for this time is a tithe offering for the whole year and gives, on the day of the Lord itself, the divine and luminous day of the Resurrection, the award due to those who fought and won for Christ.

36. OF DISCERNMENT. OF CONTEMPT FOR MEASURED WORK. OF SUBMISSION.

One must get involved in these practical matters and other similar things with a rigorous discernment, if you want to maintain the dual animal which we are in a state of peace and harmony. It is said: 'One builds a house with wisdom. It is finished with the intellect. And it is by means of experience that the rooms are filled with good and valuable things' (Prov. 24 : 3 , 4). St Thalassios wrote this: 'Poverty and lack, lived in a spirit of reason and discernment, are the royal road. But self-mortification without discernment, or unreflective self-humiliation, are a pest, for the one and other are both contrary to reason.' St Isaac says: 'Bewilderment and confusion of thought follow the relaxation of the body. And listlessness follows aimless activity, which is followed by bewilderment. But these two types of bewilderment differ. The first is

¹ *ibid.*; §23, 1, p. 187.

followed by our fight against fornication. The second is followed by giving up on the life of stillness, and our leaving the monastery altogether and finally by fruitless wandering from place to place. One ceases to give respect to activity with an aim in the form of labour. When the labour aspect in activity declines, one starts to look for pleasure. So the lack of an aim leads to bewilderment.'² And the great Maximos: 'Do not have all your attention directed toward your body, but maintain your asceticism as much as you can, and turn your intellect toward the inside. For bodily asceticism does not achieve great things, but piety is useful in everything' (cf. Tim. 4 : 8).³

When balanced, the body can impose on the soul, dominate it and weigh on it, while drawing along with impulses and disordered actions which can corrupt it, just as it is written: 'The body desires against the spirit, and the spirit against the body' (Gal. 5 : 17). But you, give the body the muzzle of temperance, hold it back, mortify it even if it does not want it, until it becomes docile and submissive to what is best. Remember what St Paul said: 'The more the external man is destroyed, the more our internal man is renewed from day to day' (2 Cor. 4 : 16). And St Isaac: 'Force yourself to die to self in this struggle, and not to live with negligence. For the martyrs are not only those who receive death for the faith in Christ, but those who would die in order to keep his commandments.'⁴ And: 'It is better to die in the struggle than to live with the sin.'⁵ And: 'Above all, do nothing without having first taking the advice and asking your spiritual father in the Lord. Then, with the grace of Christ, whatever had seemed heavy will be easy to carry, and what was steep will incline and become like a flat plain.'

But we should now return to the point where we left off before making this digression.

37. HOW THE ONE WHO UNDERTAKES SPIRITUAL COMBAT SHOULD SPEND THE TIME FROM HIS MEAL UNTIL SUNSET. THAT HE SHOULD BELIEVE THAT DIVINE GRACE IS GIVEN US ACCORDING TO THE INTENSITY AND THE AMOUNT OF OUR EFFORTS

After having eaten as one engaged in this combat ought, as ordered by the glorious St Paul when he said, that one who carries out this struggle should be temperate in everything (cf. 1 Cor. 9 : 25), sit and read something relevant, ideally something written by the fathers concerning watchfulness. Afterwards sleep an hour, if the days are long. Then get up, work a while with your hands, while praying internally. After that, pray as has been shown, read, meditate, watching that you humble yourself, so as to consider yourself below all other men. For it is said: 'Whoever raises himself up will be lowered. And whoever lowers himself will be raised up'

² *ibid.*; §55, 7, p. 364.

³ St Maximos the Confessor, *Fourth Century on Love* 63; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 108.

⁴ *Ascetical Homilies*; §44, 3, p. 314.

⁵ *ibid.*, §6, 2, p. 109.

(Luke 14 : 11). And: 'He who believes he is standing should be careful not to fall' (1 Cor. 10 : 12). And: 'The Lord is against the proud. But he gives grace to the humble' (James 4 : 6). And: 'The beginning of pride is ignorance of the Lord' (Sir. 10 : 12). And: 'The proud have been deeply unjust' (Ps. 119 : 51. LXX). And: 'Do not become used to pride, but aim for what is humble' (Romans 12 : 16).

Likewise, the divine Chrysostom says: 'He knows himself who considers that he is nothing. Nothing is loved by God more than to hold yourself among the least.' And St Isaac: 'The mysteries reveal themselves to the humble.'¹ And: 'Where humility pushes us, there everything is covered in the glory of God.' And: 'Humility runs ahead of grace, and pride ahead of suffering.'² And St Varsanuphios: 'If you truly want to be saved, listen well. Raise your feet from off the ground and carry your spirit to heaven. Be attentive night and day. Distrust your own power. Struggle so as to see yourself lower than all men. That is the true way. Other than this, there is no other way for one who wants to be saved in Christ, in the one who gives us our strength (cf. Phil. 4 : 13). Whoever wants it should run. Whoever wants this should run quickly. Whoever wants this should run quickly, and he will attain it (1 Cor. 9 : 24). I witness to this before the living God (cf. 1 Tim. 5 : 21), who wants to give eternal life to every man who wants it.' And John Klimakos: 'Not that I fasted; not that I was watchful; not that I slept on the bare earth. But that I humbled myself. And in a little time, this has saved me.'³

Before all else seek out effacement, as St Varsanuphios says: 'Being unafraid will allow you to go to the town. Being inconspicuous will allow you to remain in the town. Dying to all men will make you the owner of the town and all its treasures.' And: 'If you want to be saved, be self-effacing and go toward what is before you.'⁴ According to the blessed John, the disciple of St Varsanuphios, self-effacement is the same as being equal to no one, to never say about a good work: 'It was I who did that.'

And again: sit down, pray in purity and recollection, until evening. Sing the Vespers appropriately, and retire. Have faith in this with a sincere heart: according as we have taken trouble, according as we have suffered for virtue, and to the measure of labour, we will receive from God a share of gifts and recompense, the praise and consolation, as the holy psalmist says: 'As much as I suffer in my heart, so much have your consolations delighted my soul' (Ps. 94 : 19. LXX). And the Saviour: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11 : 28). And St Paul: 'We suffer with Christ so as to be glorified with him, too. I consider that the suffering of the present time are not comparable to the glory which will be revealed to us' (Romans 8 : 17 - 18).

Maximos, who possessed wisdom about holy things, says equally: 'It is said that the gifts of God are dispensed in the measure of the faith of each person. Effectively, our belief is what augments the burning desire in us to do good. When he reaches the goal of his work a man reveals the depth of his faith proportionally in what he has done, and he receives grace in the measure that he has believed.'⁵ But he who did not get to the end of his work shows the measure of his lack of belief proportionally in what he has not achieved, and he is deprived of grace to the extent that he has not believed. The envious man has good reason to be jealous of the one who has chosen the way which is clear right here, and cannot be anything else: believe, do, and receive grace in the measure of your faith. Demand with all our soul that we may be allowed to patiently bear the years which remain to us, that the end of our life will be Christian, without sadness, without shame, peaceful, and that we will be able to reply well when we stand before the terrible throne where our Lord will judge us, our God and our saviour Jesus Christ.

38. THAT PURE PRAYER IS GREATER THAN ANY OTHER WORK

Beyond what has been shown, know this, brother, that every method, and all types of rules and, if you want, every other type of activity whatsoever, is arranged as it is, on the understanding that we are not yet capable of praying in the heart in complete purity and composure. For when we arrive, with the blessed approval and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we escape all division and all the diversity of multiplicity, then we are directly, in way beyond all explanation, united with the one, the simple, the unifying. As the glorious Theologian says: 'God unifies and reveals himself to gods.'⁶ It is the genuinely existent illumination which the Holy Spirit brings into the heart. This illumination, it has been said, is born from undistracted pure prayer, from the prayer of the heart of which we have spoken. But this is rare. It is with difficulty that one man in a thousand is found worthy, by the grace of Christ, of progressing to this state. As for voyaging higher still and being judged worthy by spiritual prayer of uncovering the revelation of the mysteries of the age to come, very few have ever been found over generations of generations who have had this power with the grace of divine approval.

It is likewise this that St Isaac says: 'Just as among six thousand men it is with difficulty that one finds anyone who has succeeded appreciably in fulfilling the laws and commandments, and has arrived at purity and peace of soul, just so one in a multitude who, having attained with great watchfulness the pure prayer, might have crossed that frontier and disclosed this mystery. For pure prayer is never given to

¹ *ibid.*; §23, 14, p. 195.

² *ibid.*; §5, 32, p. 105.

³ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 25 §14.

⁴ St Varsanuphios, *Letters* 38; E.T., *Varsanuphios and John, Letters*, vol. 1; trans. J. Chryssavgis, *Catholic University of America Press* (Washington, DC: 2006), p. 54.

⁵ St Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century of Various Texts*, 35; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 218.

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* XXXVIII, 7; E.T., *Select Orations of St Gregory Nazianzen*, trans. C. G. Brown & J. E. Swallow, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 7, *James Parker and Co.* (Oxford: 1894) p. 347.

many but to few. And as for the mystery which follows it, and of the beyond, it is hardly possible to find one who has arrived at it by the grace of Christ from any generation.’ And he adds: ‘If there is hardly a man who prays in complete purity, what can we say of spiritual prayer? All spiritual prayer is a state and not an act. Prayer attached to movement or action of any kind is beneath spiritual prayer.’¹

This is why if you want for yourself, by work and in reality, that is in your experience itself, to be worthy in Jesus Christ of these new mysteries, then force yourself to arrive at all times, every hour and in all activity, at the state of pure prayer and meditation in your heart. You will be able to progress from being a child to being a perfect man, by the standard of the plenitude of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 4 : 13), and with a faithful and informed economy (cf. Luke 12 : 42-3) be able to call yourself blessed and receive praise, for you will have used your language with discernment, that is to say, you will live along the lines of the things you have said. In addition, you will never be shaken, as St Philemon wrote: ‘Brother, when God has made you worthy of prayer night and day with an intellect pure and undistracted, be no longer preoccupied with the rules themselves. But remain as much as you can attached to God. It is he who brings light to your heart for the spiritual labour.’² And another sage divine says: ‘If you want to celebrate the liturgy of God in your body as if it were incorporeal, secretly acquire in your heart continual prayer, and your soul will be like an angel, even before your death.’

St Isaac writes in the same sense. Approached by someone asking what it was which embraced all the labours of this work, that is to say the life of stillness, so as to know it having arrived at it, and know that one had indeed attained the perfection of the monastic life, he replied: ‘When one carries out constant prayer within. When one achieves this prayer, one arrives at the effective extreme limit of all the virtues. One becomes a residence of the Holy Spirit. For if one has not definitely received the grace of the Comforter, it is impossible to carry out within oneself in total freedom the perfection of this continual prayer. It is said, that the Spirit, when it establishes its residence in a man, does not cease praying. The Spirit itself prays always. And so if such a man sleeps or if he wakes, the prayer does not depart from his soul. If he eats, if he drinks, if he rests, whatever he does, even in the deepest sleep, the perfumes and vapours of the prayer mount with ease in his heart. Thus the prayer is not broken. But at every hour of his life, even when this prayer takes place deep inside him, it does not cease to speak inside him secretly.’³

One of the fathers who had put on Christ calls the prayer the silence of the pure. For their thoughts are the movements of God. But the movements of the pure heart and the pure intellect are the gentle voices which sing secretly to the God who is in the secret. Other fathers who had put on God, initiated into such grace by experience of it, have described a

number of such things worthy of admiration, but which we will leave aside so as not to prolong this discourse.

39. OF THE NUMBER OF PROSTRATIONS EACH NIGHT AND DAY

As regards the number of prostrations we ought to make each night and day during the five days of the week, our holy fathers have advised that the number be three hundred. But every Saturday and Sunday, and on other days fixed by custom for hidden and mysterious reasons, even when they fall during the week, they have instructed us not to do prostrations. There are those who exceed three hundred. There are others who do not attain this number. Each does them according to his strength and determination. So do what you are able to. Truly blessed and frequently so, are those who always give their utmost to things sworn to God. For the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force’ (Matt. 11 : 12).

40. THAT THE GIFTS OF GOD ARE AWARDED, AS HAS BEEN SAID, NOT ONLY ON ACCOUNT OF OUR COMBAT AND THE AMOUNT OF OUR EFFORT, BUT ALSO ON ACCOUNT OF THE STATE OF OUR LIFE, THE CARE WITH WHICH WE LEAD OUR LIFE, OUR FAITH AND THE NATURAL DISPOSITION WHICH IS CHARACTERISTIC OF US

One must therefore know, as we have said already, that we are given the gifts of God, not only on account of our combat and the amount of our effort, but also on account of the state of our life and the care with which we lead it, and moreover, according to the faith we have during what we propose to do, and according to our characteristic disposition.

St Maximos says: ‘The intellect is the organ of wisdom. And the word is the organ of understanding. The natural certainty which inheres in them both is the organ of faith established in each of them. Charitable compassion is the organ of the gift of healing. For every holy gift has an appropriate organ in us – a faculty, or a state, or a disposition – which is naturally attached to it and is capable of receiving it. Thus, whoever purifies the intellect of all sensible imagination receives the gift wisdom. Whoever allows his reason to dominate natural passion – I mean the appetitive aspect of the soul – receives the gift of spiritual knowledge. Whoever bears the unshakable certainty of the divine with intellect and intelligence, receives the gift of faith that can do everything. Whoever attains to charitable compassion, after the total destruction of self-love, receives the gift or charism of healing.’⁴ But understand this: you should watch that nobody knows about your labours toward these ends other than those who teach and guide you. And pray for those of us,

¹ *Ascetical Homilies*; §31, 6; p. 247-8.

² *A Discourse on Abba Philemon*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 349.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; not determined.

⁴ St Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century of Various Texts*, 33; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 217.

the unworthy, who talk of doing good but do not act, so that we might be judged worthy of doing what pleases God, and then telling others and encouraging them. For those who have done and who have taught, as the gospel says, will be called great (cf. Matt. 5 : 19). Now the all powerful and all compassionate Lord will strengthen and guide you, so that you will be able to understand these things. For those who only understand the law are not found righteous before God, according to St Paul, but rather those who also accomplish it (Romans 2 : 13). He will lead you in every good and saving work. And when he proposes this sacred and intellectual labour to you, he will conduct you in spirit, in the prayers of the saints. Amen.

We have spoken briefly of practical discernment. But it is now time to speak of total and perfect discernment as best we can, in as much as it will be possible to speak of such an important thing briefly. For discernment is by nature the greatest of all the virtues, according to our glorious fathers.

41. TOTAL AND PERFECT DISCERNMENT. THOSE WHO LIVE PURELY PHYSICALLY AND CONTRARY TO NATURE. THOSE WHO HAVE A SOUL AND LIVE ACCORDING TO NATURE. AND THOSE WHO LIVE SPIRITUALLY, THAT IS, ABOVE NATURE

Whoever lives and conducts himself carnally and contrary to nature has totally lost the power of discernment proper to him. But whoever distances himself from evil, and who has begun to do good (as it is written: 'Turn away from evil and do good' (Ps. 34 : 15. LXX)), if he opens his ears so as to be instructed, will acquire a sense of discernment, which is appropriate to novices. Whoever, following the way of nature and the soul, submits his life to discernment and to intelligence, who could be named a junior, sees things by the proper standard, and he discerns what is appropriate to himself, and what is appropriate to others who are like him. But he who leads his life beyond nature and spiritually, he goes beyond the novices still engaged in the passions, he goes beyond the limits of the life of the junior, he progresses with the grace of Christ toward being perfect – that genuinely existent illumination – with perfect discernment: he sees himself, he discerns himself in complete clarity. Likewise, he sees and discerns all beings in total purity. But himself, when one looks at him, is not seen or discerned by anyone. He is no longer judged, for he is truly spiritual, and he is known as such not on paper and with ink, but in fact and by grace, as the holy apostle says: 'The spiritual man judges all beings, but himself is judged by no one' (1 Cor. 2 : 15).

42. DISCERNMENT. AN EXAMPLE

Of these types of men, the one resembles a person who walks in profound night, in gloomy shadows. Wandering and blind through intangible darkness, not only unable to see and unable to discern himself, he does not know where he is going or

where he puts his feet, as the Saviour says: 'Those who walk without light do not know where they are going' (John 12 : 35). Another of these types of men is in a calm night in which the stars alone provide light. He advances little by little with the aid of the dim light of their rays. His feet are frequently obstructed by rocks – for his vision is poor – and he falls. Such a man sees and discerns himself with difficulty, as if in shadow, as it is written: 'You who sleep, wake up, get up from among the dead, and the light of Christ will give you light' (Eph. 5 : 14). Another of these men is in a calm night with a full moon. The rays of the moon guide him. He walks without losing his way and he goes forward. He sees and discerns himself as if in a mirror, and he discerns those who walk with him, as it is said: 'You do well to be attentive to the law as to a lamp which burns in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the sun arises in your hearts' (2 Pet. 1 : 19). And another is in the immense clarity of full midday made clear by the sun's rays in all their force. By the light of the sun, he sees and discerns himself just as he is. And he judges many beings, indeed all beings, as the holy apostle says (1 Cor. 2 : 15), properly judging all things which happen, in whatever particular manner they occur. He advances without making mistakes, and he infallibly leads those who follow toward the light, the life, the truth.

Of such men it is written: 'You are the light of the world' (Matt. 5 : 14). And St Paul: 'God, who said 'Let light shine in the shadows', has himself shone in our hearts, so that the understanding of the glory of God which is the face of Jesus Christ can radiate' (2 Cor. 4 : 6). And the blessed David: 'Raise up above us the light of your face, Lord' (Ps. 4 : 6). And: 'In your light we will see the light' (Ps. 36 : 9. LXX). And the Lord: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but he will be in the light of life' (John 8 : 12).

43. OF CHANGES AND SELF-ALIENATION. THE EMINENT GLORY OF HUMILITY

We also want you to know this about those who, through purification and illumination, have attained perfection as much as that its attainment is possible. That there is no perfect perfection in an imperfect age, so this accomplishment has no end. Men are not able to be unchanging at all times, due to their natural weakness and because of the presumption which insinuates itself in them sometimes. But it happens to them, so that they are tested, to suffer alienation, captivity. And then they must call for help of the greatest sort.

The fathers have described these perfect ones when they stray as prey to wolves. For being static and unchanging are characteristics closely held back for the age to come. So in the present age, it is sometimes the time for purity, for peace, and divine consolation, and sometimes the time for confusion, for tempest, and misery. And this in measure of the life and progress of each person individually, depending on things which only the Lord knows, and moreover so that through these things we can become aware of our weakness. For it is

said: 'Blessed the one who knows his own weakness' (Job 37 : 7). And Paul: 'Don't trust yourselves, but trust the one who revives the dead' (2 Cor. 1 : 9).

Therefore, we return continually to God in humility, in repentance, with confession. St Isaac says: 'How many times certain people transgress and then heal their souls with repentance, and each time receive grace. For, in every person endowed with intelligence, changes supervene on life indefinitely and alterations assail every man at every moment of his life. Whoever is endowed with discernment understands the meaning of so much vicissitude. But above all the tests which he undergo every day can give him experience, if he is watchful. They will keep him undistracted in his intelligence. He will notice how the states of gentleness and happiness which he tries to maintain every day can change in a single instant from peace to trouble, they can do so for no reason at all, and he can find himself in great and unspeakable danger. It is this which the blessed Makarios wanted to demonstrate with great insight and attention, for the instruction and training of his brothers, when he wrote that they should not fall into despair when things going against them forced them to lose themselves, for these things always happen to people who are looking for order and purity, and not because they were negligent or absent minded, but because these things are as certain as the changes of the seasons. It is exactly when we are following the proper way that we to come up against things contrary to what they were aiming at.'¹

And a little further on: 'So how exactly does this happen? Changes, he says, come to each man like changes in the air one breathes. Understand the emphasis: to each man. For nature is one and the same thing for everyone. But just so that you do not think that he said this about the most humble and solitary men or the most advanced monks, and think that the perfect have a means of evading change and hold themselves inflexibly in the same state at all times, without passionate thoughts, as it is said of eunuch, Makarios has insisted: to each man. But how is this possible, blessed Makarios? "You say it yourself: It is cold, and a bit later it becomes warm, perhaps storm, and soon after calm. It is the same in the course of our lives. War and rescue by grace succeed one another. At one time, the soul travels across winter and harsh waves assail it. And from nowhere a change comes. Grace visits and fill the soul with joy and peace which come from God, and with chaste and peaceful ideas."²

He here declares the thoughts to be chaste, letting us know that before the calm they were bestial and impure. And he exhorts the reader: 'If after these chaste and soft thoughts an aggressive thought of the opposite kind arises, do not grieve or despair. And likewise, in the moments of repose which grace gives, do not glory in your achievement, but in those periods of joy remember the torments.' He adds: 'Know that all the saints have gone through this work. While we are in this world, the immense consolation which is in their centre is given to us in secret, for at all times and every day it is

demanded of us to prove our love for God with effort, in combat against temptations. And such is the test: never to give up, and never to abate our combat. So we go along the right road. But whoever want to go another road, or turn aside, becomes prey to wolves.

'It is miraculous, how the saint, in so few words, was able to confirm a way of life, give it its meaning, and entirely remove doubt from the intellect of the reader. He who turns aside from the path, he says, and becomes prey to wolves, wants to walk on the way which is not the way. And while he has taken it into his head to go his own way, it is one which has not been marked out by the fathers.'³

And a little later: 'Humility, even without works, obtains a pardon for many faults. By contrast, works without humility serve to acquire nothing.' And again: 'What salt is to food, humility is to every virtue. It can break the power of many sins. It is necessary to struggle for it in the spirit, with modesty and with proof of discernment. If we acquire it, humility will make sons of God of us. And without it all our work, all virtue and all struggle is vain. God wants the changes and fluctuations of the intellect.' And: 'It is by our thoughts that we will become better. It suffices that thought alone, without aid from anything else, stands alone before God and speaks for us.' He says again: 'One of the saints has said: When the proud thought comes to you which says: "Remember how virtuous you are", reply to it: "Old man, see your promiscuity."⁴

44. OF REPENTANCE, PURITY AND PERFECTION

Every journey accomplishes itself in these three things: repentance, purity, perfection. What is repentance? To abandon things past and grieve over them. And what, in brief, is purity? A heart compassionate for all created nature. And what is perfection? The depth of humility: the abandonment of all things visible – sensible things – and invisible – intelligible things – , and to be dispassionate toward them.

And again: 'Repentance is the double voluntary death to all things. It is a compassionate heart, the fervour of the heart for all creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, for every creature.' And again: 'As much as we are in this world, and abandoned to the flesh, if we want to rise to the vault of the heavens, we cannot do so without work and without struggle, while being dispassionate. This is the accomplishment. But more is needed, and that would be meditation: meditation beyond all thought.'

And St Maximos: 'Philosophy devoted to virtue gave rise to dispassion of judgement, but not dispassion of natural itself. That's to say grace of divine pleasure in the intellect, is allied to this dispassion of judgement.' And again: 'He who has had experience of the distress and the pleasure of the flesh is said to have been proven, for he has experienced both the pleasing

¹ *Ascetical Homilies*; §49, 1-2, p. 337-8.

² *ibid.*; §49, 3, p. 338-9.

³ *ibid.*; §49, 4, p. 339-40.

⁴ *ibid.*; §49, 8-10, p. 341-42. St Isaac makes use of the first Letter of Makarios of Egypt.

and the displeasing aspects of the flesh. He is called perfect who has battled the pleasure and pain of the flesh with the force of reason. And he is called accomplished who, by his intense longing for the divine, has kept his faculties for acting and contemplating under his control.¹ That is why it is discernment has been called the greatest of the virtues, for in those things which, by the blessing of God, one can see outside the divine light, it is possible to exactly separate what is divine from what is human, and also to distinguish mystical and apocryphal things.

But come, it is now the time to reveal, as far as we can, the principle of the holy and deifying hesychia which we promised, now that we can see it with better clarity. Let God guide what we are about to say.

45. OF THE FIVE WORKS OF THE HESYCHIA OF NOVICES, OR ELEMENTARY HESYCHIA: PRAYER, PSALMODY, READING, MEDITATION AND MANUAL LABOUR

The novice, the one has undertaken to consecrate himself to the life of stillness, should pass the day and night devoted to five types of work in the service of God. In prayer, which is to say the remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ, a memory continually and calmly introduced into the heart during the inspiration of breath, as we have shown, like this: lips closed, without any thinking, and free from strange imaginations.

Prayer, we have said, unfolds from pure humility, inside a small cell room, alongside that temperance which constricts the stomach, alongside the privation of sleep and the attenuation of the other senses. He will engage in psalmody, and in the reading of the holy Psalter, the Apostles and the holy Evangelists, the writings of the holy God-bearing fathers, and particularly the chapters on prayer, in sobriety and watchfulness. And as for the other sources of divine instruction derived from the Spirit, the novice should recollect those sins which pain the heart, meditate on the Judgement before God, on our death and correction, or on our future happiness, and other such subjects. And then engage in some simple work of the hands, in order to put a muzzle on acedia. Then once again he should commit himself to praying, particularly when it is difficult to do so, to the point where the intellect can habitually reject distraction, entirely occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ, in constant remembrance, a continuous straining toward the interior wealth profoundly rooted there in the secret room of the heart.

St Isaac writes thus: 'Force yourself to enter into the treasure which is inside you, and you will see the celestial treasure. For the one and the other are the same and you contemplate them by the same door.'² And St Maximos: 'The heart controls all the organs of the body. When grace occupies the field of the heart, it rules over all thoughts and all the

limbs. For in the heart are the intellect and all the soul's thoughts. Therefore, it is necessary to look there to see whether the All Holy Spirit has set down its law. There. But where? In the organ which controls, from the throne of grace, the intellect and all the soul's thoughts: in the heart.'

46. HOW THOSE WHO WANT TO LIVE THE LIFE OF STILLNESS FOLLOWING REASON OUGHT TO BEGIN. WHAT IS ITS BEGINNING, GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND PERFECTION

Such is the first labour of the ancient monks, for they opened the way for those who chose to live the life of stillness according to reason. They begin in the fear of God, and as soon as possible, move on to all the deifying commandments: absence of interest in all things good or bad; and then faith, the complete flight from all contrary things, and the pure consecration to a life in solitude, as we have said. They trust to the hope without defect (cf. Rom. 5 : 5), and they arrive at the measure of the plenitude of Christ (cf. Eph. 4 : 13). They arrive, indeed, by means of ecstatic love, total and super eminent, which comes by way of the prayer of the heart, pure and without distraction, which in turn derives from spiritual prayer, strong and unmoving. At the last, they arrive, through immediate and unique ecstasy, through ravishment, through the ultimate call to unification, at the unique place which flows from sources of perfect love. It is thus that action leads inevitably to contemplation. And it is through this that one is revived. David, the ancestor of the Lord, knew this. Transformed by the blessed change (Ps. 77 : 10. LXX), he proclaimed loudly: 'I have said in my ecstasy: All men are liars' (Ps. 116 : 11. LXX). And another of those who distinguish themselves in the Testament: 'That which the eye has not seen, and that which the ear has not heard, that which is not found in the heart of man, it is this that God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor. 2 : 9, cf. Is. 64 : 4). And the great Paul adds in conclusion: 'He has revealed this by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (1 Cor. 2 : 10).

47. INSTRUCTIONS FOR STILLNESS AMONG BEGINNERS

The beginner, we have said, should not regularly go in and out of his hermitage. He should avoid speaking with others, or see them, unless there is an urgent need, and even then with attention and precaution, with restraint, and rarely, as the divine St Isaac says: 'In everything keep this thought close, the help which comes from keeping to yourself is better than the help which comes from works [of asceticism].'³ For such things invite the dispersion of attention and confusion, not only in novices, but also among those who are more advanced, again as St Isaac says: 'Comfort does not just hurt

¹ St Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century of Various Texts*, 95-6; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 233-4.

² *Ascetical Homilies*; §30, 11, p. 236.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §59, 2, p. 395.

the young, but relaxation is harmful to young and old.’ And: ‘Stillness destroys external sensations and revives internal movements. But the life in the outside provokes contrary effects: it revives external sensations and destroys internal movement.’¹ St Isaac wants to show by this where the activity is, and moreover the way of the life of stillness where this good work leads. John Klimakos or his part, describes in the words which follow what sort of person he is who acts and does as he ought while following the way: ‘The one devoted to stillness searches for the most marvellous thing: to contain the incorporeal powers in the house of his body alone.’² And: ‘The one seeking the life of stillness is he who says: I sleep, but my heart is awake.’³ And: ‘Close the door of your cell to your body, the door of your tongue to speech, the inner gate to evil spirits.’⁴

48. OF PRAYER IN THE HEART IN ATTENTION, WATCHFULNESS AND VIGILANCE, AND OF ITS WORK

We have said, the prayer which rises from the interior of the heart through attention, watchfulness and vigilance, outside of all thought, of all imagination of whatever type, is this: Lord Jesus Christ Son of God. The intellect reaches up with all its being, further than all language, toward the Lord Jesus Christ, he who is brought to our attention in this prayer. It is followed by: Have mercy on me. The intellect retraces its course and comes back into itself, as if refusing to pray unless for itself. Having progressed toward love by blind experience in the first phrase, aiming toward the one Lord Jesus Christ himself, it receives with this second phrase of invocation a clear certitude and knowledge.

49. HOW THE DIVINE FATHERS HAVE TRANSMITTED THE WAY THE PRAYER SHOULD BE SAID. AND WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE PRAYER

There is a reason why all of the divine fathers seem not have transmitted the prayer in its entirety. One gives it to us entire, another in part, another partially, and another differently again, and each according to the potential and the state of the one who prays.

The divine Chrysostom transmits it to us in its entirety. He says: ‘I pray you, brothers, never trample and never underestimate the rule of the prayer. For I have know the fathers to say: What will become of that monk you tramples or makes little of the prayer? Although he eats, he drinks, he rests, he serves, he walks, whatever else he does, he must cry ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’, so that the memory of the name of Lord Jesus Christ provokes the enemy to combat. For a soul that forces itself will uncover

everything with this memory of Christ, both good and evil. First it can see evil in the recesses of its own heart, and afterwards good. This memory can stir the dragon to action, and this memory can lay it low. This memory can expose the sin that is living in us (cf. Rom. 7 : 17), and this memory can eradicate it and stir up in the heart all the power of the enemy. And it can conquer it and gradually root it out. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it descends into the depths of the heart, will subdue the dragon which controls those fields, and will save and quicken the soul. Remain constantly in the name of the Lord Jesus that the heart may swallow the Lord and the Lord the heart, and that these two become one. However, this is not accomplished in a single day, nor in two days, but requires many years and much time. Much time and combat are needed, in order to expel the enemy, so that Christ lives in us.’⁵

And again: ‘The intellect must be strengthened, it must conduct matters with harness and reins and whip every thought, every action of the Evil One with the invocation of our Lord Jesus Christ. There where the body is, there must also be intellect, so that between God and the heart nothing else will be found like a wall or a barrage darkening the heart and separating the intellect from God. And if it happens that darkness impairs the intellect, thought must not accommodate this, otherwise we could be charged with consenting to it on the day of Judgement before the Lord, when God will come to judge the secrets of men (cf. Rom. 2 : 16). Therefore never pause, and remain in the Lord our God, until he has mercy on us (cf. Ps. 123 : 2). And look for nothing else but the mercy of the Lord of glory (cf. 1 Cor. 2 : 8). But if you look for mercy, do so with a humble heart, a broken heart. And say from morning to evening, and if possible all night, too, cry out: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ Engage your intellect in this work with total commitment right up until death. For this work requires from you some violence. The gate is straight, and the way narrow which leads to life (cf. Matt. 7 : 14). Nobody enters except those who do so violently. For the kingdom of heaven is within you (Matt. 11 : 12). Therefore I ask you: Do not separate your heart from God. But preserve it, keep it at all times in the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, until the name of our Lord will planted in your heart and your heart will think of nothing else, so that Christ may be magnified in you.’⁶

But before him, the great Paul had already written: Lord Jesus. He says: ‘If you confess the Lord Jesus with your lips, and if you believe in your heart that God has raised from the dead, you will be saved. For it is while believing from the heart that we come to justice, and in confession with the lips that we come to salvation’ (Rom. 10 : 9-10). And again: ‘None can say ‘Lord Jesus’, if they are not in the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12 : 3). He adds: in the Holy Spirit. This means: When the heart receives the energy of the Holy Spirit, it is by that Spirit that we pray. And this belongs to those who have

¹ *ibid.*; §85, 25, p. 522.

² *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, E.T., Step 27 §6.

³ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 27 §17.

⁴ *ibid.*, E.T., Step 27 §18.

⁵ Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Epistula ad monachos*; P.G., vol. lx, p. 753.

⁶ *ibid.*

made progress, who have received the wealth of Christ, and it is in them clearly.

Diadochos of Photiki tells us to follow this road, too. 'Until we have closed all the doors of the intellect through the memory of God, it will not cease demanding a work which will assure it that it is on the right track. It is necessary to give to the intellect these words 'Lord Jesus' so as to let it attain this. For nobody, according to Paul, can say 'Lord Jesus' if he is not already in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12 : 3). And he should hold these words among his most treasured things, so as not to be side tracked by imaginations. Those who meditate without giving up in the depth of their heart on the glorious and longed for name, one day they too will be able to see the light of the intellect. If their thinking keeps this name and watches over it, this light burns all the filth which attaches to the soul, so much so that we feel it happening. For it is said that our God is a devouring fire (cf. Heb. 12 : 29). The Lord therefore calls the soul to a great love of his glory. The glorious and longed for name, when the heat of the heart makes it stay in us, by force of the memory of the intellect, it puts us into a state of love for his generosity. And nothing can stop us from reaching this state. It is the pearl that one can acquire after selling everything else (cf. Matt. 13 : 46), and whose discovery fills us with ineffable joy.'¹

St Hesychios has it simply: Christ Jesus. He adds: 'The soul which, after death, throws itself through the air toward the celestial gates and which has Jesus with it and for it, will never be confounded there by its enemies, but will speak on its behalf with complete confidence. Only this is needed, that up to the time of its departure from this life, it should not be discouraged from calling on Christ Jesus. And he will render justice quickly, according to his solemn and divine promise, that promise which he made respecting the iniquitous judge (Luke 18 : 1 , 2). Yes, I tell you, this is what he will do in this life here, and after the soul has fled the body.'²

St John Klimakos speaks only of Jesus. 'Beat your enemies with the name of Jesus. For there is no weapon more powerful in the heavens.'³ He does not add anything else to it. He says elsewhere: 'Let the memory of Jesus attach itself to your breathing. Then you will know the help of stillness.'⁴

50. THAT IN ADDITION TO THE HOLY FATHERS, THE PRINCES AMONG THE APOSTLES PETER, PAUL AND JOHN HAVE INITIATED US INTO THE SPIRIT WITH THE WORDS OF THIS HOLY AND DEIFYING PRAYER

But it is not only with the God-bearing fathers, and those who followed them, that one finds oneself initiated somewhat in the use of these words of the holy prayer, but before the fathers too, among those leaders of the chorus of saints who were the

first of the apostles; and so we will now speak of Peter, Paul and John. We have already noticed that St Paul has said: 'Nobody can say 'Lord Jesus' if he is not already in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12 : 3). And John: 'Grace and truth come from Jesus Christ' (John 1 : 17). And: 'Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is in the flesh, is of God' (1 John 4 : 2). And the elect among the disciples of Jesus Christ, Peter, in reply to the question which the Saviour and Master addressed to the apostles in person – 'What do the people say that I am?' – responded with this blessed confession: 'You are the Christ, the Son of God' (Matt. 16 : 16).

Those who came after them, our glorious masters, and additionally those who led life in the desert free from all shackles, have followed the example of the apostles, these three pillars of the true Church, and their words have been transmitted as divine voices of revelation by the Holy Spirit. The use of the words of the prayer is attested by these three witnesses worthy of trust (cf. Matt. 18 : 16). For it is said that every truth will be built on three witnesses (cf. Deut. 19 : 15).

These celestially wise men, perfectly bound to each other in the One, and vowed to the Holy Spirit which resided in them, preached the rule of the prayer, and they transmitted it to those who came after them as something to hold and keep in the manner that they had done. Look then at the order and the connection which, by the wisdom from above, brought about this marvellous thing. For the one says: Lord Jesus. The other: Jesus Christ. And the other: Son of God. Everything happens as if the one was following the other, as if they were attached the one to the other by agreement and the thread of these words which are the work of God. You see how each of these receives from the final word of the last the first words of his own, and all is accomplished with the three together. You will see the same thing if you add the meaning of the Spirit. The blessed Paul says: 'Nobody can say 'Lord Jesus' if he is not in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12 : 3), and it is by this which is positioned at the end – by which we mean the Holy Spirit – that John begins, the voice of thunder, when he says: 'Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is in the flesh, is of God' (1 John 4 : 2). See here then what they made comprehensible to all, not of themselves and by their own will, but as something inspired by the hand of the All Holy Spirit. The confession of Peter came to him, that is to say, by the Holy Spirit. For it is said: 'One and the same Spirit accomplishes all things, dispensing them to each as it wishes' (1 Cor. 12 : 11).

So the threefold thread (cf. Eccl. 4 : 12) of the deifying prayer, woven, adjusted, co-ordinated with great wisdom and knowledge, is come down to us too, we who have kept it in the same manner as they did. The holy fathers who came afterward added the words 'Have mercy on me' to the saving words of the prayer (namely: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God) and they adapted and prescribed this addition for those who were still little children in the order of virtue, the novices and the imperfect. But those who have made progress, those who are perfect in Christ, use the main phrase 'Jesus Christ Son of God', and sometimes the invocation of the name of 'Jesus' alone, embracing and hugging it, so to speak, as their entire

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 59; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 270-1.

² St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness*, 149; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 188.

³ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 21 §7.

⁴ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 27 §61.

work when praying. They are then filled with an ineffable pleasure and joy, higher than all intellect, higher than anything one can see or hear.

So the three times blessed, leaving behind the flesh and the world, their senses guided by divine gifts and the grace which inhabits them, are seized by love in an ecstasy of beatitude, purified, illuminated, and they attain to perfection, for they contemplate grace which has no beginning secretly while being in possession of a pledge, that supernatural and uncreated grace of the Divine which is higher than all being. They are satisfied with the memory, but also, as we have said, with being able to say each of the invocations of the Word, of the God-Man, which we have indicated. And so, elevated by this prayer into rapture, into understanding and revelations, they are made worthy of the ineffable knowledge in the Spirit. In his great kindness and his love for the soul, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose words are the works and the spiritual language of life, as he himself says, has given them a clear certainty and a completely sure confidence (cf. John 6 : 63). He declared to them powerfully: 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15 : 5). And: 'If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it' (John 14 : 4). And again: 'Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it' (John 14 : 13). And so on, all according to what has been transmitted to us.

51. EQUALLY THAT IT IS PERMITTED NOVICES TO REPEAT IN FULL THE WORDS OF THE PRAYER, OR TO SAY IT IN PART, BUT ALWAYS IN THE INTERIOR OF THE HEART. AND THAT THE WORDS MUST NOT BE CONTINUALLY CHANGED

It is permitted to novices, sometimes to say all of the words of the prayer, sometimes to say on part: but always inside the heart and continually. To speak with Diadokos: 'he who remains always within his own heart quits once and for all the charms of this life. For, walking in the Spirit, he cannot know the desires of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5 : 16). Such a man comes and goes in the fortress of the virtues, which are in him like the guardians of the gates of the city of purity. That is why the games of the demons against him have no effect.'¹ St Isaac writes in the same way: 'The heart of him who watches his soul at all times rejoices in the revelations made to him.' And: 'He who is gathers his contemplation into himself, contemplates the rays of the Spirit. He who despises all distraction contemplates his Master in the interior of his heart.'²

But he must avoid frequently changing the words of the prayer from one to the other, because by the change and continual transformation, his intellect will become unstable, wayward, so that it gets used to being in an inconstant and sterile state, like trees frequently transported and transplanted.

52. THAT THE FRUIT IS THE PRAYER INSIDE THE HEART. BUT IT MUST HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF TIME, OF COMBAT, AND EFFORT. QUITE SIMPLY ALL GOOD IS ACQUIRED ONLY BY GREAT LABOUR AND WITH TIME

This constant prayer within the heart, and what follows from it, is not obtained easily, as if by accident, with little effort and in a short time, even though, by a mysterious process, it can happen sometimes just by itself. Rather, a great deal of time and labour, of fighting with the body and in the soul, and intense forcefulness, is required in order to come by it. For, depending on the share of the gift of grace which falls to us and which we hope to receive, we must, to the extent we are able, undertake to fight for it and take our time. This grace and gift, according to the holy masters, allows us to drive the enemy from the fields of our heart, and to make a clear place there for Christ.

St Isaac says likewise: 'He who wishes to see the Lord forces himself to purify his heart in the continual recollection of God. Then in the clarity of his thinking, he sees the Lord at all times.'³

And St Varsanuphios: 'If interior work done with God does not come by help of man, then he looks outside himself in vain. For interior work which the heart carries out with struggle brings purity; and purity brings the true stillness of the heart: stillness itself brings humility; and humility brings one to the abode of God. While God abides in him, the demons are banished along with the passions. Man thus becomes a temple of God full of sanctity, of light, of purity and grace. Blessed therefore he who, reflecting his own Lord in the secret of the heart, pours out his prayer and weeps with happiness.'⁴

And St John of Karpathos: 'A great effort and much time are needed in prayer, before through struggle we can reach a state in which our mind is no longer troubled, and so attain the inward heaven of the heart where Jesus dwells. As the Apostle says: 'Do you not know that Jesus Christ dwells within you?'' (cf. 2 Cor. 13 : 5).⁵

And the great Chrystosom: 'Persevere without pause in the name of the Lord Jesus, until the heart absorbs the Lord, that the Lord absorbs the heart, and that the two become one. But this is not the work of one or two days. It requires a number of years, a great deal of time. A long combat and amount of time before the enemy is ejected, so that Christ dwells in us.'⁶

There is more to say on this. But we must resume our exposition.

³ *ibid.*; §43, 3, p. 306.

⁴ St Varsanuphios, *Letters* 119.

⁵ St John of Karpathos, *Texts for the Monks in India*, 52; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 310.

⁶ Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Epistula ad monachos*; P.G., vol. lx, p. 753.

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 57; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 270.

² *Ascetical Homilies*; §43, 1, p. 305.

53. OF THE PRAYER IN THE HEART WHICH IS NOT PURE. HOW TO ARRIVE AT PURE PRAYER WITHOUT DISTRACTION

As a result of perseverance in the method which we have spoken of, the method of prayer in the heart, of pure prayer without distraction, even when the same is mixed with impurities and agitation, it is clear that across the perceptions which mixed with the thoughts, he who fights will arrive at the state of prayer in complete freedom, in total immobility, in total purity, in total truth. Therefore the intellect must persevere in the heart, penetrate it with the inward breath, neglecting nothing, and never give up. But it must always dwell in the heart, and pray continuously.

St Hesychios says: 'If we have not attained prayer that is free from thoughts, we have no weapon to fight with. By this prayer I mean the prayer which is ever active in the inner shrine of the soul, and which by invoking Christ beats and burns our hidden enemy.'¹ And following that: 'Blessed is the man whose mind and heart are as closely attached to Jesus Prayer, he who, unceasingly invokes the Lord in his heart, just as air joins to our body or the flame to wax. When the sun rises above the earth, it is day. The holy and venerable name of the Lord Jesus shines continually in the mind, engendering innumerable thoughts as bright as the sun.'²

54. OF THE PRAYER WITHIN THE HEART, PURE AND WITHOUT DISTRACTION, AND THE WARMTH WHICH IT AROUSES

Such is what we call the prayer of the heart, pure and without distraction; it has been said: 'A warmth arises within the heart because of it.' It is written: 'My heart burns in me', and: 'A fire is lit within my meditation' (cf. Ps. 39 : 3). This is the fire that our Lord Jesus Christ came to throw fire on the world of our heart which, at another time, under the influence of the passions, brought thorns, but now, under the influence of grace, brings the Spirit. He himself said: 'I am come to throw fire on the world, and how I wish it were already on fire' (Luke 12 : 49). It was this fire which at another time illumined Cleopas and his companion, which warmed them and made them say to each other, as if speaking outside themselves: 'Did our hearts not burn along the way while he spoke to us?' (Luke 24 : 32).

The great John of Damaskos wrote in one of his troparia to the most pure Mother of God: 'The fire of the heart draws me and carries me to celebrate virginal desire.'

St Isaac writes likewise: 'The warmth without measure which, comes to the surface of the mind with burning memories, consumes the heart with its fire, grows with the same violent force that one aims at oneself. This work, this care of the heart, refines the intellect with fire, and accords

vision to it.' And further on: 'The flux of tears well up from this heat which in turn comes from the grace of contemplation.' And bit later: 'From constant tears the soul receives peace of thought. From peace of thought it raises itself to the purity of intellect. And with purity of intellect a man pushes himself to see the mysteries of God.' And again: 'After this, the intellect is able to see revelations and signs like those seen by the prophet Ezekiel.'³ And again: 'Tears, the head which touches the ground during prayer, the heat of prostrations seeing in the heart the burning of their sweetness. And it is the ecstasy worthy of any praise. The heart throws itself toward God and says: "My soul is thirsty for you, great God, living God. When will I come and see your face, Lord?"'⁴

And John Klimakos: 'When the fire comes to dwell in the heart, it revives prayer; and after the resurrection and ascension into heaven, a descent of fire into the high chamber of the soul.'⁵ And again: 'Who is that faithful and wise monk (cf. Luke 12 : 42) who has kept alive the fire which is in him? And who, until the moment of his departure from this life, has not stopped adding every day more fire to the fire, heat to heat, desire to desire, effort to effort?'⁶

And St Elias Ekdikos: 'When the soul has quit the things of the external world and is united with prayer, then prayer surrounds him like flames, like a fire surrounds iron, and embraces him completely. The soul stays the same. But one can no longer touch it, in the same way that iron embraced by fire cannot be touched by anything outside it.'⁷ And again: 'Blessed he who in this life has been judged worthy of being considered thus. Blessed he who has seen his body, by nature made of earth, become made of fire by grace.'⁸

55. THAT THE HEAT HAS DIVERSE ORIGINS. BUT THE FUNDAMENTAL HEAT IS THE WHICH COMES FROM PRAYER OF THE HEART, FROM PURE PRAYER

Know that such warmth has a variety of ways of originating and many ways of existing in us. This is shown clearly by the variety of descriptions among the saints we have presented, and also, though we hesitate to say it, because the act itself differs, for the warmth which comes from the prayer of the heart, from pure prayer, is in some manner more important than the words. The warmth propagates itself and grows continually, until the holy Sabbath of the genuinely existent illumination. That is to say, as the fathers said, that the warmth and the act of prayer makes the man who prays visible in its light.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §9, 1, p. 124.

⁴ *ibid.*; §13, 3, p. 138.

⁵ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 28 §45.

⁶ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 1 §27.

⁷ Ilias the Presbyter, *Gnomic Anthology II*, 105; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, p. 46.

⁸ *ibid.*, 106; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, p. 46.

¹ St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness*, 21; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 164-5.

² *ibid.*, 196; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 197.

56. THE CONTINUAL WORK OF THE WARMTH OF THE HEART

This warmth continually chases away whatever blocks the foremost prayer, pure prayer, from accomplishing itself perfectly. For our God is a fire (cf. Heb. 12 : 29), and a fire consumes the evil of demons and of our passions.

St Diadochos says: 'When the heart has received the wounds of demons, having been burned by grief, then like a soldier who fears the hurt of arrows, in its pain the soul fears suffering those injuries again, and it hates the passions because it has begun to purify itself. If one has not been tested by a great suffering of shame before sin, one cannot enjoy the abundance of justly deserved generosity. He who wants to purify his inmost heart, must therefore enflame his heart constantly with the memory of Jesus Christ, so that he has nothing else than this attention in him, nothing but this ceaseless work. For those who wish to drive away their putrefaction should not sometimes pray and sometimes not pray. They should constantly carry the prayer in the keeping of the intellect, even if they are away from places of prayer. Just as those who work at refining gold do not let the fire become too distant from the rock in case the materials coalesce again, so he who sometimes remembers God, and some times does not, loses when he stops whatever he had acquired by the prayer. It is the business of a man who loves virtue to absorb the terrestrial matter of the heart in the memory of God. Thus evil bit by bit is consumed by the fire of the memory of good, the soul returns perfectly to its natural splendour, and with greater glory.'¹ The intellect which remains freely in the heart prays in total purity, beyond any error.

A saint puts it this way: 'The prayer is true, beyond any error, when the intellect keeps the heart in prayer.' St Hesychios writes likewise: 'The true monk is the one who arrives at watchfulness. And the truly watchful person is a monk in the heart.'²

57. OF THE DESIRE AND THE INTENSE LONGING WHICH IS BORN IN THE WARMTH, OF THE ATTENTION OF PRAYER

It is in such warmth, in such attentive prayer, that is to say in pure prayer, that the desire is found, the divine intense longing, which draws to itself the recollection of Jesus Christ continually. Love is born then in the heart, as it is written: 'The virgins have loved me, they have drawn me' (Song 1 : 3 , 4). And: 'I am sick with love' (Song 2 : 5). St Maximos says likewise: 'All the virtues labour with the intellect on the road toward intense longing for God, but pure prayer more than the

others. It receives wings so as to go toward God. And it lifts itself above all things.'³

58. OF TEARS OF THE HEART; AND OF DESIRE AND INTENSE LONGING FOR GOD

When tears flow abundantly out of such a heart, they purify and enrich the one so filled with love. They do not exhaust him. They do not dry him up. For what comes with the fear of God, like that which comes from the intense longing for God, is born from a violent and irresistible desire to love the Lord Jesus Christ and to remember him. The soul proclaims to the outside: 'Christ, you have drawn me with your desire, you have transformed me with your intense longing for God.'⁴ And: 'Saviour, you are entirely gentle, you are entirely desire and response, you are entirely inexhaustible, you are inconceivable beauty.'⁵ It says with Paul, the preacher of Christ: 'The love of God weighs on us' (2 Cor. 5 : 14). And: 'What can separate us from the love of Christ? Distress, anguish, persecution, nakedness, peril, the sword?' (Rom. 8 : 35) And again: 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor the angels, nor principalities, powers, potencies, neither the present nor the future, not the heights nor the depths, nor any other thing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8 : 38 , 39)

59. EXHORTATION NOT TO SEEK AFTER WHAT EXCEEDS LIMITS, AND TO CONTINUALLY KEEP IN THE HEART THE MEMORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Who is a judge worthy of these things and of all which follows? It is not applicable to try to answer this. It is said: 'Do not ask ahead of time what comes in its own time.'⁶ And: 'The good is not good when it does not come at the right time.' According to St Mark the Ascetic, it is not right to know the second thing before knowing the first, 'for knowledge puffs up, if it does not translate into action; but love builds'; 'it supports everything.'⁷

One must undergo some labour and continuous warfare, we have said, in order to carry the memory of the Lord Jesus Christ continually in the depth of the heart, and not merely so in an exterior or superficial manner, as the blessed St Mark the Ascetic has said: 'If prayer does not open the space of our heart in spiritual and complete hope, opening up the most interior space, secret and pure, it is sure that we can neither know him who comes and remains, nor whether our sacrifice of praise has been received.'⁸

³ St Maximos the Confessor, *First Century on Love*, 11; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 54.

⁴ Troparion sung at the Feast of the Transfiguration.

⁵ Troparion from the Byzantine liturgy, sung before communion.

⁶ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 26 §60.

⁷ St Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law*, 84; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 116.

⁸ St Mark the Ascetic, *De Baptismo*; P.G., lxxv, p. 936 ff.

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 97; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 293-4.

² St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness*, 159; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 190.

60. OF ARDENT ZEAL. OF THE DIVINE APPARITION IN US, AND THE GENUINELY EXISTENT ILLUMINATION OF GRACE

Then one can easily brush aside not only evil works, but impassioned thoughts and evil imaginations, as it is written: 'Walk with the spirit and do not fulfil the desires of the flesh' (Gal. 5 : 16). For he who burns with ardent zeal for virtue and removes from his intellect and from his senses all the works of evil before they begin to act on him, distances himself more and more from all thought and all imagination and from their princes, the demons, who rejoice in the sickness of others. As St Isaac says: 'The demons are terrible, but God and his angels are behind the man who, in his divine zeal, picks out the thorns which the enemy has stuck into him. Such a man, when advancing, will arrive at the certainty which establishes in him the genuinely existent illumination of grace, totally divine grace, which comes to establish itself in him. One can say that, going via a joyous way, he ascends on high toward the same nobility and spiritual filiation from on high which was accomplished in us by the grace of holy baptism.' Further he says this: 'That is the Jerusalem, and that is the kingdom of God inside us (cf. Luke 17 : 21) according to the words of the Lord. This land is the cloud of the glory of God, where only pure hearts may enter and contemplate the face of their Master (cf. Matt. 5 : 8). But note that we must not seek for the actual apparition of God, in case we receive instead the one from the darkness who counterfeits the light (cf. 2 Cor. 11 : 14).'

61. OF THE DIVINE ENERGY AND THE CONTRARY

When the intellect, without seeking, sees the light, it should neither accept it nor refuse it, as St Mark the Ascetic says: 'The small child ignores the energy of grace.' And: 'Another energy, that of evil, makes itself look similar to the true one. It is good not to give too much attention to these things, for the sake of delusion. And it is good to avoid anathematising them, for the sake of truth. But one must at all times apply to God with hope. He knows how to distinguish between these two.'¹ Also, be taught by one who has the grace and the power to teach and to discern what is of God.

62. OF THE INFALLIBLE AND ENLIGHTENED MASTER

If one finds a teacher who can teach not only what he has gathered from Holy Scripture, but things which he has learned in complete holiness with divine illumination, give thanks to God. But if he has not been proven in this way, it is better not to accept him, but to return to God in complete humility,

considering and examining yourself alone, with a sincere heart, as if unworthy of the energy and of such contemplation. This is how we ourselves have spoken in the past, and how we speak to you now, and how we ourselves were initiated, by the true instruction of teachers speaking through the action of the Holy Spirit, and through the Scriptures inspired by God, and by our own limited experience.

63. OF TRUE AND FALSE ILLUMINATION; OF THE DIVINE LIGHT AND THE BAD LIGHT

In some of their writings, our glorious fathers let us know the signs that the light does not deceive, and the signs that the light is illusion. This is what the thrice blessed Paul of Latros² does when he says to the disciple who questioned him on this subject: 'The light of the opposing power has the appearance of flames; it is accompanied by smoke and is like a normal fire. When the sober and purified soul sees it, it feel unwell, it feels a profound disgust. But the light which is good and comes from God is completely inside grace and without mixture; it infuses and heals, it fills the soul with light, with joy, with enjoyment, it renders the soul gentle, it moves him to love mankind.'

Others say the same thing. But just as someone confided these things to me in person, so I will speak of them with you at a later date. This is not the right time.

64. OF BAD AND THE GOOD FANTASY. IT IS NECESSARY TO MOVE FROM ONE TO THE OTHER

Since we have mentioned fantasy in passing, and bad fantasy, it would be very useful, it seems to us, to explain as best we can, briefly, what it is or particularly what all fantasy is. For the evil one opposes with all his force pure prayer, the prayer of the heart, the simple and direct work of the intellect. That is why the holy fathers speak about it and against it in many ways. Like Daedalus of the myths, fantasy gives rise to many forms, and like the Hydra it has many heads. It is like a bridge of the demons, the saints have said. It is by this bridge that infamous murderers cross and pass, coming to mix and unite with the soul, making of it a hive of wasps, a habitation of sterile and impassioned thoughts.

Totally reject all fantasy. Although an exception can be made if you need it for the work of repentance, contrite grief, humility, in the study and the contemplation of beings, or, certainly when forcing aside a bad fantasy so as to replace it with good fantasy. By bringing together and opposing the one with the other in this way, mastering indecent and impudent fantasy with a leash, you might obtain the reward for victory over it. Doing this you will not only do no wrong, but you will receive great profit, since you will lead your life with an

¹ St Mark the Ascetic, *No Righteousness by Works*, 28; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 128.

² St Paul of Latros, d. 995. The monastery of Latros was in Bithynia. The saint is described by Nikiphoros the Monk, *Philokalia* (E.T.), vol. iv, p. 197-8.

unfailing discernment and you will scatter any bad fantasy with good fantasy. You will beat and kill the adversary with his own weapons, as the divine David did Goliath in other times (cf. 1 Sam. 17 : 51).

65. THAT IN PURE PRAYER AND SIMPLE WORK AND THE UNIFYING OF THE INTELLECT, THE SAINTS REJECT NOT ONLY BAD FANTASY, BUT ALSO THE GOOD

Such is the warfare of those who are still children, that is to say, of novices. But those who have progressed with time reject all fantasy, the good and the bad. They distance themselves from it. Like the wax melting before fire (Ps. 68 : 2. LXX), they reduce fantasy to ash and they consume it with pure prayer, by disengagement and release of the intellect away from any form, because they tend simply toward God, and, so to speak, they willingly unify themselves with Him in that unity beyond all forms.

St Hesychios says: 'All thought in the intellect makes use of the fantasy of a sensible thing. The intellect – which is the Assyrian – has no force to deceive us unless it makes use of sensible things which surround us and which we habitually see around us.'¹ And St Diadochos: 'All thought enters into the heart through the fantasy of sensible things. So, when the heart has time to be distant from everything and is disengaged from all forms, the blessed light of Godhead shines in him; however its splendour reveals itself to the pure intellect only in the emptiness of all thoughts.'² And Basil the Great: 'Just as the Lord does not abide in temples made by the hand of man (cf. Acts 7 : 48), so he does not abide in representations and the creations of the intellect. Those things project themselves before the soul which they besiege. And the soul, altered by them, is thereafter no longer able to give itself purely to the true. For it is still attached to a mirror and an enigma (1 Cor. 13 : 12).'

And the divine Evagrius: 'It is said that God abides where he is known. That is why it is also said that the throne of God is the pure intellect. So, the thought of God is not found in the thoughts which impregnate the intellect, but in the thoughts which do not impregnate it. Whoever prays should therefore totally separate himself from thoughts which impregnate the intellect. The intellect should be impregnated in another way in order to see the Intellect. And it should be disposed in another way, if it is to nothing other than its intelligence. Then we will grasp how the spiritual understanding distances the intellect from its representations: it disengaged from all figures and shifts itself toward God.'³

And St Maximos, in his commentaries on the great Dionysios: 'Fantasy is one thing, and intellection, by which I mean thinking, is another. For they come from different sources of power, and their movements are not the same.

Intellection is energy and creation. But fantasy is passion and representation attached to a sensible thing, or to something which resembles it. The senses conceive beings in the forms into which they are assembled. But the intellect knows, that is to say it conceives beings in another manner, not as the senses do. Just as it does physical movement, spiritual movement, which we will deal with later, is picked up by the senses, and fantasy receives the passions and represent the forms. But we owe to the soul and to the intellect the faculty of judgement and conception. The fantasy ought therefore to be distanced from this power of the soul to conceive. The faculty of fantasy is divided into three parts: the first transforms images into perceptions, rendering what we intelligible what we perceive. The second represents in us the memory of the perceived thing so that it can remain in the mind, for these images rely on anything: it is the fantasy properly so called. The third part gathers up every pleasant thing, every representation of what appears to us good or bad, depending on how much misery it brings to us. It has been said that fantasy has no place before God. For God is simply once and for all beyond all thought and higher than all.'⁴

Basil the Great says: 'The intellect which does not disperse itself in external things, which is not spread out in the world by the senses, returns in on itself, then across itself rises to the thought of God. Surrounded by light of this beauty, it comes to forget its own nature.'⁵

Knowing this, force yourself at all times to be with God. Pray without images, shapes or forms, with an intellect and soul that are entirely pure. That is what St Maximos says.

66. OF THE INTELLECT, OF THE SOUL, AND OF THE PURE AND PERFECT HEART

Of the pure intellect: 'The pure intellect is the intellect which is separate from ignorance and which shines in the light of God.'⁶

Of the pure soul: 'The pure soul is the soul which is liberated from the passions, and which ceaselessly rejoices in the love of God.'⁷

Of the pure heart: 'The pure heart is the heart which offers to God the entire memory of God, outside of any figuration, outside of any form, ready to be branded with the archetypes by which He reveals himself.'⁸

Of the perfect intellect: 'The perfect intellect is the intellect which has known through true faith the supremely Unknown,

⁴ Source undetermined.

⁵ St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 2 (2); P.G., xxxii, 228B; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 110.

⁶ St Maximos the Confessor, *First Century on Love*, 33; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 56.

⁷ *ibid.*, 34; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 56.

⁸ St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 82; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 158.

¹ St Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness*, 180; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 194.

² *ibid.*, 89; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 177.

³ Source undetermined.

which has contemplated the variety of his creatures, and which has received from God the knowledge which includes the providence and judgement which governs them. But I speak as a man speaks.¹

Of the perfect soul: ‘The perfect soul is the soul in which the passible aspect is totally turned toward God.’²

Of the perfect heart: ‘One calls the heart perfect which has in no manner any natural movement towards anything which is. On it, as on a wax writing tablet polished to extreme smoothness, God has inscribed His own laws.’³

Of the pure intellect: To purify the intellect, according to St Diadochos, is in the power of the one Holy Spirit.⁴ Likewise to bind the intellect, according to John Klimakos, is in the power of the one Holy Spirit.⁵ St Neilos says again: ‘If you want to see the profound nature of the intellect, distance it from all thoughts. The you will see it equal in colour to sapphire or the colour of the heavens.’ And again: ‘The profound nature of the intellect is its height equal to the colour of heaven. In it, during prayer, the light of the Holy Trinity abides.’ And St Isaac: ‘When the old intellect is plucked from the man, when he is vested with the grace of the new man (cf. Col. 3 : 9), then it will arrive at his proper purity as clear as the sky. It will be what the assembly of the sons of Israel called the place of God, when they looked on the mountain (cf. Ex. 24 : 10).’⁶ If then you do what has been said, if you pray in total purity beyond all fantasy, beyond all form, you follow the tracks of the saints. If not, rather than lead the life of stillness, you will be a fantasist. And rather than gathering grapes, you will gather thorns. But this will not be the case with you.

67. HOW THE PROPHETS SAW

If some think that they have known, by use of fantasy and the natural order, the visions of the prophets, the figures and the revelations which they have contemplated, then they have strayed from the goal and the truth. For in what they saw and imagined, it is not in consequence or not the result of following the natural order, that the prophets and those among us who are initiated have seen and have formed such images. Rather, divinely and supernaturally, by the power and the indescribable grace of the Spirit, their spirit has known these signs and these figures, as the great Basil has said: ‘An ineffable power has given to those with purified intellect, separated from all distraction, to see in themselves images, as

if the language of God resounded in them.’ And again: ‘Their guiding faculty stamped by the Spirit, the prophets saw’ (cf. Ps. 51 : 12). And Gregory the Theologian: ‘He – that is to say the Holy Spirit – is active in the angelic and celestial forces, then in the fathers and in the prophets. Among them, these have seen God or have known Him; their guiding faculty stamped by the Spirit, the others have had foresight of the future; they were as if present among future things.’⁷

68. OF FANTASIES AND OF VARIOUS SUCCESSIVE CONTEMPLATIONS

But some, who receive fantastic visions and various contemplations, doubt and oppose us, believing they follow the saints, because Gregory the Theologian said, that one can imagine God by intellect alone, not as a vision of what He is, but from what can be attributed to Him, when fantasy assembles an image of the truth; and they also say that the divine Maximos held that the intellect cannot become free of passions by virtue of actions, if it is not accompanied by numerous and successive spiritual contemplations;⁸ and finally, they say that other saints have said similar things in the same manner.

So that such men might know how these words came to be spoken by these blessed ones, they should notice that the words deal not with the business demanded of them where grace is at issue – the grace of contemplation which unites man with God in direct experience – but rather that these words refer to something yet to be discussed, namely the contemplation which belongs to the wise; which by using analogy and recognition of the harmonious arrangement of beings, leads inevitably to the thought of God. This is a type of thinking which many, if not all, are permitted to investigate and to conceive. He who has experienced with full understanding these examples from the saints will know this clearly, as it is written: ‘It is by starting from the grandeur and the beauty of created things that, by analogy, one comes to understand the Creator’ (Wis. 13 : 5), but not by starting with the teaching of this profane world, which is artificial and vain. For that learning is like an unworthy servant. Knowledge, sophistry, proofs fill it with pride. It is not founded in evangelical faith and humility, in true submission. It is banished from the holy doors.

But we will speak now of perfect illumination, the genuinely existent illumination, by which the chosen apostles who went with Jesus to Mount Tabor ineffably experienced the beautiful and truly blessed alteration (Ps. 77 : 11. LXX) which changed them. Their bodily eyes, transformed into a more divine state, rendered spiritual by the right hand of the all-Holy Spirit, were judged worthy to see the kingdom and

¹ St Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century on Love*, 99; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 99.

² St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 82; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 158.

³ *ibid.*, 81; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 158.

⁴ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 28; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 260.

⁵ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 28 §17.

⁶ *Ascetical Homilies*; §31, 16, p. 254.

⁷ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations* XLI, 11; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 383.

⁸ St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 5; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 99.

the divinity which none may behold (cf. Matt. 17 : 1 , 2).¹ As the east is far from the west (cf. Ps. 103 : 12. LXX), as far as heaven is from the earth, as the soul stands above the body, so the work of passively receiving grace, is higher than any labour of we carry out by intention. For the one, labour which we intend, remains external: it classifies beings, it orders them it groups them. When the fantasy of this external sort gathers together thus into a picture image of the truth, such an intentional labour of mind is always moving toward, pushing toward and raising itself toward God in faith. The other, the labour which is passive, comes directly from God himself and communicates itself deep into the heart. It also happens sometimes that grace is manifested outwardly and transmits its splendour and God's illumination to the body in a visible manner, but beyond all understanding.

The heart, according to the most wise Maximos, supernaturally undergoes, rather than provoking, the uncreated deification. This saint says on this subject: 'I call it deification without origin, this genuinely existent illumination specific to the Divinity. This light has no origin. But in an inconceivable manner, it appears in those who are worthy.'² The great Dionysios speaks with the same thing in mind: 'It must be understood that the intellect which belongs to us has the faculty of knowing, by this it sees intelligible things, but it also possess a power of unifying itself to things which surpasses nature, by which it can join itself to what is beyond it.'³ And St Isaac: 'Our soul has two eyes, as the fathers say. But the one and the other do not have the same way of seeing. By one of them we see what is hidden in natural things, that is to say the power of God, his wisdom and his providence for our sake, which we understand on account of the sanctity with which he direct us. By the other eye we contemplate the glory of his holy nature, when it pleases God to let us enter into spiritual mysteries.'⁴

And the divine Diadochos: 'The charismatic gifts – wisdom and spiritual knowledge and all the other divine gifts – are given by the one Holy Spirit. Each has its own energy. This is why the Apostle attests that one is given wisdom, another spiritual knowledge, by the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12 : 8). Spiritual knowledge, by providing experience in itself, unites man with God without demanding of the soul the thought of things. That is why some of those who cultivate the

solitary life have their senses given understanding by this knowledge, but do not enter into the rational understanding of divine things. By contrast, wisdom, if it is given alongside spiritual knowledge to one who has faith, which is rare, reveals the energy of this spiritual knowledge itself. For the one, spiritual knowledge, gives understanding by means of energy, but the other, wisdom, does so by means of thought. But spiritual knowledge comes from prayer and a great stillness in the absence of all involvement. While wisdom comes from disinterested meditation on scripture. And the one and the other come from the grace of God.'⁵

St Maximos says more in his commentaries: 'Jacob's well is Scripture (cf. John 4 : 6 – 7). The water is the spiritual knowledge which is in Scripture. The depth of the well is the contemplation of the enigmas of Scripture, which are difficult to comprehend. The bucket which holds the water is the apprenticeship with the word of God within the language of the book. The Lord has no need of this learning, for he himself is the Word. And it is not through instruction and study that He gives spiritual knowledge to those who believe. Rather it is by inexhaustible grace that the Spirit that he accords to them who are worthy the inexhaustible wisdom which will never run out. For the bucket, which is to say instruction, holds only a part of spiritual knowledge. It is not permitted it to hold everything. But the spiritual knowledge which comes with grace brings all the wisdom possible for men, and without study, and it spills out in diverse ways to accommodate their needs.'⁶

And St Diadochos: 'Our intellect finds it difficult to pray for long periods. For the virtue of praying is very hard and secret. But the intellect gives itself to theology with joy, so immense and absolute is divine speculation. Therefore, we should be careful not to indulge this or give free rein to its desire to speak too much, and we should not permit it the joy of raising itself above on wings, beyond all measure. Rather, consecrate it totally to prayer, to psalmody and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Still, do not neglect the investigations of men of theology, whose words reveal the faith. However, do not mix their words with the words of grace, and do not allow yourself to be overcome by the vanity where enthusiasm and boastfulness can take us. In periods of contemplation, with which we are concerned, take care to separate it from all fantasy, and ensure that all thoughts which come at that time should be like tears of sorrow [and therefore avoid thoughts]. He who, at times of stillness, makes everything cease inside him, he who rejoices before all the sweetness of prayer, not only removes himself from the blame about which we have spoken, but he renews himself more and more while applying himself with insight and without suffering to divine contemplation, all the while advancing with great humility in the spiritual knowledge of discernment. He should know in addition that this truest form of prayer is outside understanding. But this prayer only belongs to those who, in

¹ '[...] no explicit connection is made between the vision of light received by Peter, James and John on the mountain and the vision of light received during prayer by the hesychasts in later generations. But, as we have noted, what the hesychasts behold at the higher level of illumination is not a created splendour but nothing less than the "blessed light of the divinity". Presumably, then, their experience is to be understood as an extension of the mystery of the Transfiguration: like the three apostles, they perceive the divine light through their bodily eyes, even though the light itself is non-material and uncreated.' (Kallistos Ware, 'A Fourteenth-Century Manual of Hesychast Prayer: The Century of St Kallistos And St Ignatios Xanthopoulos', *Canadian Institute of Balkan Studies* (Toronto 1995), p. 26.)

² St Maximos the Confessor, *Responses to Thalassios* 61 & Scholion 14; P.G., vol. xc, L; E.T., Fr Maximos Constatas, *Catholic University of America Press*: (Washington D.C., 2018). p. 447.

³ St Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, vii, 1; P.G. iii, 865C; E.T., trans. C. Luibheid, Pseudo-Dionysus, *Paulist Press* (New Jersey: 1987), p. 106.

⁴ *Ascetical Homilies*; §72, 1, p. 449.

⁵ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 9; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 254-5.

⁶ St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century of Various Texts*, 29; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 193-4.

full awareness and in full certitude, are filled with holy grace.’¹

Have you understood? He says that prayer is outside of all understanding, and that it only belongs to those who, in full awareness and in full certitude, that is to say in the interior of the heart, are, in a supernatural and genuinely existent manner, filled with the divine light of grace.

St Isaac calls this prayer ‘unstamped memory’, which means memory without form, without figure, simple.

Others with equal justice, among the holy fathers, give it other names.

69. OF THE FIVE FACULTIES OF THE SOUL. OF IMAGINATION PROPER TO THE SOUL AND THE INTELLECT. THAT IN PURE PRAYER AND THE SIMPLE AND SOLE WORK OF THE INTELLECT, IT IS NECESSARY TO AVOID FANTASY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF FORMS, IMAGES AND FIGURES.

We have said, for sure, that it is not only because of the demons that the soul engages in fantasy, but it does so naturally, by itself, across the five faculties which it possesses – intellect, reflection, opinion, fantasy and sensation – as the body has five senses, sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

The fantasy, we have said, is one of the faculties of the soul. It is by it that the soul represents images to itself. The soul which wants to do so, must choose and discern well what is important to it [and the fantasy assists in this], that it gives wings to these faculties which unify it with God in this age and the age to come, and that the soul makes haste to raise itself to God. So, it should pay attention to all, make use of all things, and do everything toward this end. We must look at what the fathers say on this subject, and how we should hold fast to what is good.

St Maximos says: ‘The soul, by itself, in its own essence, is endowed with intelligence and intellect, it is in every manner founded in itself. If it is founded in itself, it works for itself by nature, as well as with a body, by its nature engaged in understanding and reflecting, never depriving itself of the intellectual faculties which are naturally its possession. For what is naturally attached to a being, whatever it is, cannot be taken from it such as it is, without his ceasing to be such as it is. The soul therefore which is always the same, and has been such and was created by God in this way, can never desist from understanding, reflecting, and knowing. And it does this by itself, in its body, for itself and by nature. It is not possible to find a reason therefore to separate the soul from what appertains to it naturally, not even after the dissolution of the body. For we know, having learned it from the saints, that the intellect and the mind operate around God and work with Him in the present age and the age to come, but that the other faculties only operate in the present age, for they are proper

only to that. The soul itself, like a pilot, having natural authority over the others, and destined to act not only in this but in the age to come, forces itself in every way to tend, to push toward God and unite with Him the intellect and the mind during pure prayer, at the time of the one and simple work of intellect, and to separate the intellect in general from the fantasy and the other faculties.’

And from St Neilos: ‘The state of prayer is the condition of impassibility which, by a tension of extreme love, ravishes the spiritual intellect and takes it to the heights.’² The soul which does this guards what is natural to it and its precious dignity.

70. OF THE INTELLECT

For this reason the intellect, indivisible in essence, simple, absolute, pure and luminous, should protect itself, watch itself, preserve and separate itself from fantasy. For the intellect possesses in itself the natural ability to do this, and turn itself irresistibly toward itself, to meditate and to enter into itself. Such is the immobile state of the intellect, which comes to it from divine grace, as John Klimakos says: ‘The immobility of the spirit and intellect is not possible except by the Creator.’³

To the extent that the intellect is a power of the soul, it is animated and commanded by the soul, but it is equally the soul’s eye, and we call it that. The intellect is rich by distinctly and by nature, simple and perfect, we have said. Which is why when it is in a natural relation to the soul and its other powers, the intellect is itself in command. It is said moreover that man is spiritual (cf. 1 Cor. 2 : 14). But when the intellect dresses itself in its own natural condition, simply, essentially, and with its indivisible splendour, absolutely, independently, that is to say while disengaged from the habits and natural movements of the body and soul, and it is permitted it to pass from its potential existence to its proper energy, to progress to the point of the supernatural and spiritual man; then the intellect enters into a condition of continuous steadiness and raises itself irresistibly, totally, absolutely toward formless thought, without figures and simply for God, as the great Basil says: ‘The intellect which does not disperse itself in the things of the outside world, which does not spread itself in the world through the senses, returns into itself and raises itself toward the thought of God.’⁴ Illuminated, surrounded with such beauty of light, the intellect forgets nature itself.

Thus the intellect takes care of, and safeguards fully, the image and likeness of God, which is what it is (cf. Gen. 1 : 26). It unites in spirit directly to the divine Intellect by choice, that is it unites with God, and it is with Him. This work is a circular movement, the intellect’s return to itself, which tends

² Evagrius the Solitary, *On Prayer*, 53; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 62.

³ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 28 §17.

⁴ St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 2 (2); P.G., xxxii, 228B; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 110.

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 68; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 275-6.

toward itself, and unites with itself, and then through itself to God. Such return is truly the only one which does not deceive or harm it. For it is an immediate and irresistible movement. It is a union higher than any work of the intellect and a vision higher than vision.

The great Dionysios says: 'The soul too has movement. First it moves in a circle, that is, it turns within itself and away from what is outside, and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end. But whenever the soul receives, in accordance with its capacities, the enlightenment of divine knowledge and does so not by way of the mind nor in some mode arising out of its identity, but rather through discursive reasoning, in mixed and changeable activities, then it moves in a spiral fashion. And its movement is in a straight line when, instead of circling in upon its own intelligent unity (for this is the circular), it proceeds to the things around it, and is uplifted from external things, as from certain variegated and pluralised symbols, to the simple and united contemplations.'¹

And St Maximos: 'The intellect in immediate union with God is in a state of total stillness in its faculty of understanding and of being understood. But when it frees this faculty so as to conceive what it can discern of created things, it breaks that union which surpasses all intellection, that union by which it was unified with God and when it was above its natural state, as far as that is possible, having become God by participation. Like an unshakable mountain, while in union with God, it sits in place of the law of its usual nature.'²

And again: 'The pure intellect which is united to its proper Cause has already entered into the transcendence of all intellection, in a state where, having arrested natural relations and movements, and being very distinct from what is merely created by the Cause, and having reached the ineffable limit, it rests in a state beyond cognition, in a blessed silence which surpasses intellection. Neither language or mind, nor thought can in any way give expression to it, and it is revealed only to those who have direct experience of it through participation, those who have been judged worthy of this happiness beyond understanding. The sign of the attainment of this joy is obvious to anyone: it is total insensibility of the soul toward anything in this age, and its total separation from it.'³ This is why the intellect not assisted by the soul, which is to say not always facing toward God, and which does not force itself to do what is proper to it, and therefore does not return inward so as to mount irresistibly toward the thought of God, does not

bear the fruits of either movement, but united with fantasy, it dissipates and distances itself from God.

71. ON THE PURE PRAYER

St Neilos says: 'Force yourself to be immobile, make your intelligence unhearing and quiet during prayer, and then you will be able to pray.'⁴ And again: 'I will tell you what I know and what I have said to the young: Blessed the intellect which, during prayer, arrives at a state of disengagement from all forms.'⁵

And St Philotheos: 'It is rare to find those who live the life of stillness according to reason. For the life of stillness does not belong to anyone other than those who constantly force themselves by this act to have joy and divine consolation.'⁶

And Basil the Great: 'The most lovely prayer is that which renders the thought of God clearly to the soul. And this is the sign that God abides in the soul (cf. 2 Cor. 6 : 16): to have God founded in you by your memory, when the continuity of the memory is not ruptured by earthly concerns and when the intellect is not troubled by unforeseen passions. He who loves God flees all things and makes his way to God.'⁷

72. THAT DISPASSION OF THE INTELLECT IS ONE THING WHILE THE TRUE PRAYER IS ANOTHER AND GREATER THING

This also must be understood, as St Maximos says: 'The intellect cannot become free of passions as a result of liturgical action and practice of the virtues, if diverse and numerous spiritual contemplations do not accompany it.'⁸ And again, the divine Neilos held that, though a person may become dispassionate, he may still fail to pray properly, because even in his dispassionate state, he can disperse his mind and distance himself from God. This Father means that: 'Even if the intellect goes beyond the contemplation of the physical world, it has not yet seen God in his perfection. For it may remain at the level of contemplating thoughts themselves, and then disperse itself instead of attaining to spiritual knowledge.'⁹ And again: 'He who is arrived at dispassion does not yet pray properly. For he may remain in simple thought, distracting himself in their researches, abiding far from God.'¹⁰ And again: 'When the intellect abandons the thought on things, it does not necessarily therefore attain the place of the prayer. For it can find itself in the contemplation of inner essences, and so chatter when it speaks. Even if there

⁴ Evagrius the Solitary, *On Prayer*, 11; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 58.

⁵ *ibid.*, 117; E.T., p. 68.

⁶ St Philotheos of Sinai, *Texts on Watchfulness*, 3; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, p. 17.

⁷ St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 2 (4); P.G., xxxii, 228B; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 8*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 111.

⁸ St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 5; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 65.

⁹ Evagrius the Solitary, *On Prayer*, 58; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 62.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 57; E.T., p. 62.

¹ St Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* 4 : 9 (P.G. iii, 705A-B); E.T., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. C. Luibheid (*Paulist Press*: New York, 1987). p. 78.

² St Maximos the Confessor, *Responses to Thalassios* Q33, Scholia 3 (P.G. xc, L); E.T., trans. Fr Maximos Constas (*Catholic University of America Press*: Washington D.C., 2018). p. 209.

³ *ibid.*, *Prologue* 1.1 (P.G. xc, 262D); E.T., p. 69.

are simple and theoretical things in mind, they impregnate the intellect and distance it from God, because they are still a mode of contemplating things.¹

St John Klimakos says this: 'Those whose intellect has taken to praying truly speak the Lord face to face (cf. Ex. 33 : 11), like those who speak in the ear of a king.'² It is when considering this, these saints and their equals, that you can see precisely the two modes of life, and compare the two irreconcilable types of work, the work which you passively receive, and the work which you intend. It is one thing for attention to be focused in various places, with contemplation on numerous things. While true prayer is something else. The one is dispassion of the intellect, the other is pure prayer. Whoever practices the pure prayer following the saints, is already arrived by necessity at dispassion of the intellect. But he who has achieved dispassion of intellect does necessarily acquire the true prayer.

So much for that. But we must now return to our subject. We have said that memory of good things and of their contrary strikes the intellect with its abundance, and usually carries it toward fantasy. It is this which we will look at now.

73. OF FANTASY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INTELLECT. OF SIGNS OF ILLUSION AND OF TRUTH. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ILLUSION

If you live the life of stillness and you want to be alone with God, and if you see any thing with the senses or with the intellect underlying this, or outside of you, particularly when this would seem to be the figure of Christ, or the form of an angel or of a saint, or an image of light appears to your intellect, pay it no mind, do not accord it any faith, remain unmoved by this thing, even if it is good, for as much as you have not interrogated others who have had this experience, we have said. That is what is most practical, and which pleases God and is most agreeable to Him. Protect your intellect at all times from any colour, any form, any shape, any configuration, any quality, any quantity. Keep your attention only on the words of the prayer, meditate and reflect in the interior of the heart, as John Klimakos has said: 'The beginning of prayer is to chase away suggestions when they appear, with the unique name of God. The middle stage is to have the mind fixed on the words of the prayer and on them alone; and the end stage is rapture to the Lord.'³

Equally, St Neilos has said: 'The first-rate prayer, the prayer of perfects, is the ravishment of the intellect, the total ecstasy above all things submitted to the senses, when the Spirit, with ineffable groaning (cf. Rom. 8 : 26), intercedes before God who sees the state of the heart open like a book, this state which reveals its proper will in quiet signs.' In this way Paul was ravished up to the third heaven: whether in body or if out of body, he did not know. This happened to

Peter when he mounted to the roof to pray and had a vision of the vessel (cf. Acts 10 : 11-16). After the first rate prayer, the second rate prayer consists of saying the words, the intellect following with compunction and knowing the destination of their prayer. Finally, a prayer spoken in the midst of desires of the body and mixed with them scatters the state of the one who has arrived at prayer.⁴ Therefore, if you are absorbed by such desires, do not take care of anything else while you have not calmed the passions, while you have not interrogated those with experience, as we have said.

What we have said and plenty of other sources besides immediately reveal where illusion is found. But also consider the signs of the true. The signs of the truth, the signs of the good and life-giving Spirit, are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faith, gentleness, temperance, all those things which the Apostle calls fruits of the divine Spirit (cf. Gal. 5 : 22). He says too: 'Walk like children of light. For the fruit of the Spirit is the good, the just, the true' (Eph. 5 : 8-9), and illusion procures the opposite of these.

One of the divine sages, questioned by another, says something similar: 'As regards the straight way about which you speak, beloved, the ways are numerous which lead to life, and numerous the ways which lead to death.' And continuing: 'You have a way which leads to life: the observance of the commands of Christ. In those commands you will find all the forms of virtue, and these par excellence: humility, love, compassion. Without them, you will not see the Lord' (cf. Heb. 12 : 14). And a bit later: 'These three, I would say humility, love, and compassion, are the three invincible weapons which the Holy Trinity has given us to fight against the devil. Every assault of the demons is incapable of resisting them. For there is not the least trace of humility in them. They have been covered in darkness (cf. Jude 6). And eternal fire waits for them (cf. Matt. 25 : 41). Where to find in them a trace of love or compassion? Their hate of the race of men is implacable, and they do not stop their combat. Cover yourself therefore with these weapons, which render anyone who bears them impregnable to enemy attacks.' And a bit later: 'This rope of three threads which the Holy Trinity has woven, should be considered triple and also single. It is three-fold because each part has a different name and, if you like, is a different hypostasis. But it is single in power and energy, in its approach, its call, its experience of God. It is of this that the Master speaks: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matt. 11 : 30), and the well-loved Apostle: 'His commandments are not hard' (1 John 5 : 3).' Then: 'This is why the soul which is united to God by purity of life, by observance of the commandments and by these three weapons which are God Himself, has put on God. It is become God by adoption, through humility, compassion and love. Having surpassed the duality of matter and having been elevated to the fulfilment of the law (cf. Rom. 13 : 10), I would say of love, it is united to the Trinity higher than all being, which is at the

¹ *ibid.*, 57; E.T., p. 62.

² *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 27 §21.

³ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 28 §19.

⁴ St Neilos of Sinai, *Of Voluntary Poverty* 27-28; P.G. lxxix, 968-1060.

origin of life, and uncovers in an immediate manner continuous joy, eternal joy.¹

But we have said enough. As we have mentioned in passing the knowledge and the fruits of illusion and of truth (for it is beginning with these, the fruits, says the divine Paul, that we know the spirit of those who bear them), so we must now outline a little of what the fathers say on the consolation of the one and the other, by which we mean divine grace, true grace, and its contrary false consolation. Here then is what the St Diadochos says:

74. OF DIVINE CONSOLATION. AND OF FALSE CONSOLATION

‘When our intellect starts to perceive the consolation of the Holy Spirit, it is then that Satan also comes to console the soul in the same person making him feel in his sleep a certain sweetness, as soon as one enters the lightest sleep. If then the intellect finds in itself, in a burning recollection, the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ and uses this holy and glorious name like a weapon against illusion, the falsity of the trick played on us finishes, but it arouses in the soul a fundamental war. For the intellect knowing precisely the deceptions of evil, it moves forward regardless in the way of discernment.’²

And again: ‘The good consolation comes when the body is awake, or even when it is at the point of falling asleep, at a time of ardent remembrance of God, when one is as it were with his beloved. But the illusion of consolation comes always when he who has been fighting enters into a light sleep, as I have described, without much remembrance of God at all. The one, which comes from God, intends manifestly, with a great effusion of soul aimed at the beloved, consoles those who force themselves to live in piety. But the other, which customarily attacks the soul with a wind of illusion, seeks during periods of bodily sleep, to remove the clothing of the soul, by which I mean what the healthy intellect perceives, above all when the recollection of God is not ardent but cold. But if it happens, as I have said, that the intellect reminds itself of the Lord Jesus Christ, it then dissipates this assault of the enemy and its apparent sweetness, and it enjoys itself in combat, having for its second weapon, in addition to grace, the honour which comes from experience in the fight.’³

And again: ‘If, moved above all doubt and all fantasy, the soul throws itself toward the love of God, it can also draw the body along with it into this deep, ineffable love. This can happen when one receives the energy of holy grace while awake or when one enters into sleep, in the manner I have described. And if the soul is able to conceive of absolutely nothing else than that to which it is drawn, then we should be sure that the energy drawing the soul is the energy of the Holy Spirit. Completely at peace because of this indescribable sweetness, it can conceive of nothing else then, for it rejoices

with an irresistible joy. But if, while it is engaged in this work, the intellect does conceive any doubt, or any low thought, so that it is forced to utilise the holy name to defend itself against evil, rather simply utilising it for prayer for the love of God, it must be known that this consolation and joy comes from the imposter. The joy in this case is no more than an appearance. This joy is entirely unqualified and unordered. But by it the enemy wishes to make the soul adulterous. For when it sees the intellect glorify itself precisely because of the experience of this sensation, it provokes the soul with consolations which have only the appearance of good, as I have said. The soul relaxed by this soft and warm sweetness becomes incapable of recognising the admixture of the malign. It is in this that we come to know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error (cf. 1 John 4 : 6). It is impossible, either to taste the sensation of divine sweetness, or to suffer and feel the bitterness of the demons, if one lacks certainty that grace abides in the depth of the intellect, and that the evil spirits only attach themselves to the external limbs of the heart. This is what they never want men to believe, because the intellect, knowing this, will arm itself against them with the memory of God.’⁴ But you know already know enough about this subject now. It is better not to go beyond Cadiz.

And: ‘If you find honey, eat a little, do not take too much, so that you do not vomit’ (Prov. 25 : 16).

75. OF THE DIVINE PLEASURE AND THE HEART

But it is more opportune and more natural to say: Who speaks about the sweetness of honey to those who have not yet tasted it? And more importantly still: Who will speak of the divine pleasure, of the joy which surpasses nature and fills life, that source which never ceases to spring from the prayer of the heart, from the pure prayer, from the true prayer? As Jesus, the God-man, says: ‘He who will drink the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give will become in him a well springing from eternal life’ (John 4 : 14). And again: ‘If anyone has a thirst, let him come to me and let him drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture says: waves of living water flow from his breast.’ And the beloved disciple adds: ‘He spoke of the Spirit which those who believed in Him would receive’ (John 7 : 37 , 39). And the great Paul: ‘God has sent in our hearts the Spirit of his Son, which calls: Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4 : 6).

76. THAT THIS SPIRITUAL PLEASURE HAS MANY DESCRIPTIONS BUT IS UNNAMABLE

This spiritual pleasure in all its mystery is known as the supernatural and divine enhypostasis or the genuinely existent illumination from whence life flows, as the more than luminous darkness, as miraculous beauty, as the highest peak of desire, watchfulness, as the vision of God, and as

¹ Source undetermined.

² St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 31; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 261-2.

³ *ibid.*, 32; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 262.

⁴ *ibid.*, 33; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 262-3.

deification. It remains in every manner indescribable after every attempt at description, unknown after having been known, inconceivable after have been conceived.

The great Dionysios says: 'Thus we pray that the darkness which is brighter than the light will come, that it may be given us, through blindness and non-knowledge, to see and to know beyond vision and knowledge, to see and to know what can never be seen or known. For then one truly sees and truly knows. It is then, when removed from all beings, one can celebrate beyond them Him who is more than Being.'¹ And again: 'The divine darkness is that unapproachable light where God is said to live. And if it is invisible because of a superabundant clarity, if it cannot be approached because of the outpouring of its transcendent gift of light, yet here those are found who are worthy to know God and to look upon him. And such people, precisely because they neither see him nor know him, truly arrive at that which is beyond all seeing and all knowledge. They know that God is beyond everything conceivable and intelligible.'²

And the great Basil: 'One can say nothing with clarity about the beauty of God. One cannot describe them. They evade intelligence. They exceed understanding. Everything one can say about the dawn of day, of the clarity of the moon, of the light of the sun, is truly pale beside this glory, and in comparison of the true light is further away from it than profound night and the sombre shadows are far from the immense purity of midday. This beauty, invisible to the eyes of the flesh, is apprehended by the mind and soul alone. Whenever it cast its light upon any of the saints, it left them with an intolerable pain of longing, and they would say, weary of life on earth: 'Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged.' And: 'When shall I come and appear before the face of God?' (Ps. 42 : 3. LXX). And again: 'To be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better' (Phil. 1 : 23). And: 'Now, Master, let thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word' (Luke 2 : 29). Since they felt the burden of this present life as an imprisonment, they were scarcely able to contain themselves under the impulses which the touch of Divine Love had made to stir within their souls. Indeed, by reason of their insatiable eagerness to enjoy the vision of Divine Beauty, they prayed that contemplation of the joy of the Lord would last as long as the whole of eternal life.'³

And the Theologian: 'For where fear is there is keeping of commandments; and where there is keeping of commandments there is purifying of the flesh, that cloud which covers the soul and suffers it not to see the divine ray. And where there is purifying there is illumination; and illumination is the

satisfying of desire to those who long for the greatest things, or the greatest thing, or that which surpasses all greatness.'⁴

And the divine Gregory of Nyssa: 'If you wash from your heart the dirt which the distractions of existence have covered it in, divine beauty will shine on you, as if it had become iron. When rust is removed as by grinding, he who a while before was sombre begins to shine with the reflection of the sun, and beams of clarity come from him. Just so the man on the inside, which the Lord calls the heart, when he has removed the poisonous rust which covered him, he will rediscover his likeness to the original design and will be good. For good follows in every way what is good.'⁵

And St Neilos: 'Blessed the one who bears in him the non-knowing inseparable from prayer.'⁶

And John Klimakos: 'Abyss of mourning has seen consolation. And the purity of the heart has received illumination. Illumination is that ineffable energy contemplated in the invisible and conceived in ignorance.'⁷ That is why they are thrice-blessed who, as Mary did in past times, have chosen the better part (cf. Luke 10 : 42), the spiritual and incorruptible life, and have been judged worthy to receive in part that happiness the same as God. In the great ecstasy of the joyous light, with the divine Paul it is possible for them to be openly transported out of themselves and to say: 'When the kindness of God our Saviour and his love of man appears, there is no more thought of the justice of what we have done, but in his mercy he saves us with the bath of rebirth, he renews us in the Holy Spirit, which he has sheds on us in abundance through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, justified by the grace of Christ, we may obtain according to hope the inheritance of eternal life' (Titus 3 : 4, 7). And again: 'He has given us unction, he has marked us on the skin, he has sent to our hearts the deposit of the Spirit' (2 Cor. 1 : 21, 22). And: 'We carry this treasure in clay pots. For this power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Cor. 4 : 7). Such were those men. May it be granted to us also, through their prayers to the Lord, that we have a share in what they experienced, by God's compassion and grace.

77. THAT ANYONE WHO WANTS TO LEAD THE LIFE OF STILLNESS SHOULD BE GENTLE OF HEART

But, my child, you should understand this meanwhile in your own way, before all other things and alongside the other things, this: Just as one who wants to learn how to use a bow cannot do so without a target, so he who wants to learn the life of stillness has the target of always being a gentle heart. St Isidore says: 'It is not enough to exercise yourself in the virtues, but you must also have moderation in asceticism. If,

¹ St Dionysios the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, II; P.G. 1025A; E.T., p.138.

² St Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Letters*, V; P.G. 1073A; E.T., p.265.

³ St Basil the Great, *Regulae fustius tractatae*; P.G., XXXI, 889-1052; E.T., *Ascetical Works*, 'The Long Rules', trans. Sister M.M. Wagner, *The Catholic University of America Press* (Washington D.C., 1962), p. 234-5).

⁴ Gregory of Nazianzos, *Orations XXXIX*, 8; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (*Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 354.

⁵ Undetermined source.

⁶ Evagrius the Solitary, *Kephalaia Gnostika*, III §88; F.T., A. & C. Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique, Le Gnostique ou A celui qui est devenu digne de la science, Sources Chrétiennes 356*, (Paris, 1989) pp. 88-193.

⁷ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 7 §60.

while engaged in the fight for gentleness, we interrupt it with very violent thoughts, we do nothing other than desire the attainment of our salvation, while refusing to desire what contributes to our salvation.'

Long before, the divine David had said: 'He guides the meek in judgement. He teaches his ways to the meek' (Ps. 25 : 9. LXX). And Sirac: 'The mysteries are revealed to the meek' (Sir. 3 : 19). And the very meek Jesus: 'Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matt. 11 : 29). And: 'Who will I look to, if not the gentle, the peaceful, those who tremble at my words?' (Isa. 66 : 2). And: 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' (Matt. 5 : 5), which is to say, the heart which bears the fruits of grace, the one thirty-fold, the next sixty-fold, the other a hundred (cf. Mark 4 : 20), following the rank system of monks - of novices, of intermediates, and of the perfect; this means never in any way stir up trouble, nor yet be stirred up, if the dispute is not related to matters of piety.

78. HOW TO BECOME GENTLE. THE THREE PARTS OF THE SOUL

You will achieve this easily, if you make all your acts converge on love and bear your soul while staying silent mostly, eating moderately and praying always. As the fathers say: 'Restrain the incensive faculty of the soul with love, exhaust the appetitive faculty of the soul with temperance, give to its intelligence the wings of prayer, and the light of the intellect will never be obscured.'¹ And: 'To bridle the incensive aspect of the soul, be silent at the right times. To bridle the appetitive aspect of the soul, eat sparingly. To bridle fiery thought, recite the prayer of the only name of the Lord.' And again: 'There are three virtues which wrap the intellect in light for ever: to ignore malice in men, to support without trouble whatever arises, and to do good to those who do evil. These three virtues engender three other virtues greater still than them: for ignoring the malice of men engenders the virtue of love; supporting whatever happens without trouble engenders gentleness; and to do good to those who do evil engenders peace.' And again: 'Three general conditions are apply to the ethical inward life of monks. The first, not to sin in activity. The second, not to let the soul grow familiar with impassioned thoughts. The third to greet without passion, when they appear before us in reflective thought, women and those who have injured us.'²

79. BE QUICK TO REPENT AFTER THE OCCURRENCE OF ANY TRANSGRESSION AND BE ON GUARD AGAINST IT AFTWARDS

¹ St Maximos the Confessor, *Fourth Century on Love*, 80; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 110.

² St Maximos the Confessor, *Second Century on Love*, 87; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 80.

If you find that you are always blaming yourself, or always falling into some fault which separates you from your duty, you should reconcile yourself completely with the person who has injured you or whom you have injured, and repent with all your soul. You must accept the grief, fall to weeping, and blame yourself, and thereafter be attentive, watching yourself wisely, as the Lord Jesus teaches: 'If you bring your gift to the altar, and when you are there you remember that your brother has some grievance with you, leave your gift before the altar, and go to reconcile yourself with him straightaway. Then return, and present your offering' (Matt. 5 : 23 - 24). And the apostle Paul: 'Anger, shouting, offence should leave you, and all malice at the same time. Rather, be kind, compassionate toward each other, pardoning each other, as God has pardoned us in Christ' (Eph. 4 : 31 - 32). And: 'Be impassioned but do not sin. Do not let the sun set on your wrath' (Eph. 4 : 26; cf. Ps. 4 : 5). And: 'Do not seek justice for wrongs done to you, but let anger go' (Rom. 12 : 19). And: 'Do not let yourself be defeated by evil, rather defeat evil with good' (Rom. 12 : 21). So much for mutual reconciliation.

80. FALLING AND REPENTANCE

St Isaac says this on the subject of falling: 'It is not when something makes us slip that we ought to blame ourselves. It is when we persevere in this fallen condition. For even the perfects often slip. But to remain in a fallen state is complete death. The grief we feel when we fall and then blame themselves can be considered a work of purification in grace. But whoever allows himself to fall a second time while leaving his repentance for the future, he is trying to make a fool of God. Death takes him without his knowing it, and he will not arrive at that time which he is hoping to see, when he will be able to carry out works of virtue.'³

St Isaac again: 'We should be fully aware that we must repent throughout the twenty-four hours of the day and the night. And here is the meaning of repentance, as the true order of things has made us aware: go toward God, asking continually, at all times, in a prayer full of compunction, that we may be pardoned for our past mistakes. And to feel remorse so as to guard against any future errors.'⁴

And again: 'Repentance is given to men, grace after grace. Repentance is new birth, the second birth which comes from God. We have received his pledge through our faith. But through repentance we receive his gift. Repentance is the door of his pity. It opens to those who look for it. By this door we enter into divine mercy. For all have sinned, says divine Scripture, but they are made good again by the pure gift of his grace (cf. Rom. 3 : 23 - 24). Repentance is the second grace. It is born in the heart through faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod, which leads us to the point of spiritual paradise. And when we arrive, it leaves us and goes back. That paradise

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §60, 4, p. 398.

⁴ *ibid.*; §50, 1, p. 345.

is the love of God, where the delight of all sainthood is found.¹

And again: 'Just as it is not possible to cross a great sea without ship or boat, so without fear we cannot attain to love. This sea and seasickness which separates us from the intelligible paradise, we can cross it with the ship of repentance, when it carries the crew of fear. But if the oarsmen of fear do not work for the ship of repentance, by which we traverse the waters of this world making our way to God, we drown in the nauseous sea.'²

81. OF REPENTANCE, OF FEAR, OF LOVE, OF GRIEF, OF TEARS AND OF SELF-BLAME

Repentance is the ship. Fear is the pilot. Love is the divine port. Fear directs us toward the ship of repentance. It makes us traverse the nauseating sea of existence, and it leads us toward the divine port, which is love, where those arrive through repentance who suffer and bend under the load (cf. Matt. 11 : 28). Then, when we have attained love, we will have arrived at God. We will have finished our journey. We will have passed into the island which is beyond the world, where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are.

On the grief for God, the Saviour has said: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matt. 5 : 4).

Regarding tears, St Isaac writes: 'Tears shed while praying are a sign that one has obtained the divine pity of God thanks to repentance, and that the repentance has been accepted.'³ And: 'With these tears the soul has stepped onto the field of purity. But if one does not cut loose from thoughts of transitory things, if hope in the world is not rejected, if the soul does not awake in itself hatred of the world, if it does not arm itself for the exodus, if thoughts of the beyond are not born in the soul, then tears will not flow. For tears flow during undistracted meditation, from steady reflection on things we cannot cut ourselves loose from, and in the recollection of something which climbs up from inside the spirit, the recollection of which afflicts the heart. Such things produce tears in abundance, and do not stop growing in number.'⁴

And John Klimakos: 'Just as fire consumes reeds, so blameless tears wash away dirt from the flesh and from the spirit.'⁵ And again: 'Keep the tears over our dissolution pure and without malice. For there is no guile or pride in them, but rather purification, progress in the love of God, absolution of sin, and dispassion.'⁶ And again: 'Do not trust the sources of your tears until perfect purification has happened. The wine is not trustworthy, if it comes straight to the glass from the press.' And again: 'Tears moved by fear have in them something which guards them. But tears of love, when the

love is not perfect, dry quickly, unless at the moment when they fall the fire constantly in our memory does not enflame the heart. It should be noted that the most humble will also be the most assured in time.'⁷ And again: 'Fear of our final exodus engenders tears. But when fear leads to its own absence, joy arrives. And when incomprehensible joy has itself ceased, then the way is open to holy love.'⁸

On self-accusation, the great Anthony says: 'This is the great work of man. To assume the burden of his guilt before God, and to watch for any temptation until his last breath.'⁹

This question was posed to another of the fathers: 'What is the best thing you have found, Father, on this road?' He replied: 'Find yourself guilty in everything.' The one who had asked approved of the reply. He said to him: 'There is no other road than this.'¹⁰ And Abba Poemen: 'All the virtues come to the fore with groaning and sighing. Raise up one virtue. Without it a man has only evil to hold on to.' They asked him: 'What is that virtue?' He replied: 'That man never ceases to blame himself.'¹¹ Another thing he said: 'He who blames himself for everything presumes that whatever comes his way, be it prejudice, affliction, or wrong, is merited and he is not surprised or troubled by it.'¹²

82. OF ATTENTION. HOW TO PUT YOURSELF ON GUARD IN WISDOM

The glorious Paul writes equally on the subject of attention and prudence: 'Take care not to conduct yourself like thoughtless men, but like the wise, redeeming the time, for the days are evil' (Eph. 5 : 15 - 16). And St Isaac: 'O wisdom, how admirable you are! And how you foresee distant things. Blessed he who have found you. For he has been released from the idleness of youth. If anyone searches the cure for great passions by making a small change, in order to acquire wisdom, he does well. For such is the love of wisdom: that such a man is always watchful regarding what happens to him, even in the smallest things. He amasses great stillness as if it were great treasure, he hardly sleeps so that nothing contrary comes his way the roots of which he has not cut out before it reaches him. In small things he can sustain some affliction, so that he can scatter great evils and to proceed forward. That is why the wise man says: Be fully awake, be watchful, keep an eye on your life. For the sleep of the mind makes itself known and is indeed actual death.' St Basil the hierophant says likewise: He who is negligent in the small things, does not believe he can distinguish himself in great ones.'¹³

¹ *ibid.*; §72, 2, p. 449-50.

² *ibid.*; §72, 5, p. 451-2.

³ *ibid.*; §33, 11, p. 262.

⁴ *ibid.*; §33, 11, p. 262.

⁵ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 7 §31.

⁶ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 7 §33.

⁷ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 7 §66.

⁸ *ibid.*; E.T., Step 7 §56.

⁹ *Apophthegmata*, alphabetical collection, Anthony 4; E.T., p. 2.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, Theophilos 1; E.T., p. 80-1.

¹¹ *ibid.*; Poemen 134; E.T., p. 186.

¹² *ibid.*; Poemen 95; E.T., p. 180.

¹³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §26, 11, p. 215-6; citing St Basil the Great, E.T., *Ascetical Works*, 'The Morals,' Rule 8.1; p. 82.

83. THAT THE LIFE OF STILLNESS NEEDS ALL THE THINGS WE HAVE SPOKEN OF. ABOVE ALL IT IS CALM AND GENTLE, AND ATTACHES ITSELF TO THE PURE INVOCATION OF THE LORD JESUS IN THE DEPTH OF THE HEART

Apply to yourself then to everything we have said, and above all to invoking with a pure awareness, in the depth of the heart, in stillness and gentleness, the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is thus that, advancing on the way, you bear in your soul, divine grace. John Klimakos says: 'No-one, if he is troubled with anger and presumption, with hypocrisy and disputes, can ever see in himself the least trace of the life of stillness which permits the discovery of ecstasy. But if he is free of these things, he might know what is good for him. But perhaps even he will know it.'¹ Not only grace will rest in your soul, but your soul itself will rest entirely free of the demons and passions which troubled it in previous times. And even if they trouble it still, they cannot do anything, for the soul does not need them, and does not want to receive the least advantage from them.

84. OF THE DESIRE FOR BEAUTY AND ECSTASY. OF DIVINE BEAUTY

All the desire of a man, the ecstasy of love in his heart, the total opening of himself to beauty which is more than appearance, all this looks toward something more blessed still, what the fathers call the summit of desire.

The great Basil says: 'When the love of piety is lodged in the soul, everything which fights it is derisory, and all things which attack the soul because of its desire for Him make it yet more happy than if there had been no such attacks.' And again: 'What is more admirable than Divine beauty? What reflection is sweeter than the thought of the magnificence of God? What desire of the soul is so poignant and so intolerably sharp as that desire implanted by God in a soul purified from all vice and affirming with sincerity: "I languish with love"?'²

85. OF WARFARE. OF GOD ABANDONING US FOR INSTRUCTION. AND OF ABANDONMENT

Man is subject to warfare while God gives room so that we can be instructed by it, but he does turn away so as to leave us behind. Why? So that man's intellect should not become proud of itself for the good it has discovered. Each time he is attacked, each time he is chastened, he discovers only humility. And he not only defeats those who fight against him in their demonic pride by means of humility, but in addition he is rendered worthy of the greatest gifts. For, caught and oppressed by the unbreakable bonds of the heaviness of the

flesh, he progresses as much as human nature allows, advancing toward perfection, toward the dispassion of Christ.

St Diadochos says this: 'The Lord himself says that Satan fell from heaven like lightning (cf. Luke 10 : 18), so that his deformed soul could no longer see the dwellings of the holy angels. How then can one judged not worthy of communion with the good servants have in the human intellect a common dwelling with God? It is considered possible that the enemy shares space with God because the space is conceded to him. And there is nothing more to say. For what God concedes to instruct us does not subtract in any way the divine light from the soul. Grace, as I have said already, hides only the most powerful side of itself from the intellect. It does this so that the soul has to push itself forward, fleeing the bitterness of demons, searching in fear and with complete humility some rescue in God, realising bit by bit the malice of his enemy. In the same manner as a mother might put her child down for a moment, if it refuses to take milk regularly, and leave it surrounded by sordid men or beasts, she does so in order that in fear and weeping the child may return gladly to her breast. When God turns away, the ground he concedes allows the demons to capture the soul which did not want anything to do with him. But we are not children of perdition (cf. Heb. 10 : 39). On the contrary, we trust that we are honest children, nourished with the milk of the grace of God, of such a kind that, to raise us, he abandons us briefly and consoles us often. And we hope, through the divine generosity, to arrive at the perfection of man, at the measure of Christ.'³

And again: 'That which God concedes so as to instruct us brings with it a great suffering, a humility, a despair to the limit of the soul's power, so that the portion of vanity and temerity which is in the soul can be humbled as is right. It also brings into the heart the fear of God, tears of confession, a great desire for beauty and silence. But when God turns away quite simply, He thereby permits the soul to be full of despair, of infidelity, anger, confusion. It behoves us to have experience of these two ways in which God recedes, and go to Him following both of them. Following the first type, at the same time as we give account for our actions, we should give him thanks for the cessation of consolation which has humiliated our intemperate thoughts, so that he could teach us, as a good Father, the difference which separates good virtue and vice. Following the other type, we ought to confess our sins without hesitation, weep constantly, and return into ourselves as much as possible, taking on ourselves labours, praying Him to look into our heart as before. We should know in addition that, during the true warfare between the soul and Satan, I mean while God recedes to educate, grace pulls itself back, as I have said. But grace does indeed assist the soul without letting itself be known, and it does this in order to show that the victory over the enemy belongs to the soul.'⁴

And St Isaac: 'Other than through temptation, it is not possible to become skilful in spiritual warfare, to know and to

¹ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 27 §36.

² St Basil the Great, E.T., *Ascetical Works*, 'The Long Rule,' Rule 2; p. 234.

³ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 86; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 286.

⁴ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 87; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 286-7.

feel how God takes care of us, or to be secretly confirmed in faith, in the acquisition of the force which experience gives. But if grace sees pride begin to preponderate in a man's thought and that he has a high idea of himself, then for sure grace might permit temptations to take by him by force and carry him away, right up to the point where he realises his personal weakness, seeks refuge in God and allies himself to humility. And so he arrives again at the correct level of the perfect man in faith and hope in the Son of God (cf. Eph. 4 : 13), and is raised to love. That is effectively when a man finds himself in the middle of circumstances which raise his hope, when he knows the marvellous love of God for man. God shows him then the power which bears him toward salvation. For a man would never know the divine power while he is safe in comfort and prosperity. God has never truly revealed his energy in a physical way except in the life of stillness, in the desert, in places distant from any social commerce or trouble which the life among men brings with it.¹

86. OF DISPASSION. WHAT HUMAN DISPASSION IS

We must now speak here particularly about dispassion and of perfection, then afterwards bring an end to the present work.

The great Basil says: 'He who tends toward God with all his love and seeks how to possess, just so much as he can, God's dispassion, spiritual sanctity, serenity, peace, meekness, he who wants to taste the happiness and joy which the virtues engender, he applies himself to distance from himself any thoughts of all the material passions which trouble the soul. With a clear eye, out of any shadow, he considers the things of God, fills himself with the light of the beyond, and his desire is insatiable. Having exercised the soul so as to come to this state, by any means of imitation possible, he becomes the familiar of that God he loves and seeks for. For while he undergoes the great and hard warfare, the purification of his mind so that it is free of any contamination of the bodily passions, he has been able, by parting ways with the material world, to meet God.'

So he speaks on the subject of dispassion. On human dispassion, St Isaac writes: 'Dispassion does not consist in not feeling any of the passions but in not welcoming them. Thanks to the numerous and diverse virtues, some visible and some hidden, which the ascetics acquire, the passions become weak and can no longer easily rise up against the soul, and the mind has no more business to be always attentive to them, for at all times it is full of thoughts which are born from meditation and the internal conversation on excellent subjects of which the intellect takes notice. When the passions begin to decline, thought is just as much subtracted from contact with them thanks to the instinctive vigilance of the intellect. Now the passions can do nothing, and leave. As the blessed Evagrius has said, the intellect which, by the grace of God, accomplishes the works of the virtues and has made its way to spiritual knowledge is little aware of what which is evil and

reasonless in the soul, for this knowledge is ravished away into the heights and is rendered a stranger to everything worldly. On account of the chastity which possesses them, to their subtlety, their gentleness, the acuity of their intellect, to their asceticism too, their intellect is purified and has become transparent, so much as their body is dried up. On account of their application to the life of stillness, and the fact that they have persevered in it for a long time, contemplation is easily accorded to each of them and conducts them miraculously so that it sustains their life. Meanwhile, they are abundantly favoured with contemplation, their mind has never wanted for material for internal activity, and they have never found themselves going without the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5 : 22). Long habit has erased from their heart any memory which might enliven in the soul the passions or the energy of the power of the demons. When the soul is no longer associated with the passions while maintaining its inner life, being possessed constantly by another focus of interest, their claws have no purchase on their spiritual senses.'²

And the divine Diadochos: 'Dispassion is not the absence of combat with the demons (for that we need to have made an exit from the world, as the Apostle says (cf. 1 Cor. 5 : 10)), but, attacked by them, to no longer feel their attacks. When soldiers are armed with iron breastplates receive attacks with the arrows of the opponent, they hear the noise of the bow, they see all the arrows which are aimed at them, but nothing harms them, for their armour is solid. Protected by the iron, they are invulnerable during the fighting. We also, by all the good which we have received, covered in the armour of the holy light, and the helmet of salvation, turn the gloomy ranks of the demons (Eph. 6 : 11 - 17). For it is not only doing no evil which makes us pure, but also to have the force to destroy evil while doing good.'³

St Maximos distinguishes four types of dispassion. He says: 'I call the first dispassion the irresistible movement which holds us back from committing any sin of the flesh. I call the second dispassion the total rejection of all passionate thoughts of the soul. By this rejection we etiolate the movement of the passions which is the root of the first dispassion, for such movement no longer has passionate thoughts which enflame it to carry out acts. I call the third dispassion perfect immobility of desire before the passions. It is likewise be this that we had arrived at the second dispassion founded on purity of thoughts. The fourth dispassion I call the total rejection of all sensible fantasy which cross the mind of the intellect. From such a rejection the third dispassion had taken its start, since this fourth dispassion is disengaged from fantasy of sensible things capable of giving life to passionate images.'⁴ And again: 'Dispassion is the peaceful state of the

² *ibid.*; §81, 8-9, p. 488-9.

³ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 98; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 294.

⁴ St Maximos the Confessor, *Third Century of Various Texts*, 52; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 222.

¹ *Ascetical Homilies*; §26, 8-9, p. 164-5.

soul, which renders difficult any movement toward evil actions.’¹

87. OF DISPASSION AND PERFECTION

St Ephrem explains dispassion and perfection in this way: ‘The dispassionate, insatiably tending with all their being toward the summit of desire, to a perfection that is ever imperfect. For the eternal goods are infinite.’ And again: ‘Dispassion is perfect, if one takes as measure human power. But it is only unachieved because it surpasses itself with what it adds day by day, and because it raises itself continually in this ascent toward God.’²

Likewise St Neilos, *a propos* perfection, says this: ‘You should consider perfection as being of two types. The one is temporal, the other eternal. It is on the subject of this last that the Apostle writes: “When the perfect comes, what was partial will be done away with” (1 Cor. 13 : 10). When the perfect comes, means then that in this life we cannot bear divine perfection.’ And again: ‘The marvellous Paul knew two perfections. He knew that the same man at one and the same time can be perfect and imperfect. He affirms that man is perfect when measured against the present life, but he is imperfect measured against the true perfection. That is why he says: “Not that I am already perfect” (Phil. 3 : 12), and a bit later, he adds: “We, the perfect, see what we think” (Phil. 3 : 15).’³

88. OF PASSION, OF SELF-INDULGENCE, OF CRAVING, AND OF DISPASSION

St Ilias the Presbyter says: ‘The evil matter of the body is passion. That of the soul is the passion for pleasure. That of the intellect is passionate obsession. The sense of touch gives rise to the first evil. The other senses give rise to the second and third evils. And the contrary disposition gives rise to the last.’⁴ And again: ‘He who lives in self-indulgent pleasure is close to the impassioned one. And he who gives in to passionate obsession is close to the one who lives for pleasure. The dispassionate one is far from all three.’⁵

89. THE IMPASSIONED MAN, THE MAN WHO LIVES IN SELF-INDULGENCE, THE MAN WHO LETS HIS OBSESSIONS RULE HIM, AND THE DISPASSIONATE MAN. THE CURE FOR THE ONE AND THE OTHER

‘The impassioned man is the one whose tendency to choose sin is stronger than his reason, even if he is not sinning outwardly at any given time. He who lives by self-indulgence is the man whose tendency to do sinful things is not approved of by his own mind, even when he is doing those sinful things. He who is ruled by passionate obsessions is one who prefers to release his mind in sin rather than remain in servitude to moderation. But the dispassionate man is ignorant of both these extremes.’⁶ As for the remedy for the one and the other evil, he says clearly: ‘Passion disappears from the soul with fasting and prayer. Self-indulgence with wakefulness and silence. Obsession with stillness and watchfulness. As for dispassion, it comes through the remembrance of God.’⁷

90. OF FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

But since the beginning, the middle, and the end of all good, or if you prefer, of the virtues which dispense and preside over good, are faith, hope and love, that rope of three parts woven by God (and above all love, for ‘God is love’ (1 John 4 : 8) and so we call him), it is right to make up for the deficiencies in the present work by completing it with them. Moreover, if, as St Isaac says, one does not receive the perfection of the numerous fruits of the Spirit until one is judged worthy of perfect love, then we should speak a little about it.⁸

John Klimakos writes: ‘Now then, after all which has been said, these three remain, which hold the cords uniting all things: faith, hope, love. But the greatest of these virtues is love (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 13). For it is the name of God. As for me, I see the one like the ray, the other like the light, and the last like the circle. I see the three like a single flame, a single splendour. The one can do all things, create all. The other is surrounded by the mercy of God, and nothing can confound it. And the third does not fail, nor stop on its course, nor leave any respite to the one it consumes with blessed madness.’⁹

And again: ‘The cause of love is known by the angels. And it is revealed by them in the energy of light: God is love (cf. 1 John 4 : 8). Whoever wishes to define love is like a blind man trying to count the sand of the ocean. Love, in its quality, is the likeness of God, as much as this is permitted to mortal men to be like. In its energy it is the intoxication of the soul. In its nature it is the source of faith, endless abyss of patience, sea of humility. Love is properly the rejection of all opposition in thought, so long as it takes no part in evil (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 5). Love, dispassion, our adoption by God as sons, are not distinguished from each other except in their names. As light, fire and flame never have a form except as energy, it is the same for these virtues, to my mind.’¹⁰

And St Diadochos: ‘Brothers, all spiritual contemplation must be led by faith, hope, love. But most of all by love. The

¹ St Maximos the Confessor, *First Century on Love*, 36; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. ii, p. 56.

² No citation available.

³ No citation available.

⁴ Ilias the Presbyter, *Gnostic Anthology*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, *Gnostic Anthology* I, §71, p. 41.

⁵ *ibid.*; E.T., §72, p. 41.

⁶ *ibid.*; E.T., §73, p. 41.

⁷ *ibid.*; E.T., §74, p. 42.

⁸ *Ascetical Homilies*; §85, 42, p. 534.

⁹ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 30 §1-3.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, Step 30 §5-9.

first two virtues force us to despise visible things. But love unites the soul itself to God's virtues, while discovering with the intellectual sense our invisible God.¹ And again: 'Natural love in the soul is one thing, while the love which comes from the Holy Spirit is another. The first has its appropriate source in the our own proper will, when we desire something. This is why the demons impair our natural love easily, if we do not have the power to master their particular intentions with our own. The other love so burns the soul in love of God that it unites all the parts of the soul to the indescribable sweetness of divine desire and sends us into a state of infinite simplicity. Like the intellect, the soul is then made pregnant with spiritual energy. This love makes the soul into a source of love and joy.'²

And St Isaac: 'Love attached to things is like a little torch fed with oil, and such is the origin of its light; or it is like a flood after rain of which the current diminishes when it runs out of the material which made it up. But love which has for cause God is like a spring. It never stops flowing. For God alone is the source of love, and his material is inexhaustible.'³

He was asked: 'What is the perfect condition of the numerous gifts of the Spirit?' He replied: 'When someone is rendered worthy of the perfect love of God.' He was asked: 'And how will he know that he has attained to this love?' He said: 'When the memory of God is awoken in the reasoning power of his intellect, and moreover his heart beats in with this love, and his eyes fill with abundant tears. For love has the habit of making tears flow at the remembrance of the beloved. A man who bears such love does not lack tears, for he always has in him the matter which bears him toward the thought of God. Even in his sleep he converses with God. Love makes this happen. And such is the perfection of men in this life.'⁴

And again: 'The love of God is ardent in nature. When it flows without measure on someone, it makes the soul go outside itself. That is why the heart of the one who feels it cannot let go of it, nor yet support it. But, according to its capacity and the measure of love which comes to him, an unaccustomed change takes place in him. These are the obvious signs of such love: his face appears to be of fire and pours out joy. His body is hot. Shame and fear leave him. He is as if outside himself. The power which rules his intellect abandons him. He is like a fool. He holds implacable death to be a joyful thing. The contemplations of his intellect always push his thoughts toward celestial things. In the midst of other people he is absent. He is as if invisible. His natural knowledge and his vision are superseded. He does not sense in a sensible manner any movement which leads him in the middle of things. For if he carries out any act he does not know about it entirely, because his intellect is suspended within contemplation. And his mind is always as if in dialogue with an other. It is this spiritual drunkenness which the

martyrs and the apostles knew. The apostles roamed the whole world, outraged and pained. The martyrs, their bodies beaten, shed their blood as if it were water. Suffering the most terrible things, they were not afraid, but supported them nobly. They were wise, yet others took them for fools. Others wandered in the desert, in the mountains, in caves and holes in the earth (Cf. Heb. 11 : 38). In the midst of disorder, they remained faithful to the order of God. Such is the madness God has asked us to acquire.'⁵

91. OF HOLY COMMUNION. THE GOOD WE RECEIVE WHEN WE COMMUNICATE OFTEN WITH A PURE CONSCIENCE

Nothing contributes more to the purification of the soul, to the illumination of the intellect, to the sanctification of the body, the transfiguration of the one and the other into the divine, to immortality, and, truly, to the rejection of passions and of demons, or more precisely to the union, the divine and supernatural conjunction which opens us up to God, than receiving with a pure and ready heart the continual⁶ communion of the holy and immortal mysteries which nothing can spoil and which gives life. We speak of the precious blood and body of our Lord, of our God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. That is why it is necessary to give a precise explanation here, in writing, and so conclude the present work.

Not only is this clear in the words of the saints, but it is still more clear in the words of the Life himself and of the Truth himself. For he says: 'I am the bread of life' (John 6 : 48). And: 'Such is the bread which descends from heaven, so that one eats and does not die. I am the living bread which descends from heaven. Who eats of this bread will live in eternity.' And: 'The bread I give you, it is my body. I will give it for the life of the world' (John 6 : 50 - 2). And: 'If you do not eat the body of the Son of Man, if you do not drink my blood, you will not have life in you. Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood has eternal life.' And again: 'For my flesh is true food, and my blood a true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood stays in me, and I in him. As the Father, the Living God, has sent me, so I see by the Father. And whoever eats me, he will live with me. Such is the bread which descends from heaven.' And: 'Whoever will eat this bread will live in eternity' (John 6 : 53 - 9).

Paul who carried Christ says this likewise: 'Brothers, I have received from the Lord that which I have transmitted to you. The Lord Jesus, in the night when he was betrayed, took bread, rendered thanks, broke it, and said: Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this in memory of me. And after eating, he took the chalice and said: This chalice is the new covenant in my blood. Each time that you drink, do this in remembrance of me. For each time that you eat this bread and that you drink from this cup, you announce the death of the Lord until he comes. That is why he who eats this bread or

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, §1, p. 253.

² *ibid.*, §34, p. 263.

³ *Ascetical Homilies*; §33, 7, p. 260.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*; §24, 1-2, p. 203-4.

⁶ By which they mean daily, see Ware** p 31.

drinks from this cup of the Lord unworthily, will have to give reasons before the Lord. Each man should examine himself, and then let him eat of that bread and drink from that cup. For whoever eats and drinks when unworthy, without knowing it is the body of the Lord, eats and drinks the judgement against himself. It is for this reason that you have among you many sick and weak people, and that certain of you died. For if we were to judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are punished by the Lord, so as not to be condemned along with the world' (1 Cor. 11 : 23 – 33).

92. THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO TAKE THE MIRACLE OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT. WHAT IT IS. WHY IT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US. AND WHAT IT IS FOR.

John Chrysostom writes: 'We must learn what the miracle of the sacrament is, why it was given to us, and what it serves. So, beginners must understand these words: We are one body (cf. Rom. 12 : 5), members of the flesh and bones of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 5 : 30). For which reason, we do not become the body of Christ through love only, but through being united to that flesh by an activity, and this passes through the food that the Lord has given us, wanting to show the love he has for us. He is united to us, he has formed in us his Body, so that we can be one as the body is bound to the head: that which is the deepest wish of those who love greatly. Job was allowed to prefigure this union when he spoke of servants who desired to the utmost to be close to him, and, to prove their love for him, said: "Who will give us satisfaction with his flesh?" (Job 31 : 31). Now, this is what Christ did, confiding the greatest things to us out of love. He showed what his love for us means. It is not only given to be seen by those who love, but also to be tasted, and touched. He has given them the means of entering into his body, to unite with it, to fulfil love completely.'¹

And again: 'Those who communicate through the most holy Body and precious Blood are with the angels, the archangels and the powers on high. They are wrapped in royal vestments, the vestments of Christ himself. They have spiritual armour. But I have said nothing yet. They are clothed in the King himself. This is a great mystery, terrible and marvellous: if you go to him in purity, you find salvation, but if you go with a bad conscience, you head toward damnation and punishment. For he who eats and drinks unworthily the Body and Blood of the Lord eats and drinks to his own judgement (cf. 1 Cor. 11 : 29). If those who dirty the royal purple are condemned along with those who cut it, it is natural that those who receive the Body with an impure spirit, undergo the same punishment as those who have torn it with their nails. Consider how terrible the condemnation is which Paul gives when he says: If anyone rejects the law of Moses, he is sent mercilessly to death on the grounds of two or three

witnesses. How much greater will the punishment be, do you think, for somebody who has trod the Son of God under his feet and treated the blood of union in which we are made holy as if it were a mere profane thing? (cf. Heb. 10 : 29).'² And: 'Therefore, when we communicate in the Body and when we taste the Blood, we taste Him who is on high, who is adored by the angels, who is near to the most pure Power. Alas! How long shall we neglect our own salvation? He has made us into his own Body, he has given to us his own Body, and yet still we can't turn aside from evil! O the darkness and the depth of the abyss! O the apathy!'³

And again: 'An admired old man once showed me a thing which had been given to him to see and understand: Those who are at the point of leaving this life, if they are able to take part in the sacrament of communion with a pure conscience at the moment when they die, will find angels accompanying them, and they bear him away.'⁴

And the divine John of Damaskos: 'Because we are dual in nature and composed of parts, our birth is also twofold. And likewise our food is composite. Our second birth is given by the water of the Spirit. And our food, the bread of life, is our Lord Jesus Christ descended from the heavens. Just as men have the custom of bathing themselves in water and apply oil to themselves after, so God has united to oil and water the grace of the Holy Spirit and has made the baptismal bath the place of new birth; and likewise, as men have the custom of eating bread, and drinking water or wine, he has united to these things his Divinity, and he has made of them the Body and the Blood, for through that which is habitual and natural, we arrive at what surpasses nature. The body born of the holy Virgin is truly a body united to the Divinity, not because that body which he took descended from heaven, but because this bread and this wine become the Body and the Blood of God. If you ask how this comes about, it suffices to know that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, just as it is through the Mother of God and the Holy Spirit that the Lord took on the flesh. And we do not know anything more than this, except that the Word of God is true, active, all powerful, but the manner in which he was conceived is too profound for us. It bears those who worthily take communion in faith into a state of absolution of all their sins, to eternal life and to the protection of body and soul. But those who receive it unworthily, in infidelity, it bears them toward damnation and punishment. There it is like the death of the Lord.

'And the bread and the wine are not mere symbols of the Body and the Blood of Christ, far from it. They are the actual Body of Christ, which has been seen, and his actual Blood. "For my flesh, he says, is truly food, and my blood is truly drink" (John 6 : 55). They are the Body and the Blood of Christ. They contribute to forming our soul and our body.

² *ibid.*, p. 167.

³ St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* §3; E.T., ed. P. Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 13, Eerdmans Publishing (Michigan, 1956), p. 63.

⁴ St John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood* §6, 4; E.T., ed. P. Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 9, Charles Scribner's Sons (New York, 1908), p. 76.

¹ St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St John* §46; E.T., ed. P. Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 14, The Christian Literature Company (New York, 1890), p. 166.

they are not consumed, they do not alter, they are not evacuated, but they found and sustain our being. They are the purification of filth. When Christ receives from us some alloyed gold, he purifies it in the fire of judgement, so that we may not be condemned with the world in the age to come (cf. 1 Cor. 11 : 32). Cleaned up by him, we are united to the Body of Christ and to his Spirit, and we become Body of Christ. This bread is the first fruit of the bread of the future life, it is epiousios, beyond substance. This 'daily bread' signifies the bread of the future, that is to say, the bread of the age to come, or perhaps the bread which we receive to sustain our being. The flesh of the Lord is living spirit, for it was conceived by the living Spirit. What is born of the Spirit is spirit (cf. John 3 : 6). And I do not say this to replace the natural way of the body, but because I want to show what is life-giving and divine in it. The bread and the wine are therefore called symbols of things to come, not because they are not truly the Body and Blood of Christ, but because in these times we communicate by means of them with the Divinity of Christ, while we will be united with him in vision and intellect in the age to come.¹

And the divine Makarios: 'Just as wine unites with the members of the one who drinks it, and the wine passes into him and he into the wine, so he who drinks the blood of Christ, the Spirit of the Divinity, joins himself to the perfect soul, and the perfect soul joins itself to him. Thus sanctified, it is worthy of the Lord. For all, it is said, have been watered by the one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12 : 13). In the Eucharist of bread, it is given to those who communicate in all truth to be a part of the Holy Spirit. Thus the souls which are worthy can live in eternity. And as the life of the body did not spring from us, but from what is external to us, by which I mean the earth, so God has wished that the soul not receive what is merely in us, but of his Divinity, his own Spirit, his own Light, the food, the drink and the clothes which are the true path for the soul. For the divine nature is the bread of life, Him who has said: I am the bread of life (John 6 : 48). It is also the living water, and the wine which gladdens (cf. Ps. 104 : 15. LXX), and the oil of gladness (cf. Ps. 45 : 8. LXX).'

And St Isidore: 'Participation in the divine mysteries is called communion, for it joins us to Christ, it makes us communicate with his Kingdom.'

And St Neilos: 'It is impossible for believer to be saved, to receive absolution from faults, to arrive at the kingdom of heaven if, with fear, faith and love, he does not communicate in the pure mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ.'

Likewise the great Basil writes in his letter to Patricia of Caesarea: 'It is good and beneficial to communicate every day, and to partake of the holy body and blood of Christ. For He distinctly says, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (John 6 : 54)." And who doubts that to share frequently in life, is the same thing as to have manifold

life. I, indeed, communicate four times a week, on the Lord's day, on Wednesday, on Friday, and on the Sabbath, and on the other days if there is a commemoration of any saint."² I think that those were the days on which the saint celebrated the liturgy. For he could not celebrate it every day, weighed down as he was by so many other duties. St Apollos says equally that a monk, if he can, should communicate every day in the sacraments of Christ. For the health-giving voice says: 'He who eats my body and drinks my blood rests in me and I in him' (John 6 : 56). It is there that monks find their good who make it their task to remember the Passion of our Saviour. The monk should be ready on each day, and comport himself such that he will always be worthy of receiving the holy sacrament. It is by this means that we are given absolution from sins.

John Klimokos says this: 'If a body which touches a body is transformed by its action, will he be transformed who touches the body of God with innocent hands?'³

It is written in the Gerontikon: 'John of Vostros, a holy man and one who had power over impure spirits, questioned the demons which were living in a group of young women who were agitated by fits and who were moved to do strange things: "Why do you fear Christians?" And they answered him: "You have three great things. The one that you carry around your neck. The one that you wash us with in the Church. And that one which you eat when you gather together." And when he asked them which of these three was the most fearful to them, they replied: "If you watch carefully over what you receive when you communicate, none of us can harm a Christian." This is what our enemies fear more than anything else: the cross, baptism, and communion.

93. CONCLUSION. EXORTATION GIVEN SPECIFICALLY TO THE ENQUIRER

There, well-beloved son, your request has been granted, thanks to God. If we have not responded precisely to your wishes and your intention, we have done all we are capable of. God takes pleasure in our self-improvement. Take care therefore never to give an end to your love of learning or to your efforts, but prove yourself desirous to know and full of zeal. St James, the glorious brother of the Lord, says on this subject: 'By beloved brothers, put the word of God into effect. Do not be mere listeners who keep to themselves. For he who hears the law and does not put it into practice is like a man who sees in a mirror the face of his birth. It is hard for him to see what he was and he forgets it. But he who applies himself to the perfect law, the law of liberty, and attaches himself to it not as a forgetful listener, but puts it into effect, he will be fortunate in what he does (James 1 : 22-6).

¹ St John of Damaskos, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* §4,13; E.T., trans. S.D.F. Salmond, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 9, *The Christian Literature Company* (New York, 1899), p. 83-4.

² St Basil the Great, *Letters*, 93; E.T., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 8, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Christian Literature Publishing Co.*, (Buffalo, NY, 1895), p. 179.

³ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; E.T., Step 28 §52.

94. HOW TO HEAR AND POSSESS THE SPIRITUAL WORDS OF THE FATHERS

But above all you must receive and understand faithfully, with the necessary piety, the divine commands, the spiritual commands of the fathers. St Makarios says about this: ‘Those who have no experience cannot get near to the spiritual. Only the holy and faithful soul can receive the communion of the Holy Spirit. The celestial treasure of the Spirit does not reveal itself, unless to those who have had experience. So he who has not been initiated cannot understand anything. Hear these things therefore with piety, until you are able to attain to them yourself through faith. You will then know by experience of the eyes of the soul to what good, what mysteries, the souls of Christians can communicate with here. For by learning from the fathers, you will gather very quickly the fruit and the advancement of the things you have read and that you have heard. As a result of understanding and doing what you have learned, you will progress until you yourself are able to exhort and lead others, through your own experience, toward the most divine things from which the majority of people are excluded.’

So it should be in your case. Force yourself to be subject and guided by the all powerful hand of Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. But a surfeit of discourse, like a food which overstimulates the body, can harm the understanding.

Everything in moderation. We must abandon excess, the present authors included, and embrace moderation as the best way, holding firm to our proposed task; therefore we will write a brief recapitulation of the whole work, so as to fix it down like an anchor, as if making an anchor.

95. RECAPITULATION. HOW TO PRAY. OF TRUE ILLUMINATION AND OF DIVINE POWER

The fathers say: he who wants to be watchful in his mind should enter into the breath as it is inspired or taken in, and go down with it to the interior of his heart, and should force himself to pray with a pure spirit without distraction, while being attentive to these sole words of the prayer – Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me – , meditating on them, embodying them until the light of the intellect shines in the heart, as St Diadochos says: ‘Those who never cease to say in the depth of the heart the glorious and much loved name Lord Jesus, they will one day see the light of the intellect.’¹ When we will have seen, going then under the impulsion of God as if in the light, on the road which remains for us to travel – that road of our life vowed to God – and, what is more, having become children of light, we will walk without straying, without stumbling anymore, as Jesus, the one who gives the light, says: ‘As much as you have the light, believe in it, so that you will become children of light’ (John 12 : 36). And: ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not

walk in the darkness, but he will have the light of life’ (John 8 : 12).

Equally David says to the Lord: ‘In your light we see the light’ (Ps. 36 : 9. LXX). And the divine Paul: ‘God who has said: The light shines in the darkness, is the same God who shines in our hearts’ (2 Cor. 4 : 6). It is by this light precisely, a flaming torch which is never extinguished, that they are led who have true faith, so that they can contemplate what is beyond sense experience, and it opens for them, to pure hearts, the celestial door of complete life, the door to a condition equal to that of the angels, carrying us on high.

Like the disk of the sun, the light rises over them, giving them the means of inspecting, discerning, seeing and foreseeing, progressing on to other such activities. And meanwhile every manifestation and revelation of sacred mysteries illuminates them. They are filled in spirit by supernatural and divine power. Their body of earth is made lighter by such supernatural power, or better, their heavy flesh is refined and upborne, elevated. It is through this flaming power of the Holy Spirit that certain among our holy fathers, even while they were embodied in the flesh, have, as if they were immaterial and incorporeal, crossed impassable rivers with dry feet and seas where no ship will venture; they have crossed in an instant long roads which require many days to walk; and they have done many other extraordinary things, in the heavens, on the earth, in the sun, on the sea, in the deserts, in the cities, in every kind of place, in every land, among beasts and serpents, and simply among all creation, among all elements. In everything they have been glorified. Upright in prayer, they have raised above the earth, as if they had wings, their saintly and precious bodies. And by the divine and devouring fire, by the immaterial fire of grace, they have reduced the heaviness of the body to ashes. They became light and rose above the earth, O miracle, transformed in plain sight to a state more divine than all being, and reformed by the hand of God, that hand of force and grace which remains with them.

At the end, the venerable bodies of some of them were given incorruptibility and confirmed clearly the action of grace and supernatural power which lives in them like in all those who have the certainty of faith. And after the communal and universal resurrection, as if given wings by that power which illumined them in spirit, they will be carried in the clouds to the meeting with the Lord in the air, as the initiate of the ineffable, the divine Paul. They will then always be with the Lord (cf. Thess. 4 : 17). David, the prophet of the Spirit, sings likewise: ‘Lord, they will walk in the light of your face, they will rejoice in your name all the day’ (Ps. 89 : 15-6. LXX), that is to say, in the age to come they will raise themselves into your justice, for you are the glory and their power. Our force rises in your blessed concern for us. And again: ‘Those who have their power in God have been ravished from the earth’ (Ps. 47 : 10. LXX).² The great prophet Isaiah affirms in the same way: ‘Those who await the

¹ St Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. i, §59, p. 270.

² The Psalm has a different sense when translated in the KJV. There, God is raised. The variant is due to the location of the comma.

Lord will rise as if on wings; their force will be transfigured' (Is. 40 : 31). And St Makarios: 'Every soul which, through faith and effort in all the virtues, has been judged worthy of clothing itself almost perfectly in Christ in power and certainty, and joins itself to the celestial light of the incorruptible image, receives in his fundamental personhood, the knowledge of mysteries of heaven at all times. On the day of resurrection, when the body, glorified with the soul is in that celestial image of glory, and is ravished into the skies by the Spirit (cf. I Thess. 4 : 17), as it is written, to meet the Lord in the air, it will be worthy to assume the form of the glorious body of Christ (cf. Phil. 3 : 21), and then the soul and body will reign with God in eternity.'¹

96. ANOTHER RECAPITULATION

The origin and the source of these new states situated beyond the possibilities of the mind, is as we have said, located beyond any inclination or desire, or better, in the state of stillness, watchfulness and prayer, which is like a solid foundation and an impenetrable defensive rampart, and is rich in the highest possible accomplishment of all the deifying commandments.

From the absence of desire, from the life of stillness, attention and prayer, we have said, come the movement and the warmth of heart which burns the passions and the demons away, and purifies the heart as if in furnace. From this warmth desire and love ascend without end toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Then tears flow as from a spring of tears in the heart, gentle tears which, with repentance, love, Eucharist and confession, like hyssop purify and nourish the soul and body. These things engender serenity, or peace of thought, which have no limit, for they surpass the intellect (cf. Phil. 4 : 17). They give rise to lights bright like snow, and finally that dispassion that is given to man, in other words the resurrection of the soul before that of the body. It is the new creation, the return to the image and the resemblance of God, through action and contemplation, through faith, hope and love; or again it is the greatest tension toward God, immediate union, ecstasy, immobility and desisting. In the present age we are like a mere mirror image, an enigma (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 12) and a pledge of the age to come; there we will be face to face (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 12), and there will be the perfection, total participation, and eternal joy of God.

97. THE LIFE WITH GOD, UNFAILING, TRUE, TAUGHT BY THE FATHERS: THE LIFE OF STILLNESS WHICH COMES FROM OBEDIENCE, WHICH THE SAINTS JUSTLY CALL LIFE HIDDEN IN CHRIST

Such is the road, the spiritual conduit to God, the sacred work of those who are truly Christians. Such is, aside from every

illusion, every change, in complete clarity, the true life, the life hidden in Christ (cf. Col. 3 : 3). It is the road of this life that the God-Man, the very gentle Jesus, opened and taught. It is this road that the divine apostles traversed. It is on this road that those who came after them, those who followed the apostles, our guides and our glorious masters, those who after the end of the first coming of Christ on earth until now, shone in the world like torches (cf. Phil. 2 : 15), in all the radiation of their living words, in all the miracles of their works, those who transmitted to men of our race and were themselves transmitted one to another this good seed, the sacred leaven, the holy first fruits, the inviolable base, grace, power from on high, the pearl of great price, the divine heritage of the fathers, the hidden treasure in the field, the deposit of Spirit, the royal signal, the living and flowing water (cf. Matt. 13 : 24; Matt. 13 : 33; Rom. 11 : 16; 1 Tim. 6 : 20; Luke 24 : 29; Matt. 13 : 46 & 44; 2 Cor. 1 : 22; John 4 : 14), the divine fire, the salt venerable, the charism, the seal, the light, and that which resembles these.

That will also be our part in the heritage mysteriously transmitted from generation to generation until the second coming of Christ on earth. He who has promised does not lie (cf. Heb. 10 : 23): Behold, I am with you every day, until the end of time (Matt. 28 : 20).

98. WHILE THERE ARE OTHER SALUTARY ROUTES, THIS IS THE ONE ELECT AND ROYAL ROAD, AND LEADS TO ADOPTION

Other ways, other ways of conducting ourselves, and if you like, other works are well, which lead to salvation and bear those who search toward rest, in the same way that there are various ways which end in slavery or in mercenary labour: it is said that the Lord prepares many dwellings before his Father (cf. John 14 : 2). But the one we have described is by its nature the royal road, the eminent road, which, as the soul exceeds the body, surmounts and surpasses all other works, since out of earth and ashes (cf. Gen. 18 : 27), it renews the creature so as to offer him divine sonship, and to make paradoxically make the man who travels it into a God, under the action of the Spirit. As the great Basil says: 'When he enters into the soul of a man, the Holy Spirit gives life, he gives immortality, he lifts one who is prone, so that the man becomes living, a saint animated by an eternal movement of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit has made his dwelling in him, a man receives the dignity of a prophet, an apostle, an angel of God, though prior to this he was earth and ashes.'

99. THIS WAY OF LIFE, SO SUBLIME IN ITS WORKS, HAS MANY NAMES

That is why the divine fathers honour this way with a number of names, diverse and glorious names. They have called it the way of knowledge, action worthy of praise and true contemplation, prayer higher than any understanding, stillness

¹ St Makarios of Egypt, *The Freedom of the Intellect*; E.T., *Philokalia*, vol. iii, §140, p. 348-9.

of the intellect, labour of the mind, the work of the age to come, angelic life, heavenly existence, divine pathway, the land of the living, mystical vision, spiritual feast, paradise of the miracles of God, heaven, celestial Kingdom, Kingdom of God, darkness brighter than light, hidden life in Christ (cf. Col 3 : 3), vision of God and deification, the summit of all wonders, and other such names.

It is following these divine fathers that we too, who live among mortar and brick (cf. Ex. 1 : 14), among thought, and words, and evil and impure works, we have forced ourselves, beloved brother, to reply to your request. Truly, you have asked it of us, and we have not feared to speak beyond our own means, because of your love and the commandment of the Father, as we said at the start. The door of such an angelic life is here; it is the new and mysterious economy: of Word and Son and God, of God's incarnation in man, of the consideration of a Father who has no beginning, and of the energy lent by the Holy Spirit.

100. WITH THE HELP AND GRACE OF GOD, IT BEHOVES US, AS BEST WE CAN, TO FORCE OURSELVES AND TO FIGHT, UNTIL WE ARE READY TO TAKE HOLD AND KEEP HOLD OF IMMENSE SUPERNATURAL GIFTS, AND NOT TO LET GO OF THEM, ALAS, BY OUR OWN NEGLIGENCE. THIS IS WHAT GOD WANTS

Since such immense and precious gifts are offered to us, well-beloved, not only as something hoped-for and promised to us in the age to come, but in the present age in truth and in fact, let us hurry, reminding ourselves that it is time now. Run, fight. Force ourselves, by a small temporary effort and by a little suffering, but more than that by the gift and grace of God, to be judged ready for these good things, we too. 'For the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory which will reveal itself in us' (Rom. 8 : 18), says Paul, the divine preacher. Understand this. And truly force ourselves to discover it now as he did, at least in part, as first fruit and pledge (cf. Rom. 8 : 23; Eph. 1 : 14).

On this matter, if any, from the low places where fate has put them, are called to the secular power and influence, and they do everything they can with the work, their words and their thoughts so as to arrive at these almost inaccessible things, often despising their own life so as to gain such glory and such temporal honour that flows, that runs, and that leads them sometimes to total ruin and not to what is good for them, how much more must we work with zeal to enter into communion with God, participate at the wedding and unite ourselves to him, since he has called us, him, the King of kings, the Creator, the sole Incorruptible, who dwells in eternity and dispenses to his own a glory and an honour so durable and resplendent?

And not only that, but we have received the ability to become children of God. It is said that to those who have received him, to those who have believed in his name, he has given the power to become children of God (cf. John 1 : 12).

He gives that power. He will not clothe us in a tyrannical way. He will not constrain us against our will. For a tyrant always makes his slaves hate him, and we see evil healed with more evil. Rather, he honours our ancient dignity, our freedom, so that the good which comes entirely from his good will and from his grace might also be thought of as the righteous work of our own effort and of our application. He is God and Master. He has everything done as he likes. He has created every being, and in the same manner he died for us, so that he could save us unilaterally. But he has left us free to approach him, to confide ourselves to him, to join with him, to serve him in fear, fervour and love, him, the Master who loves man, who has loved us truly and protected us, right up to the point of death, and a cruel shameful death, to deliver us from the tyranny of the devil, from the enemy at the origins of evil, to reconcile us with God the Father, and to make of us inheritors of God, heirs alongside him (cf. Rom. 8 : 17), a thing the most marvellous and blessed of all things.

Because of a small fault, for a brief lack of attention, for a false pleasure, we must not go on to deprive ourselves of so much great good, such reward, such enjoyment. But do everything, putting everything at stake, sparing nothing for him, and even if it costs our life itself, as it did him for us, even though he is God, to render us worthy by that of things which we can receive now and of all the gifts and all the prizes. Let us force ourselves to make our way there, in the benevolence and the grace of the most good and compassionate Lord our God and Saviour Jesus Christ; he abased himself for us, and he gives actively and abundantly now his supernatural and deifying grace, to those who abase themselves for him. For to him is due all glory, honour and worship, as is due to his most pure Father, who has no beginning, and to the eternal and all Holy Spirit with him, good and life-giving, now and always and forever to the ages of ages. Amen.